

December 8, 2008

President-elect Barack Obama
233 N. Michigan Avenue, #1720
Chicago, IL 60601

Dear President-elect Obama:

We congratulate you on your historic election victory and look forward to working with you and your administration next year.

We are writing on an issue of great concern to members of our various communities – U.S. policy towards Cuba. We believe that changes made by the Bush administration in 2003 and 2004 have not had their intended effect and have been counterproductive in terms of helping the Cuban people.

In particular we ask you to address at an early date certain executive branch amendments to the Cuban Assets Control Regulations (CACR) and strongly urge you to consider their early repeal. The amendments were published in the Federal Register on March 24, 2003 (FR Doc. 03–6808), and June 16, 2004 (FR Doc. 04-13630). The provisions of concern imposed new restrictions on academic and family travel, and on remittances, to Cuba. Repeal of these regulations would restore travel and remittances to the island and reverse policies that isolate American students and other citizens from the Cuban people.

Specifically, academic and people-to-people exchange with Cuba has been decimated by the prohibition of the following activities. We recommend restoring the availability of licenses for:

- short-term study and teaching in Cuba;
- study in Cuba under third-party programs—i.e., programs other than those of degree-granting higher education institutions;
- study in Cuba under programs other than those of the institution in which the student is enrolled;
- academic travel to Cuba by any bona fide professor or researcher, including adjunct faculty;
- people-to-people, cultural and sports exchanges unrelated to academic coursework; and
- programs of secondary schools for study in Cuba.

As well, we ask that you rescind the 2004 restrictions on family visits to Cuba, on the amount of money that family visitors can spend while in Cuba, on cash remittances to Cuba, and on the personal baggage of travelers to Cuba.

An important parallel move is to again make visas available for Cuban scholars, religious leaders, cultural and sports figures, and others to participate in academic conferences and events, religious and cultural activities, and other forms of people-to-people exchange, and to conduct research in the United States.

In making the above changes, we hope you consider minor amendments to the CACR to permit travel to Cuba by all eligible persons via a general license rather than requiring specific license applications. This would allow the Treasury Department to focus on keeping the United States safe rather than on administering routine licenses to Cuban Americans, academic institutions, church groups, athletes, and members of the press who wish to travel there legally.

Finally, we urge you and your administration to work with Congress to reexamine U.S. policy more broadly. Complete repeal of travel restrictions would allow all U.S. citizens to engage with the Cuban people. Repeal would also take a burden off of the Departments of the Treasury and Homeland Security, which could put the resources that are now used to administer and enforce prohibitions on travel by U.S. citizens toward investigating transactions that actually endanger U.S. security.

By immediately taking steps to rescind the 2003-2004 regulations, you will send a clear and welcome signal of change and reverse actions that have proven counterproductive to our shared goal of assisting the Cuban people. Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Friends Service Committee
Church World Service
Fund for Reconciliation and Development
Latin America Working Group
Latin American Studies Association
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
National Foreign Trade Council
Operation USA
Social Science Research Council
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
USA*Engage
Washington Office on Latin America