

March 16, 2016

Dear Member of Congress,

As faith leaders in the United States we write to urge you today to take action to end our long-standing and counter-productive embargo on Cuba.

We have listened to the call of our partner faith communities in Cuba, with whom we have worked for many years on humanitarian issues, on disaster response, and in sister church relationships. Uniformly and consistently, they have told us that the embargo brings no benefits to the faith community in Cuba. In fact, it makes life more difficult for church members and the Cuban people more broadly. They would like a full normal relationship, in which they can visit and learn from us, and we can visit and learn from them. They recognize that our two governments have differences, and issues that must be resolved; They are eager to see those issues discussed in the context of normal, respectful relations.

As religious membership and attendance in Cuba has grown over recent years, we feel a renewed urgency to bring an end to the embargo, and move toward a more constructive relationship.

In the last few years, restrictions on travel to Cuba and on exports to Cuba have eased somewhat, and diplomatic relations have been restored. Our partner communities have welcomed these moves, as have we.

Now is the time for you, as our representatives in the Congress, to take action to bring an end to the embargo. The Cuban Democracy Act, the Helms-Burton legislation, and the Trade Sanctions Reform Act, all impose various legislative restrictions on travel, trade, and diplomatic relations. The time for those restrictions has passed.

In the current Congress, there is a packet of legislative initiatives that would bring an end to most of the onerous restrictions of the U.S. embargo. H.R. 3687 the Cuba Agricultural Exports Act would end rules that limit agricultural sales to Cuba, H.R.3055, the Cuba DATA Act, would end limits on telecommunications trade and investment, and H.R. 3238, the Cuba Trade Act, would end limits on trade in general. The Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act (H.R. 664) would end any remaining restriction on U.S. citizen travel. We urge you to endorse these pieces of legislation, as a signal of your commitment to ending the embargo and returning to normal relations that will benefit both our peoples and our faith communities.

While our two governments have disagreements that must be resolved, these can be addressed in the future through respectful dialogue and engagement.

Religious freedom and religious life have grown dramatically in Cuba in the last two decades, and religious attendance – among Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim communities – has grown as well. The faith community is playing a greater role in the life of the Cuban people, and we look forward to its continuing growth and expansion. We look forward to the day when relations between our two countries are fully normal, and when our peoples and our communities can engage

with one another unhindered and with mutual understanding and benefit. Legislative action to end the embargo will bring that day closer, and we urge you to support legislation that would do so.

Yours,

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