

Letter Regarding Religious Travel and Remittances to Cuba Faith Communities

May 16, 2019

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As leaders of national faith communities and agencies we are deeply concerned about the measures recently announced by Trump Administration officials to place new limitations on travel by U.S. citizens to Cuba and to tighten restrictions on remittances to Cuban citizens. The proposed restrictions will have a harmful impact on the churches, temples, and communities of faith with whom we partner in Cuba.

Accordingly, we write to urge the *retention* of the current rules for religious travel under *general license* and for the ability to express support to Cuban religious organizations through *remittances*.

People of faith in the United States, including staff of national denominations and religious bodies, faith-based agencies, and members of local faith communities, travel to Cuba regularly to engage with and support sister communities. We share with them in worship, offer our human solidarity, support their pastoral and social service programs, and learn from them in return.

Our visits, our moral support, and our financial assistance in many cases help sustain these faith communities and contribute to religious expression and religious liberty in Cuba. Measures that would limit the ability of U.S. people of faith to visit with and support their colleagues and partners in Cuba will be detrimental to the wellbeing and growth of the religious sphere in Cuba. Our ability to worship, pray and witness with Cuban faith communities is also an important expression of our own religious freedom.

Currently, there is a general license for U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba to engage in a full-time program of religious activities (31 CFR 515.566), and persons subject to U.S. jurisdiction can provide remittances without restrictions to Cuban religious organizations (31 CFR 515.570 [c]). These regulations allow for frequent and straightforward exchange with faith partners. We believe that these extensive connections have had a positive impact on the situation of the faith communities in Cuba. It is in the best interests and aspirations of the religious communities in Cuba and the United States to continue these policies.

We have already seen how difficult it is for our faith partners in Cuba to apply for visas to travel to the United States in order to speak to congregations and religious organizations here about

their realities and needs in Cuba, given the suspension of consular services at the U.S. Embassy and the revision of the B2 visa to single entry, 30-day visas. Restrictions on religious travel by Americans will further isolate Cuban faith communities.

Whatever one's views may be on U.S. policy toward Cuba, we hope that all can agree that unrestricted religious travel is worthy of full support. Cuban faith communities are flourishing and growing. Replacing the general license for religious travel with the requirement to apply for specific licenses will significantly reduce religious travel, deprive Cuban religious communities of important accompaniment and assistance, and could undermine the movement toward increasing religious freedom.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We are available at your convenience to meet with you if we can be helpful in making even clearer the importance of robust religious exchange between U.S. and Cuba faith communities.

Sincerely,

Paula Clayton Dempsey
Director of Partnership Relations
Alliance of Baptists

Joyce Ajlouny
General Secretary
American Friends Service Committee

Rev. Terri Hord Owens
General Minister and President
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada

Dr. Steven Timmermans
Executive Director
Christian Reformed Church

Jay Wittmeyer
Executive Director
Global Mission and Service
Church of the Brethren

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

Sister Ellen Kelly, RGS,
(International) Congregation Leader
Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

Brigid Lawlor, RGS
Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces

The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry
Presiding Bishop and Primate
The Episcopal Church

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Rev. Russell L. Meyer
Executive Director
Florida Council of Churches

Ted Penton, SJ
Secretary for Justice & Ecology
Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States

Rev. Raymond J. Finch, MM
Superior General
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers
Maryknoll, N.Y.

Sister Antoinette Gutzler, MM
President
Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic
Maryknoll, N.Y.

J Ron Byler
Executive Director
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Jim Winkler
President and General Secretary
National Council of Churches

Sister Simone Campbell, SSS
Executive Director
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church (USA)

Rabbi Jonah Pesner
Senior Vice President'
Union for Reform Judaism

Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer
General Minister and President
United Church of Christ

Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, General Secretary
General Board of Church and Society
The United Methodist Church

cc:

Vice President Michael Pence
Secretary of State Michael Pompeo
Secretary of Treasury Steven Mnuchin
Ambassador Sam Brownback
National Security Council Director John Bolton
Members of Congress