



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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June 22, 2015

United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator:

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write to urge you to oppose appropriations riders which reverse recent opening of diplomatic relations and the new regulations on travel and trade concerning Cuba. I would also urge you to support and cosponsor “The Freedom to Export to Cuba Act of 2015” (S. 491) and “The Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act of 2015” (S. 299).

Our Conference has long spoken out against the negative effects of the U.S. trade and travel embargo of Cuba. We hold that the way to encourage religious freedom and human rights in Cuba is through dialogue and reconciliation between the United States and Cuba, and within Cuban society. To accomplish this, the trade and travel embargo must be lifted. These bills are consistent with recent positive developments, including the removal of Cuba’s designation as a state sponsor of terrorism, and progress in establishing full diplomatic relations, including opening embassies.

We continue to urge Congress to take no action to impair the new regulations on travel and trade concerning Cuba, as recently issued by the U.S. Department of the Treasury. Rather, what is needed is legislation to eliminate the vestiges of outmoded and failed policies of isolation.

We are proud of the role that Pope Francis and the Holy See played in facilitating the agreement announced on December 17, 2014, between Cuba and the United States. As the Holy Father said at the time of the President’s announcement, “[T]oday we are all happy because yesterday we saw two nations, who were estranged for so many years, take a step to bring them closer together.”

Certainly, Pope Francis’ historic visit to both Cuba and the United States in September will further inspire reconciliation and dialogue. We share in the view of the Catholic bishops of Cuba that engagement is the path to greater democracy and respect for human rights. Please resist any effort to return to the failed policies of the past and instead support engagement as the road to a better future for both Americans and Cubans. Again, thank you for your leadership regarding U.S./Cuban relations.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces

Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace