

CHARLES B. RANGEL
15TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
NEW YORK

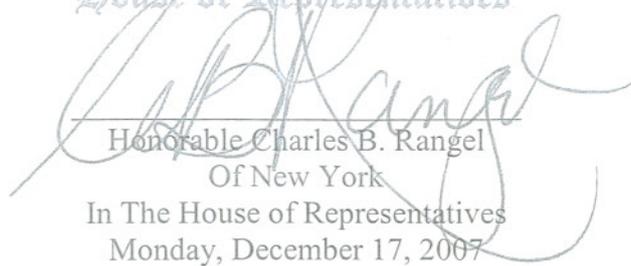
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives


Honorable Charles B. Rangel
Of New York
In The House of Representatives
Monday, December 17, 2007

**United States Cuba Cultural Exchange Letter to President Bush --
Acknowledgement**

Mr. Rangel. Madame Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the U.S. Cuba Cultural Exchange's letter to President Bush and to enter into the record a copy of their letter.

On November 27, 2007, the U.S. Cuba Cultural Exchange sent a letter to President Bush that expressed their desire to establish relations with Cuban artists and urged him to take steps to normalize interaction with Cuba. The letter was signed by several artists including Harry Belafonte, Danny Glover, Carlos Santana, and Sean Penn. As of December 11, 2007, the letter has been signed by one thousand four hundred and twelve people.

I applaud the U. S. Cuba Cultural Exchange for urging President Bush to change the U.S. policy towards Cuba and for raising awareness about how the policy impacts the artist community. Further, I support their movement, which would allow people from both countries to exchange and experience performing and literary arts.

Art in any form including, but not limited to dance, music, and poetry provides a mechanism where by people are able to express themselves, which ultimately represents their culture, identity, and voice. In addition to representing a culture, the selling of artistic goods provides a source of income for artists and substantially contributes to an economy, especially in the U.S.

The artists issue is part of the broader implications with the travel ban and trade embargo, which hurts the U.S. economically, politically, and socially. It is estimated that the U.S. economy losses millions of dollars annually due to the trade embargo. The lack of diplomatic relations prevents any effort to democratize Cuba. There is no way to quantify the cost paid by Cuban Americans who can't visit their loved ones freely.

The U.S. - Cuba policy is a failure period. Change is needed now. I urge my colleagues to support my bills, H.R. 624 and H. R. 654, which would lift the embargo and travel ban.

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November 27, 2007

President George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, DC

Dear President Bush:

We wish to bring to your attention the accompanying letter, dated October 26, 2007, received from Alicia Alonso, Prima Ballerina and Director of the Cuban National Ballet, and also Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Ms. Alonso has toured extensively in the United States and her work has long been admired by the American performing arts community, cultural critics and the public.

We are writing you as representatives of the cultural sphere in the United States. We write you as American citizens. We write to express our dismay at your administration's continuing hostility towards Cuba. We write to express our opposition to policies that keep us divided from our Cuban counterparts, preventing cultural interchange between our two countries. We believe the time has come to move towards cooperation and constructive relations with Cuba.

The present policies deny such possibilities of friendship and cultural sharing. We further note that cultural interchanges and relationships are also modes of communication and expression. In denying us the possibility of engaging in such exchanges and relationships, we are being denied our fundamental rights as guaranteed by the 1st, 5th and 14th Amendments of the U.S. Constitution.

This reality seems to run counter to other positions expressed by your Administration. In September 2006, for example, Laura Bush inaugurated your Administration's "Global Cultural Initiative," stating that "One of the best ways we can deepen our friendships with the people of all countries is for us to better understand each other's culture by enjoying each other's literature, music, films and visual arts."

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As citizens, artists, scholars, educators and cultural workers from all artistic practices, academic disciplines, advocacy and service organizations in the arts, we hope you will read and consider the words of Alicia Alonso as we call upon your Administration to:

1. open a respectful dialogue with the government and people of Cuba in accord with established protocols supported by the community of nations;
2. end the travel ban that prevents U.S. citizens from visiting Cuba and allow for Cuban artists and scholars to visit the United States, thus eliminating the censorship of art and ideas, and
3. initiate, by working with appropriate members of Congress, a process that can result in the development of normal bilateral relations between our countries.

Supporters of Cultural Exchanges with Cuba

Louis Head- Cuba Research and Analysis Group- Co-founder US-Cuba Cultural Exchange

Bill Martinez- Martinez & Associates-Co-founder US-Cuba Cultural Exchange

Cynthia Semon- Media consultant/music promoter- US-Cuba Cultural Exchange

James Early- Cultural Policy Specialist- U.S.-Cuba Cultural Exchange

Harry Belafonte- actor/singer

Danny Glover- actor

Sean Penn- actor

Carlos Santana- musician

(Plus more than 1,400 other signatories)

