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July 22, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. President:

We are approaching the start of another academic year in which American students will find their opportunities to study abroad in Cuba to be severely curtailed because of regulations issued by the Bush administration. On behalf of the organizations listed below, we write in support of the very welcome actions that you have taken to begin to chart a new course in U.S. relations with Cuba, and to urge you, as you continue to develop new policies toward the island nation, to restore academic travel between our countries.

Exchange programs are often highlighted as a critical component of U.S. engagement in the world and have historically been a successful tool in building relations between nations. As you recently noted in your address to a group of students in Turkey, "exchanges can break down the walls between us." However, Cuba currently remains the only country in the world where the United States government restricts study by American students, as well as academic travel by bona fide teachers and researchers. According to the latest data available, only slightly more than 200 students had the opportunity to study abroad in Cuba during 2006-2007 academic year, compared to more than 2,100 students who were able to study there only three years earlier.

One way in which to advance opportunities for young people to engage internationally would be to lift the current restrictions and permit academic travel to Cuba via general license. We would also welcome a trend of granting U.S. visas for Cubans coming for exchange purposes and encourage public announcement of a policy favoring academic, cultural, religious, sports and professional visits. Similarly, we urge Cuban authorities to grant exit visas for

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President Barack Obama

July 22, 2009

Page 2

students and scholars accepted by US academic institutions. With a new academic year quickly approaching, we hope that you will act quickly to restore academic travel between the United States and Cuba.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations.

Sincerely,

American Association of State Colleges and Universities
Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange
American Institute for Foreign Study
CIEE – Council on International Educational Exchange
Community Colleges for International Development
Cuba Academic Alliance
Emergency Coalition to Defend Educational Travel
Fund for Reconciliation and Development
Latin American Studies Association
Latin America Working Group
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
National Foreign Trade Council
Orbitz Worldwide
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Social Science Research Council
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