

American Association of State Colleges and Universities  
American Institute For Foreign Study  
The Center for Democracy in the Americas  
Center for International Policy  
CIEE – Council on International Educational Exchange  
Cuba Academic Alliance

Fund for Reconciliation and Development  
Latin America Working Group  
NAFSA: Association of International Educators  
National Foreign Trade Council  
National Tour Association  
Social Science Research Council

August 09, 2010

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The academic, religious, trade, and policy organizations listed below write to urge you to respond to recent positive actions in Cuba, particularly the announcement of the release of all of the remaining political prisoners arrested in 2003, by closing the book on the actions that President George W. Bush took in response to those arrests.

In 2003 and 2004, President Bush exercised his regulatory authority to significantly curtail academic and people-to-people exchange between the United States and Cuba, as well as family travel and remittances. These actions, which many of us opposed at the time, produced no positive effects in Cuba but had serious negative impacts not only on Cuban families, but also on the ability of American citizens to study and learn in Cuba and to engage the Cuban people. You took a very significant step to rectify this situation, which we applauded, early in your administration when you removed restrictions on family travel and remittances, and opened up telecommunications with the island. We also commend you for approving more visas for Cubans to visit the United States and for taking other administrative actions to facilitate travel.

You have indicated that further steps would be possible in response to positive actions by Cuba, specifically including the release of political prisoners. Now that such action is being taken, it is essential that you respond, at a minimum, by removing the remaining restrictions that were imposed by President Bush. Failure to do so would not only continue to deny American citizens the ability to engage with Cuba in ways that were permissible before 2003, but would also, we fear, jeopardize the momentum toward the eventual objective that you and we share of normalizing relations with the island.

We also encourage you to consider further actions, beyond those specified above, to facilitate travel to Cuba—specifically, to permit travel by eligible persons via general license. This will greatly ease eligible travel and will permit enforcement efforts to be focused where they are needed rather than on the administration of routine licenses.

Finally, we reiterate our strong support for legislation pending in Congress relating to travel and agricultural sales to Cuba. As a matter of policy, the ban on U.S. citizen travel to the island is counterproductive. It hurts U.S. national interests, limits exports, and restricts American citizens' freedom to travel while doing nothing to advance human rights or democracy on the island. While you can use your regulatory authority to ease travel restrictions, it is up to Congress to end them. We hope your Administration will also signal its support for Congressional action.

Mr. President, this is an important moment. We ask you to take bold steps to reverse decades of counterproductive policies toward Cuba, and we pledge our support.

Sincerely,

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