

ON THE RECORD

Cuban Dissidents, Human Rights Defenders, and Cuban Americans now support reforming U.S. policy. Here's why:

Political dissidents and former prisoners of conscience in Cuba support ending U.S. travel ban:

- **Yoani Sanchez**, *a leading Cuban blogger and victim of harassment for her opposition activities*: "...I support an immediate opening to allow all Americans to travel to Cuba, the end of the "blockade," the end of the damaging hostilities of the Cold War, and in particular the complete elimination of anything that limits contact between the citizens of both countries."
- **Marta Beatriz Roque**, *a former political prisoner and president of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society*: "I think everyone should have the freedom to travel, which is something that the Cuban people lack. So if we're fighting here for democracy, how can we try to restrict the freedom of the American people?"
- **Miriam Leiva**, *an independent journalist and co-founder of the Ladies in White, and her husband Oscar Espinosa, an independent economist and former political prisoner*: "We fully support lifting all restrictions on Americans to travel to Cuba . . . Even by a simple conversation, sharing everyday experiences, Americans would be demonstrating how your society is capable of constantly deepening and improving democracy, and could help our own efforts for democracy."
- **Vladimiro Roca**, *leader of the opposition Cuban Social-Democratic Party, and Elizardo Sanchez, founder of the Cuban Human Rights and National Reconciliation Committee, both of whom have spent years in Cuban prisons*: "Just as we insist on the right of Cubans to travel, to leave and return to our country freely, a right now denied us, so too do we support the right of Americans to travel freely, including travel to Cuba."
- **Oswaldo Payá**, *head of the Cuba Christian Liberation Movement, leader of the Cuban reform referendum drive known as the Varela Project and former Nobel Peace Prize nominee*: "As Cubans we do not accept that another country or group of countries impose its rules on the lives of our people, neither with unjust pressure nor economic isolation, be they embargos, sanctions or other types of measures."

International human rights defenders support travel and food sales to Cuba:

- **Human Rights Watch, Americas Director, José Miguel Vivanco**: "No other country in the world bans travels to Cuba, and the rest of the world sees the travel ban as a bizarre anachronism." "Ending the travel ban is a step in the right direction toward reforming this failed policy, and Congress should act swiftly..."
- **Freedom House, the first human rights organization funded under the Helms-Burton Act**: "The ban on travel to Cuba is an anomaly for U.S. citizens in today's world. Americans expect to travel freely, as well they should . . . Let us put our trust in U.S. citizens to serve as ambassadors for our ideals—to convey the virtues of free expression and other fundamental rights, to explain how democracy is a choice made every day, to show Cubans the alternatives to the decrepit communist system, and to give Cubans hope for a brighter future."

- **Amnesty International**, a leading human rights defender, has called for ending Cuba trade and travel restrictions: “Amnesty International urges the U.S. government to lift the nearly five—decade long economic and trade embargo against Cuba as it is detrimental to the fulfillment of the economic and social rights of the Cuban people.”
- **The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops**: “Despite grave concerns about human rights violations generally and restrictions on religious freedom in particular, the [Conference of Catholic Bishops] has . . . actively called for lifting restrictions on the sale of food and medicine, and travel . . . In accord with the Church in Cuba, the U.S. Bishops have repeatedly rejected a policy that, while seeking to harm the Cuban government provides it a convenient excuse for its many failings and only increases the suffering of the Cuban people.”
- **Catholic Bishop Thomas G. Wenski of the Diocese of Orlando, Florida**: “It continues to be our position that the goals of improving the lives of the Cuban people and encouraging democracy in Cuba will best be advanced through more rather than less contact between the Cuban and American people.”
- **Leaders of 18 major U.S. Christian denominations and agencies wrote to Congress**: “We urgently request you to change the Cuba policy of the United States in ways that will assist the churches in their work and benefit all Americans . . . In addition to lifting the restrictions on religious travel, we urge you to end the travel ban for all Americans.”

Cuban Americans are ready to reform U.S. policy and reach out to the Cuban people:

- Polls show between **59% and 67% of Cuban Americans** now support all Americans’ right to travel to Cuba.
- **Carlos Saladrigas**, Chairman of the Cuba Study Group and a recent convert to opening travel to Cuba puts it this way: “More Cuban Americans have come to the realization that we cannot afford to continue with failed policies to meet the challenges of the future. We need to engage. It is not reasonable to expect to partake in a new Cuba if we don’t partake in the process that creates it.”
- **Ignacio Sosa**, Executive Board member of Caritas, the only national nongovernmental organization in Cuba: “Lifting the ban on American travel to Cuba and allowing more Cubans to enter the United States on travel visas will do more to further the cause of freedom than the tit-for-tat diplomatic gamesmanship.”
- **Sergio Pino**, a Cuban American businessman and staunch critic of the Cuban government, who first opposed and then supported Juanes’ concert in Havana, recently sent a tough message to Congress: “It is time to rethink our strategy. With three Cuban-American members of Congress, and one in the Senate, and many well-meaning Cuban-American leaders of hundreds of different political organizations in exile, it is time for one of them to come forward and unite us behind a new and more effective approach that focuses on the Cuban people first.”