



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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February 2, 2015

The Honorable Bob Corker
Chair
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
425 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Menendez
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
528 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ed Royce
Chair
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
2185 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Eliot L. Engel
Ranking Member
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
2161 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Corker, Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Menendez and Ranking Member Engel:

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I write to express our support for the recent changes to the U.S. trade and travel embargo against Cuba announced by President Obama on December 17, 2014, and to oppose any Congressional action to undermine this new policy toward Cuba.

USCCB, the Cuban Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Holy See have been outspoken proponents of engagement with Cuba for many years. The Church believes that engagement is the way to encourage and support religious freedom, human rights and civil society in Cuba. Greater, rather than less, contact with Cuba can foster positive change in that country. There is a need for dialogue, reconciliation and interaction between the peoples of the United States and Cuba, and for more dialogue and reconciliation within Cuban society. To encourage such engagement, the trade embargo must be lifted in its entirety. To this end, we support the passage of The Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act, which would make it easier for all U.S. citizens to journey to that country.

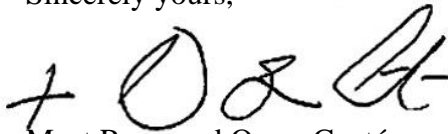
As our Conference of Bishops said when the new Cuba policy was announced publicly, “We believe it is long past due that the United States establish full diplomatic relations with Cuba, withdraw all restrictions on travel to Cuba, rescind terrorist designations aimed at Cuba, encourage trade that will benefit both nations, lift restrictions on business and financial transactions, and facilitate cooperation in the areas of environmental protection, drug interdiction, human trafficking and scientific exchanges. Engagement is the path to support change in Cuba and to empower the Cuban people in their quest for democracy, human rights and religious liberty.”

I strongly urge that Congress refrain from taking actions which would prevent the implementation of the recently announced travel, trade and diplomatic efforts to normalize relations between the United States and Cuba. Rather, what is needed is legislation to eliminate the remaining vestiges of outmoded and failed policies of isolation.

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We are proud of the role that Pope Francis and the Vatican played in facilitating the agreement between Cuba and the United States. As the Holy Father said at the time of the President's announcement, "[T]oday we are all happy because yesterday we saw two nations, who were estranged for so many years, take a step to bring them closer together." We share in the view of the Catholic bishops of Cuba that dialogue and reconciliation will be the path to greater democracy and respect for human rights in this nation, and endorse the bishops' long-standing commitment to vindicating those rights. Please resist any effort to return to the failed policies of the past and support engagement as the path to a better future for both Americans and Cubans.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Oscar Cantú". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "O" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Most Reverend Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace