

December 12, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

In just a few months, when the 7th Summit of the Americas convenes in Panama, the U.S. will have the rare opportunity to engage diplomatically with all of Latin America on our shared regional challenges. We encourage you to participate in the Summit and to see it as an opportunity to place progress and partnership with our Western Hemisphere neighbors at the center of the discussion.

As you know, Cuba is expected to be represented at the 2015 Summit for the first time. Your participation at the Summit would offer an opportunity to provide a strong message that democracy and human rights, and a vibrant civil society, are essential to our shared hemispheric vision.

In order to ensure that constructive dialogue can form the center of the discussion at the Summit, we write to encourage you to take advantage of this important window to take action towards fundamental changes in U.S. policy towards Cuba. We appreciate the steps you took six years ago to use your office to restore the rights of Cuban Americans to visit and support their families. We also note that it has been nearly four years since the reinstitution of categories of people-to-people travel that had been provided to and then taken from the American people by previous Administrations. While those reforms are a step in the right direction, we believe that they do not go far enough to truly move towards normalizing relations to the benefits of Americans and Cubans.

We believe that the President has broad discretion to take executive actions that can break the deadlock and tangibly move relations forward to the mutual benefit of the U.S. and the Cuban people. First, Cuba should be removed from the State Sponsor of Terrorism list, a designation that is increasingly difficult to justify, considering Havana's pivotal role in peace talks between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas. Additionally, travel restrictions for American citizens to Cuba, which currently limit personal freedoms and discourage productive exchange, should be loosened, including shifting all travel to a general license. These and other legally justified executive actions, along with the type of real diplomacy needed to bring U.S. citizen Alan Gross home, would open the possibility of formal diplomatic relations between our two nations to begin again in earnest.

We are encouraged that you have acknowledged the failures of our Cuba policy, stating in Miami just over a year ago, that “it doesn’t make sense” and that we need “to update our policies.” We agree with these sentiments, as do strong majorities of the American people—regardless of their political affiliation. Even a majority of Cuban-Americans in Miami-Dade County agree that the embargo has failed. This change in public opinion is an important indicator that continuing to rely on failed and punitive measures from a half-century ago to address the problems and opportunities of the 21st century does not work.

The Summit of the Americas in Panama represents a turning point in the geopolitics of the Western Hemisphere, and your Administration is poised to contribute positively and constructively to its outcomes before it even begins. We urge you to use your authority to ensure that that happens.

Sincerely,