



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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September 23, 2008

Representative William Delahunt,
Chairman, Sub-Committee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight
Committee on Foreign Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives

Representative Jeffrey Flake
Member, Sub-Committee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight
Committee on Foreign Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Representatives Delahunt and Flake:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I would like to both commend and support your efforts to relax existing restrictions on travel and remittances from the United States to Cuba by introducing H.R. 6962 “Humanitarian Relief to Cuba” Act 2008.

Recently, the President of our Conference of Bishops, Cardinal Francis George, OMI, wrote to President Bush urging him to “suspend – even temporarily - Treasury and Commerce Department restrictions and licensing requirements for humanitarian travel and remittances by American citizens and assistance by not-for-profit organizations.” H.R. 6962 would make the changes to U.S. policy that we have requested.

Two members of our Bishops’ Conference happened to be in Cuba during the recent hurricanes. Most Rev. Robert Baker, Bishop of Birmingham, Alabama and Most Rev. Peter Rosazza, Auxiliary Bishop of Hartford, Connecticut were visiting the Church in Cuba as members of a “solidarity visit” to discuss Church-related projects, traveling under license. While they were there, the hurricanes hit. They saw the path of destruction left behind by the hurricanes. They also saw people who were homeless and hopeless. Families were struggling without electricity to find food and were anxious over how they would recover and rebuild.

The Cuban government has estimated damage at \$5 billion. We regret that initial offers of aid by the U.S. government have been rejected. But there are other ways for help to get through to the millions affected by the hurricanes if these ways were not blocked by current U.S. policies. In the wake of the hurricanes, many Americans have either visited or sent money to their Caribbean relatives to help rebuild their lives. Restrictions on travel and remittances should be lifted so that ordinary Cubans can also experience the love and support of those friends and relatives in the United States who care for them.

Representative Delahunt and Representative Flake

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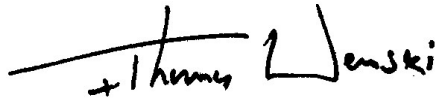
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We urge you to take all measures in supporting those impacted by the recent hurricanes. We reiterate our call to remove the U.S. embargo on Cuba so that aid from both the United States as well as other countries might have unhindered access to those in need. No one should be penalized for coming to the aid of the victims of the recent weather emergencies. Under current rules, even foreign vessels and companies that take lifesaving aid to Cuba could be penalized in doing business in the United States. These rules should also be ended.

Last Sunday, Pope Benedict XVI remembered and prayed for the people of Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and the United States who have been devastated by the recent storms and hurricanes. We know that you share this concern for all those impacted by the severe weather in the Caribbean and the United States. "In these circumstances," the Pope said, "solidarity and fraternity [should] prevail over all else." H.R. 6962 is an important expression of this solidarity and should be enacted without delay.

In prayerful support for your efforts to open up additional avenues to respond to Cuban families in need, I remain

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Wenski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Most Rev. Thomas G. Wenski
Bishop of Orlando
Chairman,
Committee on International Justice and Peace

Cc: Members of Sub-Committee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight
Representative Howard Berman, Chairman, Committee on Foreign Affairs
Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs
Representative Steny Hoyer, Majority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
Representative Mr. James Clyburn, Majority Whip, U.S. House of Representatives