



Obama's Cuba Policy Risks an Opportunity

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While Obama lifts some restrictions on travel by Cuban Americans to the island, the administration remains firm on the US embargo.

Press speculation and reports this morning indicate that the President will lift travel restrictions on Cuban American travel to Cuba as well as the sending of remittances and other items to the island. There is no indication that the administration will go beyond those measures. An urgent goal of the regime is the lifting of the embargo which will mean access to loans from international financial institutions. To date, the regime has squandered hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign assistance and loans.

The Center for a Free Cuba supports emergency and humanitarian travel to the island; indeed, while strongly opposing all tourist travel by any American, including Cuban-Americans, CFC supports humanitarian and emergency travel by any Americans to the island as often as necessary. The real issue is not whether someone needs to travel to Cuba to be with a very sick relative or with a friend just injured in a serious traffic accident, but the flow of unlimited tourist dollars to the regime, whose military and political police run the tourist industry in Cuba—an industry which violates daily internationally recognized labor standards. Cuban hotels are priced out of reach for more than 95 percent of Cubans.

While increasing the amount of funds Cuban-Americans can send to their loved ones is also a welcome measure, a Cuban's average salary is about \$25 per month. The unlimited sending of dollars to Cuba will help Cuba's National Bank in its money laundering efforts. Years ago, a Swiss bank was fined millions of dollars by the United States for processing deposits worth millions from Banco Nacional de Cuba. Havana maintains close links with narco-guerillas in South America's mainland.

The Cuban-American community believes that just as President Obama has been true to his campaign promises of adjusting restrictions of Cuban-American travel to the island, he will be true to his promise of maintaining the embargo until Cuban political prisoners are released and until political and economic reforms take place in Cuba. The most important obstacle in the flow of humanitarian and family assistance to Cuba is the Cuban regime that refuses to permit normal postal service, a measure offered to Havana by several US Administrations. Havana profits from the sending of packages to Cuba by Miami-based companies which are granted a monopoly for that purpose by the regime. Havana also refused to accept millions of dollars in humanitarian assistance offered by the United States last year to help thousands of Cubans affected by several killer hurricanes. The regime also confiscates medicine, food, etc. which is brought by travelers to the island, and it has broken into the US diplomatic pouch to stem the flow, among other things, of such items

By **Center for a Free Cuba** Executive Director Frank Calzon