



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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July 21, 2008

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Durbin:

As chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write in support of provisions in the Fiscal 2009 Financial Services Appropriations recently approved by the Subcommittee, regarding the relationship between the United States and Cuba. These provisions would allow visits to immediate family members in Cuba once a year, instead of only once every three years, and would remove the 14-day limit on each stay. In addition, visits to immediate family members have been expanded to include aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews and first cousins.

USCCB has consistently called for relaxing the sanctions against Cuba. These policies have largely failed to achieve greater freedom, democracy and respect for life. More than forty years of sanctions have unnecessarily alienated many in the hemisphere who should be our friends and allies, and brought needless hardship on the Cuban people. My most recent trip to Cuba and my experience among many Cuban-Americans reinforces our Conference's view that changes in Cuba will best be advanced through more rather than less contact between the Cuban and American people. This engagement should start, but not end, with family members.

No one should be prevented from visiting a sick or dying relative or attending a loved one's funeral simply for having traveled to Cuba once in the previous three years. This policy is inhumane and does not serve the best interests of our country. This modest relaxation in U.S. travel restrictions restores a policy that was in effect prior to 2004. This is a positive step; one that we hope can be built upon in the future. I encourage support for these provisions as legislation moves forward.

With thanks and best wishes, I remain

Sincerely yours,

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

Cc: Senator Sam Brownback, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government Appropriations