

Statement on the Lifting of Some Restrictions on Aid to Cuba

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I welcome the decision of the Administration to lift certain of the more onerous burdens affecting humanitarian assistance to the people of Cuba. Cuban Americans will once again be free, as they should always be, to send needed financial aid directly to their family members in Cuba. Catholic Relief Services and other private humanitarian agencies in this country will again be able directly to ship desperately needed medicines and other supplies to independent agencies in Cuba, such as Caritas Cubana, the Catholic Church's relief and development agency.

Still more important may be the willingness of the Administration to facilitate the sales of medicines to Cuba, something that, while technically permitted under present legislation, is so bound up with burdensome requirements as to make such sales difficult if not practically impossible.

Those of us who had the privilege of joining the Holy Father in Cuba during that historic week in January cannot forget the outpouring of joy and enthusiasm of the Cuban people as they welcomed the Messenger of Truth and Hope, and neither can we forget so many signs of a general deterioration: the pitiful condition of state-run health clinics or the empty shelves of food stores. As Church, we cannot fail to help our brothers and sisters in need, but as Church, we can do only so much through the voluntary donations of humanitarian aid. We welcome the willingness of our government to facilitate the more adequate response to the needs of the people of Cuba at this time, and look forward to further initiatives both to assist the Cuban people and to advance reconciliation and better relations between them and the people of the United States.