

## Open Letter to President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.

Five years ago, the Cuban people witnessed the president of the United States speak in Havana about hope and shaping a better future. His speech spoke of opening Cuba to the world, stimulating civic values and building new businesses. None of these lasted long, as the Trump administration imposed a series of sanctions on top of the most comprehensive and persistent embargo/blockade imposed on any nation. There is little that Cubans on the island can do to alleviate the effects of foreign sanctions during a pandemic, but a swift action from you can make a difference during this humanitarian crisis. President Biden, we ask you to start dismantling the system of sanctions that continues to hurt the Cuban people.

Today Cubans are suffering extraordinarily due to economic hardships. We do not say this lightly, as we are known for our resilience and most of us were born and raised in crisis. However, the last four years have been particularly cruel with the Trump administration's campaign to score political points in Florida. A group of hardliners inflicted much damage to Cuba from their positions of privilege. Even now, during a global pandemic, Cuban-Americans and Cubans with residence in the US are unable to send remittances and medicine to the island. Making a nation hostage to achieve regime change is not a moral thing to do nor has it been effective.

Cuba is not perfect and neither is the United States. Our history has been one of constant fight to achieve sovereignty, democracy and freedom. Despite the sacrifice of patriots for a fully democratic Cuba we are still far from that objective. Nonetheless, achieving that is our responsibility and not of foreign pressure. The United States does not have to be an ideological ally but can stop being a hostile neighbor. In these times of communications and social mobilization, Cubans are more than capable to defend our rights independently. What we need from the US government and its leaders is to stop interfering in our domestic affairs. We hearken back to former president Barack Obama's words on March 21<sup>st</sup> 2016 in Havana:

*"I've made it clear that the United States has neither the capacity, nor the intention to impose change on Cuba. What changes come will depend upon the Cuban people. We will*

*not impose our political or economic system on you. We recognize that every country, every people, must chart its own course and shape its own model..."*

As the president remarked, we share the common past of being the colony of a foreign empire in the Americas. We are sure that the United States understands the value of sovereignty, but your history with our country is troublesome. The majority of Cubans respect and admire your people and its achievements, but we feel the US government has missed time and time again the opportunity to do the right thing and correct a history of wrongdoings.

We know the United States is not the sole responsible of our problems but the economic, financial and trade sanctions imposed on Cuba for 59 years makes it difficult to overcome our differences. The agreement reached by our governments and announced on December 17<sup>th</sup> 2014 signaled a new period that stimulated our hopes and efforts. We kindly request that the US administration return to that approach with Cuba. We hope that you recognize that it is in the national interest of the United States to start a dialogue with all sectors of Cuban society, including the government, entrepreneurs, and civil society, always on the basis of mutual sovereignty. Advocating for a normalization of relations can benefit both governments, financially, culturally, economically and politically.

Lifting the US embargo/blockade unconditionally would be a key step and an act of moral courage. Cubans are hoping for it; US citizens would support it, and the international community would embrace the audacity and wisdom of such an initiative. Given the asymmetry of power between the United States and Cuba, it is your responsibility to take the first step. We call on the moral strength and humanitarian values of your administration. We know that there are those who foster hate and division. We ask that you act on your campaign platform of *unity* and apply it to the relationship with Cuba. We can learn from past mistakes and make it better this time. Don't let the Obama policy towards Cuba be an exception instead let it be the new normal.

We are asking that the US government begin the process of normalization of relations with Cuba. This will benefit our society and provide business opportunities to the United States. We ask for

you to personally take executive action to alleviate the sanctions, and thus, provide the Cuban people with an opportunity in our pursuit of happiness.