



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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April 15, 2009

Mr. Daniel Restrepo
Senior Director, Western Hemisphere Affairs
National Security Council
Executive Office of the President
The White House

Dear Mr. Restrepo:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I would like to welcome the recent announcement of significant changes to U.S.-Cuba policy. Despite the fact that the current trade embargo and travel restrictions largely remain, the President's decision to relax restrictions on Cuban-American travel and the regulation in remittances to Cuba is long overdue. This action represents an important change to U.S. policy towards Cuba.

The USCCB has for many years called for relaxing the sanctions against Cuba. These policies have largely failed to promote greater freedom, democracy and respect for human rights in Cuba. At the same time, our nation's counterproductive policies have unnecessarily alienated many in the hemisphere. Improving the lives of the Cuban people and encouraging human rights in Cuba will best be advanced through more rather than less contact between the Cuban and American people.

The stage is now set for Congress to build on the President's recent decision and to remove travel restrictions for all Americans. The introduction of the "Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act," H.R. 874 and S. 428, is a welcome initiative in this regard.

I urge the Administration to work with Congress to pass this legislation and ask the President to sign it into law.

With thanks for the Administration's leadership on increasing engagement with Cuba, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard
Bishop of Albany
Chairman, Committee on International
Justice and Peace