

April 12, 2010

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

We write as leaders and mission directors of U.S. Christian communions, their agencies, and ecumenical organizations in the United States to express to you and your committee our support for H.R. 4645, the Travel Restriction Reform and Export Enhancement Act, the legislation you have sponsored with Congressman Moran and more than 40 of your House colleagues. With you, we believe that this legislation will help to break down travel and trade barriers. In addition to supporting our work with Cuban churches, it will also provide new sources of nutrition, economic activity, and support for the Cuban people.

For decades the U.S. policy toward Cuba has had adverse consequences for the Cuban people and has violated important freedoms of U.S. citizens. It has failed in its stated objective to bring about major change in the Cuban political system. The hostility between the two governments has harmed relationships between our two peoples, including among people of faith. This has impoverished our knowledge of each other as people, denied the mutual benefits that full and free travel and exchange can bring, and disrupted the close historical bonds between many of our churches.

As churches and religious institutions with a long history of close relationships with churches in Cuba, we have keenly experienced the impact of the travel ban on our work and on the lives of the Cuba people to whom we relate. U.S. churches, mission agencies and ecumenical organizations at the national and regional levels have had their religious activities severely impeded by the travel restrictions, which have reduced their ability to send religious delegations to Cuba and severely diminished our capacity to accompany and support our Cuban church partners.

Cuban churches are growing rapidly, presenting new opportunities for U.S. churches and ecumenical institutions to relate to and support their Cuban brothers and sisters in Christ. Current restrictions on travel to Cuba are unfair and inappropriate and restrain religious freedom. This is a critical time to open wide the doors to allow greater people-to-people engagement of all kinds and at all levels between the two countries. We must not miss this opportunity!

We believe that now is the time to reform U.S. policy toward Cuba in ways that benefit all the people of Cuba and the United States. We urge you, the Agriculture Committee, and the Congress to give favorable consideration to H.R. 4645 without amendment so that

the travel and food sales reforms remain intact. We hope that we can work with you to advance the mutual interests of the U.S. and Cuban people.

Yours sincerely,

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