



August 30, 2021

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P. *
Prime Minister of Canada
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Prime Minister Trudeau,

As Cuba is facing unprecedented economic and health challenges following 62 years of US sanctions, we call on the Canadian government to maintain its historic independent policy role and friendship with Cuba. It is urgent for Canada to press the Biden Administration to immediately fulfill his election pledges to revoke the Trump executive orders on Cuba and return to the cooperative relationship established by President Obama. We also urge Canada to join Mexico, Spain and Argentina in offering Cuba, immediate humanitarian assistance to alleviate food, energy and medical shortages.

These shortages are the direct result of the US embargo and the imposition of 243 new sanctions by the former Trump administration, now continued by the Biden government. This includes restrictions on remittances from Cuban Americans to Cuban family members. It also designates Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism, a categorization applied to Iran, North Korea and Syria. Obama had removed Cuba from that same list as part of his policy of rapprochement and because the U.S. State Department could not point to a single act of terror sponsored by Cuba. Yet, under President Biden, the Trump designation of Cuba as a sponsor of terrorism remains.

The reinforcement of sanctions has increased scarcity and spread hardship across the country. Last July, tropical storm Elsa ravaged the island and placed a severe burden on the electrical grid. The storm surge combined with fuel shortages due to the US embargo of Venezuelan oil, caused a near fatal collapse of the thermal power plants that led to widespread blackouts and a growing malaise in the population.

According to the United Nations, the 60-year blockade of Cuba has resulted in a loss of US\$130 billion of economic and social development for Cuban workers and their families. These facts are recognized globally, and in June of this year, the United Nations General Assembly voted for the 29th time to condemn the U.S. blockade by a vote of 184 to 2.

Cuba is grappling with an exponential growth in COVID-19 cases, while facing a crippling shortage of medical supplies. According to the [OXFAM report](#), "The Right to Live Without a Blockade", sanctions have represented a real obstacle to the procurement of mechanical ventilators, face masks, diagnostic kits, reagents, vaccination syringes, and other necessary materials to address COVID-19. The report also underlines that the sanctions have disproportionately impacted women, not just in their private lives, but because Cuban women account for 71% of the medical professionals; 84% of personnel in clinical and biotech laboratories and because they are on the forefront of advancing vaccine technology in the country. However, despite Cuba's historic commitment to public health, its expertise in delivering immunization programs in Cuba and around the world, and its successful development of [two](#)

[proven vaccines with over 90% efficacy](#), its immunization has suffered serious setbacks due to the US blockade.

In response to this challenge, hundreds of Canadians from Halifax to Victoria, including PSAC and other unions, faith-based organizations and community groups supported the efforts of the Canadian Network on Cuba to facilitate the purchase and shipping of nearly 2 million syringes for Cuba's immunization drive. In thanking Canadians for their support, the Cuban Friendship Society recognized the difficulties organizations have experienced in shipping medical supplies due to the restrictions imposed by U.S. sanctions.

President Biden has made no move to reverse these measures. To the contrary, Biden has decided to continue, and even tighten the sanctions Trump implemented to reverse Obama's short-lived break in decades of U.S. hostility. The present attempt by the United States to use the impacts of the blockade and the COVID-19 pandemic to extort political change in Cuba is unacceptable. Canada should decisively disassociate itself from these actions and use its influence as a friend of Cuba and the United States to promote dialogue and humanitarian assistance.

We are well aware of the essential grievances of Cuban workers and their families over shortages and the COVID-19 crisis that have led to recent protests. We recognize the right of Cubans to assemble and protest and encourage the use of social dialogue to resolve these disputes. However, Canadians also know that the US blockade has been - and remains - a policy of regime change which grossly interferes in the sovereign affairs of Cuba. Ending this policy would result in the essential change that is needed to promote a peaceful and democratic path forward for the Cuban people.

According to the press, Minister Garneau spoke to Cuba's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla on July 13th, to express Canada's concern "that the people of Cuba deserve their full rights to freedom of speech and assembly, as well as democracy." The minister acknowledged the challenging economic situation facing Cuba and the impacts of the pandemic on the population but gave no indication of any diplomatic or economic measures Canada might take to address the blockade and shortages.

We believe it is Canada's ethical responsibility to take effective action to alleviate the suffering of the Cuban people, by providing immediate humanitarian assistance to Cuba and using all diplomatic tools at its disposal to pressure President Biden to honour his pledge to end the illegal, immoral, and highly destructive 60-year-old U.S. embargo.

Sincerely,



Chris Aylward
National President
Public Service Alliance of Canada

cc. Marc Garneau, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Jack Harris, NDP Critic for Foreign Affairs
Paul Manley, MP