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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

March 30, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The Cuba provisions passed earlier this month in the omnibus appropriations bill serve as a modest starting point for reforming U.S. policy towards Cuba. Additional measures are needed, however, in order to recast a policy that has not only failed to promote human rights and democracy, but that also undermines our broader security and political interests in the Western Hemisphere. As Vice President Biden remarked during his recent trip to Chile, a "transition" is needed in U.S.-Cuba relations. I am writing to you now because the timing for that "transition" is critical: the Summit of the Americas, starting April, 17, 2009 in Trinidad and Tobago, presents a unique opportunity for you to build a more hospitable climate to advance U.S. interests in the region through a change in our posture regarding Cuba policy.

Our approach to Cuba stands in sharp contrast to Latin America's engagement with the island, as demonstrated by recently announced plans to re-establish diplomatic ties between Cuba and Costa Rica and El Salvador, a series of visits to Havana by Latin American presidents, and Cuba's admission in December 2008 to the Rio Group. The U.S. embargo on Cuba is also a source of controversy between the United States and the European Union, as well as in the United Nations, which has passed a widely supported resolution condemning the U.S. embargo for the past 17 years. To the world, our current approach defies logic: even during the lowest depths of the Cold War, direct diplomatic channels with the former Soviet Union were never severed.

Given Cuba's symbolic importance to Latin America, in particular, a U.S. initiative to engage Cuba on issues relevant to U.S. security would increase our diplomatic influence as your Administration seeks regional cooperation on a wide range of pressing issues, from energy security, immigration and narcotics, to trade and poverty alleviation. Because Latin America's posture toward Cuba favors dialogue, I am concerned that our current approach could serve as an impediment to gaining support for larger goals in a region in which historical resentments color our interactions. In reforming our approach to Cuba, you have an opportunity to significantly advance our interests and standing in the hemisphere.

At the Summit of the Americas you will be confronted with growing momentum within the region in favor of reincorporating Cuba as a member of the Organization of American States (OAS). Cuban inclusion in the OAS presents challenges to the integrity of the organization and its commitment to promote and defend democracy and human rights, as codified in the Inter-American Democratic Charter and the American Convention on Human Rights. While it is too early to allow Cuba back into the OAS outright, announcing, during the April 17 meeting, a lifting of U.S. opposition to discussion on how the OAS should engage with Cuba would signal a preference for consultation, partnership, and pragmatism. This would lay the groundwork for such a discussion to take place during the Organization of American States' General Assembly (OASGA) in Honduras, starting June 1, 2009.

As your Administration reviews options in the run-up to the Summit, I ask that you also consider the designation of a Special Envoy for Cuba, who would report directly to Secretary of State Clinton. This would help ensure that our ongoing relations with the rest of the region and the duties of the Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere are not shortchanged as a result of the attention that such a complex unangling will demand. The Special Envoy's responsibilities would begin with the initiation of direct talks with the Cuban government on migration and drug interdiction in order to serve vital U.S. security interests in the Straits of Florida, among other issues. Such dialogue on matters of shared concern has significant confidence-building potential and could ultimately create the conditions for meaningful discussion of more contentious subjects, particularly human rights and greater freedoms. Proposals such as the ones I suggest would be an important demonstration that you are serious in wanting a renewed relationship with Latin America.

I encourage you to capitalize on the current bipartisan support for reforming our policy toward Cuba in the U.S. Congress and from countries in Latin America such as Brazil and the European Union (Spain, particularly), as well. The stance of these actors provides you with propitious circumstances to take meaningful action within the framework of the embargo. U.S. policy should be driven by our own interests and from Washington, not by events in Cuba. Reform of our approach towards Cuba is a means to an end: the advancement of U.S. security and foreign policy interests in the Western Hemisphere.

I look forward to working with your Administration on these issues and offer you my personal assistance as needed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dick Lugar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Richard G. Lugar  
United States Senator