



Department of Social Development and World Peace

Office of International Justice and Peace

3211 4th Street N.E. Washington, DC 20017-1194 (202)541-3198 FAX (202)541-3339 TELEX 7400424

October 16, 1992

The Hon. Lawrence Eagleburger
Acting Secretary of State
The Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary,

In recent days, the Catholic bishops of Cuba have issued two brief but significant statements, each dealing with aspects of government policy, both of their own government, and of ours. Enclosed is a copy of each, with accompanying English translation.

In the one, the bishops deplore the growing abuse of religious freedom whereby government agents, armed but in civilian dress, have taken to appearing at church services for the purpose of seizing anyone engaging in forms of protest against the government. While the bishops firmly oppose efforts to turn the sanctuary into a debating arena, they also totally reject the intrusion of armed state security agents into churches, calling their presence a profanation and an offense to the Christian tradition of respect for the Church.

In the other, the bishops express their repudiation of any measure that could contribute to the real suffering of the Cuban people, especially in this time of extraordinary deprivation and hardship. The specific measure they address is the Torricelli bill (the Cuban Democracy Act), passed by Congress in late September, a goal of which is to tighten the U.S. embargo against Cuba by forbidding foreign subsidiaries of U.S. companies from trading with Cuba.

The bishops are aware that the economic problems the Cuban people today suffer have many sources, only one of which is the U.S. embargo. But, observing that embargoes are acts of force, they maintain that any embargo that prevents essential foods and medicines from getting to people in need is "morally unacceptable, generally in violation of the principles of international law, and always contrary to the values of the Gospel."

Whether the recently enacted legislation will prove to have as dire an effect on Cuba as some fear, and others evidently hope, remains to be seen. Already many of our staunchest allies and trading partners have expressed their disagreement with this measure, and have indicated intentions of non-compliance.

Secretary Eagleburger, Page 2.

The bishops of the United States have consistently sought to support the bishops and people of the Church in Cuba. In drawing attention to these recent statements, we want to add our voice to that of the Cuban bishops in calling for true religious freedom, for respect for the rights of the Church, and for measures to lessen, not increase, the suffering of the Cuban people.

As we call on the government of Cuba to end the reprehensible practice of placing security agents in churches, we call on our own government to hear the voice of the Cuban bishops, and see to it that U.S. policy not contribute to the greater suffering of the Cuban people.

In their statement on the embargo, the bishops urged "those in whose hands lies the solution to these problems to provide more adequate ways to overcome them." It seems clear that the reference is not only to what Havana, but what Washington as well, must do. It is our hope, in the near-term, that the authorities in both countries will facilitate the efforts, such as those being advanced by the Church and other private agencies, to provide needed food and medical supplies to the Cuban people.

In the long run, as Cuba demonstrates adherence to the universal norms governing respect for human rights, religious liberty, and democratic values, the present embargo, rather than being increased, should be progressively diminished.

Our prayers go out to the Cuban people everywhere, those on the island and those in the diaspora, especially those in this country. Both groups have known more than their share of suffering and deprivation, and we pray that all will soon know greater peace, justice and reconciliation.

We are grateful, Mr. Secretary, for your attention to this matter and for whatever you can do to diminish the suffering of innocent people everywhere, including in Cuba.

Sincerely yours,

+ *John A. Roach*

Most Reverend John R. Roach
Archbishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis
Chairman, USCC Committee on International Policy

Attachments