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ATRIP-USA*Engage Alliance Denounces New Cuba Regulations

*~ Statement by ATRIP-USA*Engage Alliance Executive Director Jody Frisch ~*

Washington, DC – “Today’s publication of new OFAC regulations further restricting access to Cuba does nothing to hurt the Castro regime; instead, the regulations have a direct and sharply negative impact on Cuban-Americans and U.S. businesses. We find it difficult to believe that this is the result U.S. government officials desire; yet their actions today most certainly will hurt Cuban Americans, U.S. businesses and U.S. foreign policy objectives.

“Upon learning last month that the Bush administration endorsed Draconian new restrictions on travel to Cuba, we hoped that cooler heads would prevail, especially in light of the proposed regulations’ seemingly heartless clampdown on the rights of Cuban Americans to visit family members still living in Cuba. Unfortunately, the regulations, which become effective June 30, will further separate Cuban Americans from their relatives and prevent much-needed monetary aid from being sent to ordinary Cubans to be used for everyday necessities. Will these restrictions hurt Castro? Not likely. It is the Cuban people, already in need of our assistance, who will suffer from being cut off from their American families.

“Further, the ATRIP-USA*Engage Alliance is disheartened that U.S. government officials imposed ill-advised and gratuitous restrictions on travel to Cuba, including restrictions on baggage allowances, without consulting travel industry professionals and other affected parties. This in spite of the fact that the new rules will have an impact on costs, employment, and legal obligations that already have been incurred. At the very least, the new regulations should include reasonable transition periods and grandfathering provisions ensuring that they do not constitute a *de facto* financial penalty levied on an industry simply because the Administration has made a capricious change in its policy regarding permissible travel to Cuba.

“Particularly disturbing is the elimination of ‘fully hosted’ travel to Cuba. Traditionally, ‘fully hosted’ travelers to Cuba who spent no money there were not considered to have violated any of the provisions of the CACR, but the new regulations have declared that a person who accepts goods or services in Cuba without paying for them is engaging in a prohibited dealing in property in which Cuba or a Cuban national has an interest. If the aim of the regulation—and the embargo—is to prevent the flow of hard currency to Cuba, it is difficult to understand how fully hosted travel—where Americans spend no money during their stay in Cuba—is damaging to U.S. interests and policy. If these regulations are upheld, the government would be denying that Americans have a constitutional right to travel.”

The ATRIP-USA*Engage Alliance is formed by the National Foreign Trade Council, USA*Engage and the Association for Travel-Related Industry Professionals (ATRIP):

The National Foreign Trade Council (www.nftc.org) is a leading business organization advocating an open, rules-based global trading system. Founded in 1914 by a broad-based group of American companies, the NFTC now serves 300 member companies through its offices in Washington and New York.

*USA*ENGAGE is a coalition of more than 670 small and large businesses, agriculture groups and trade associations working to seek alternatives to the proliferation of unilateral U.S. foreign policy sanctions and to promote the benefits of U.S. engagement abroad. For more information on USA*ENGAGE and the harmful effects of unilateral trade sanctions, visit the USA*ENGAGE web site at www.usaengage.org.*

The Association of Travel-Related Industry Professionals (ATRIP) is the nation’s leading voice representing the interests of the travel industry and traveling public on issues related to open travel. ATRIP, comprising a broad spectrum of travel industry professionals—from travel agents to charter companies, airlines to tour operators—advocates for beneficial economic policies for the travel and tourism industry and the elimination of unnecessary or unduly burdensome restrictions on travel. www.atripusa.org.

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