



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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April 17, 2012

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write to encourage engagement between the United States and Cuba. The relaxation of U.S. travel restrictions announced last year was an important and positive step. Having recently returned from a trip to Cuba during the visit by Pope Benedict XVI, I can testify first-hand that these modified policies have given but a taste of what truly should happen for the sake of the people of both countries. It is imperative that more must be done to support deepened dialogue and communication between our respective countries, which hold such great promise of fostering human rights and positive change for the long suffering people of Cuba.

We urge lifting the existing embargo concerning Cuba, so that greater support and assistance may be provided to the ordinary citizens of this country. Charitable organizations, including those of the Catholic Church, provide essential and life-preserving services to the most marginalized and impoverished Cubans. While in Cuba, I had the opportunity to visit programs providing child and elderly care in which food and medical attention are provided to poor and vulnerable persons. The staff members selflessly administering these facilities and senior Cuban Church officials responsible for these programs repeatedly told me that the efficacy of their work was hampered by their inability to obtain products from the United States due to the trade embargo.

In speaking with officials at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, we were encouraged by their positive assessment of the work of Catholic charitable organizations in Cuba, and the role that these charities play in the development of a more free and humane society. To do this work well, these organizations must not be encumbered by outdated policies that only harm the most vulnerable people. All restrictions should be systematically examined and eliminated so that the complete abolition of the embargo and its harmful effects can be achieved. These burdens are not borne by the members of the Cuban governing elite, but rather by the “ordinary” Cuban and especially by the weakest members of that society.

The Catholic Church in our country and in Cuba has long maintained that greater, rather than less, engagement with Cuba can bring about positive change in that country. The call of the Church in Cuba has always been one for dialogue: genuine and open dialogue within Cuba and dialogue between Cuba and the outside world which apart from the United States exists today. The U.S. bishops continue to call for purposeful

Letter to Secretary of State Clinton
April 17, 2012
Page 2

engagement rather than ineffective isolation. In this way, we will echo the words of Pope Benedict XVI who, in his farewell remarks in Havana, noted,

“The light of the Lord has shone brightly during these days; may that light never fade in those who have welcomed it; may it help all people to foster social harmony and to allow the blossoming of all that is finest in the Cuban soul, its most noble values, which can be the basis for building a society of broad vision, renewed and reconciled. May no one feel excluded from taking up this exciting task because of limitations of his or her basic freedoms, or excused by indolence or lack of material resources, a situation which is worsened when restrictive economic measures, imposed from outside the country, unfairly burden its people.”

We hope and pray for prompt and appropriate measures to establish full diplomatic relations with Cuba and to withdraw all restriction on travel to Cuba and to offer greater people-to-people assistance to the Cuban people. In so doing, we will be supporting the people of Cuba, our neighbors but 90 miles away, in achieving greater freedom, human rights, and religious liberty plus also engaging a trading partner that will benefit American commerce.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Richard E. Pates", preceded by a plus sign (+).

The Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace