

October 21, 2013

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

This May, Cuban religious leaders, in a letter to U.S.-based churches, expressed their hope for a swiftly implemented normalization of the relationship between the United States and Cuba. We, their U.S.-based colleagues, share their hope for a more fruitful, open relationship between Americans and our Cuban brothers and sisters. We believe now is the time for the United States to take concrete action to pursue a path toward improved relations with Cuba.

We are deeply grateful to you for issuing an executive directive in 2011 to lift restrictions for religious and academic travel to Cuba, and to allow licensed people-to-people cultural travel. Since then, we have strengthened our relationships with our church partners in Cuba. We have accompanied and supported them during this time of robust growth for Cuban churches, which has occurred alongside movement within Cuba to increase economic prosperity and political rights. We believe that an improved, more cooperative relationship between our nation and Cuba would benefit Cuban churches and help facilitate progress toward full political freedom and economic opportunity for the Cuban people.

For these reasons, we urge you to take the following actions this year:

Initiate direct, high-level dialogue with the Cuban government. We encourage your Administration to engage in direct, unrestricted, meaningful dialogue with the Cuban Government between senior officials to discuss issues that concern both the United States and Cuba. We laud the recent government-to-government talks about resuming direct mail service, as well as the re-start of migration talks between our two nations. We urge you to extend such talks, and move them to a new level, to include other topics of mutual concern, creating the potential for recognizing and supporting new political and economic openings in Cuba that will benefit the Cuban people. These high-level talks could help facilitate even greater dialogue and exchange of ideas between our peoples and create possibilities for increased engagement by all sectors of our societies.

Exercise your executive authority to remove Cuba from the United States' list of state sponsors of terrorism. Cuba is not a state sponsor of terrorism and must be taken off this list. Cuba's placement on the list is widely recognized as inaccurate and dates to decades-old political dynamics that no longer exist. The most recent State Department report indicates that the Cuban government: provided no weapons or paramilitary training to terrorist groups, joined a regional group on anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism, and has distanced itself from Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) members living on the island. Furthermore, Cuba is sponsoring and hosting the Colombian-FARC guerrillas' peace talks, collaborates with the United States in counter-drug efforts, and has made international commitments to combat terrorism. Cuba's inclusion on the list of state sponsors of terrorism undermines opportunities for the United States to use its influence to encourage continuing improvements in political freedom and human rights.

Exercise your executive authority to lift all restrictions on people-to-people travel between the United States and Cuba. Purposeful travel between the United States and Cuba creates and strengthens fruitful relationships between Americans and Cubans. Since your 2011 executive directive that eased restrictions on religious travel, our communities have a great deal of experience traveling under general license to Cuba for permitted purposes. At both the church-wide and local levels, our members can provide

firsthand witness to the degree to which such relationship-building serves the common good of both nations and strengthens our common witness for peace, dignity and human rights. We have neither experienced nor observed any adverse consequences from this period of expanded relationship, and we strongly urge that the same opportunity be available to all residents of the United States.

We pray for the full normalization of relations between the United States and Cuba. We believe these three incremental steps will serve that end, while mutually benefitting our two peoples. Our church partners in Cuba are eager for meaningful ways to build relationships. We urge you to seize this moment of opportunity to improve relations between the United States and Cuba.

With blessings and peace,

Rev. A. Roy Medley
General Secretary
American Baptist Churches USA

Archbishop Vicken Aykazian
Legate
Armenian Orthodox Church

Shan Cretin
General Secretary
American Friends Service Committee

The Rev. Sharon E. Watkins
General Minister and President
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Dr. Lester A. Myers
President
Center of Concern

Stanley J. Noffsinger
General Secretary
Church of the Brethren

The Rev. Joel Boot
Executive Director
Christian Reformed Church in North America

The Rev. John L. McCullough
President and CEO
Church World Service

The Very Rev. John Edmunds ST
President
Conference of Major Superiors of Men

The Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori
Presiding Bishop and Primate
The Episcopal Church

Sr. Janice McLaughlin, MM
President
Maryknoll Sisters

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Sr. Simone Campbell, SSS
Executive Director
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Sr. Margaret Magee, OSF
President
Franciscan Action Network

The Rev. Gradye Parsons
Stated Clerk
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Peg Birk
Transitional General Secretary
National Council of Churches

The Rev. Peter Morales
President
Unitarian Universalist Association

Sr. Patricia Chappell
Executive Director
Pax Christi USA

Bishop Mary Ann Swenson
Ecumenical Officer
United Methodist Church

The Rev. Dr. Carroll A. Baltimore
President
Progressive National Baptist Convention

The Rev. Geoffrey A. Black
General Minister and President
United Church of Christ