

PROMOTING CIVIC CULTURE AND
SUPPORT FOR THE CUBAN PEOPLE

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Welcoming Remarks

by

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It is a great pleasure to welcome such an outstanding group of people here this afternoon. The fact that the President's Cuba policy can attract the interest and involvement of some of our finest scholars and journalists and most dedicated organizational and foundation leaders is very gratifying. It demonstrates that much more is going on in Cuba policy than what you read about in the newspapers.

President Clinton's announcement on October 6 about a new series of measures for advancing the policy of support for the Cuban people first enunciated in the Cuban Democracy Act has clearly helped to renew the excitement. In a major foreign policy speech at the Freedom House meeting, the President announced some specific steps to invigorate our effort to promote the cause of peaceful change in Cuba. The measures the President announced are designed to facilitate the type of efforts many of you have already undertaken, in some case for many years. We hope that this meeting and the example you provide will invigorate your activities and spur others to join the enterprise and multiply the effort. We want to build on the start that you have already made in reaching out to the Cuban people, to increase the support that reaches them, and to enhance the impact that these efforts have on forging civil society on the island. What better way to accomplish these goals than to turn to those who already have a strong interest in Cuba and who represent the best civic traditions in our own society.

As I mentioned, our Cuba policy is guided by the Cuba Democracy Act. The October 6 measures announced by President Clinton provide the next steps for implementing that policy. The measures announced refer to increased enforcement of the economic embargo and to additional steps to improve communications and the flow of information to and within the island, facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Cuban people, and address the backlog of urgent humanitarian travel of Cuban Americans to their families on the island. We recognize that

some, perhaps most, of you here do not share the commitment of the Administration to vigorous enforcement of the economic embargo against Cuba. This Administration is happy to debate the wisdom of its overall policy and does so regularly. But that is not why we have come together today. We believe that however change comes to Cuba the process will be more peaceful and the outcome more democratic if civil society is strengthened on the island. That is why we have opened up these important new spaces in US Cuba policy for your active participation in building civil society in Cuba.

The parts of the new regulations that we want to emphasize today relates, first, to travel to Cuba for educational, scientific and cultural exchanges; second, to assistance to the Cuban people that strengthens civil society and especially the involvement of non-governmental organizations in these activities--this is what we call "support for the Cuban people;" and third, to the possibility of establishing news bureaus in Cuba and increasing the flow of information into and outside of Cuba. We have already had a number of important successes in our implementation of related policies.

- The total value of private humanitarian shipments licensed by the USG since passage of the Cuban Democracy Act has just topped 100 million dollars. This amount far exceeds the total assistance of other countries to Cuba during the same period, making the American people, without a single dollar of government money, the largest donor to Cuba.
- Assistance from U.S. non-governmental sources has helped alleviate the suffering of the Cuban people, especially in the struggle against the neuritis epidemic, and has strengthened the organizational capacities of Cuban NGOs, including many churches.
- We have also succeeded in licensing telecommunications agreements between Cuba and U.S. companies that have dramatically improved telephone, fax and email communications with the island.

Yet these gains are insignificant in light of the objective. The international community simply has not yet done enough to accelerate the growth of civil society in Cuba and thereby foster the process of peaceful, democratic change. Yet despite the inadequacy of what has been accomplished to date, the government of Cuba is leery and can be expected to resist exchanges and other cooperation that would bring new openness to Cuban society.

Let me be clear about an issue related to this hostile attitude of the Cuban government to some of the measures we are here to discuss today. You were not invited here today because of, and your presence does not commit you to, any political or policy agenda. We are not seeking to sign you up for any USG

program. Rather we want to learn how we can better facilitate non-governmental activities which are legal and consistent with the goal of a peaceful, democratic transition. In turn we ask for your patience in dealing with a government bureaucracy not noted for its speed or flexibility and for our requirement to ensure that those activities we license as exceptions to the embargo comply with regulations. We know that many of you bridle at government interference and would reject any type of government control of your activities. Please be assured that our inquiries and regulations are designed to promote compliance with the law and to verify that licensed activities are genuinely non-governmental and aimed at promoting independence of thought and action.

The USG is not and should not be the primary agent of change in Cuba. Our role should be to encourage and facilitate those in our own society and in Cuba who wish to foster peaceful, democratic change.

Since the revolution, the Cuban government has sought to take on all functions of civil society and has quashed nearly all attempts by organizations or individuals to act independently. The result is a distorted jumble, lacking both freedom and representativeness. Some professional societies, such as Cuban lawyers, that depend on both code and precedent in their work, actually lack any publication or journal to serve their members. News organizations employ scores of reporters and journalists but almost no news of substance is published or broadcast. Writers and artists produce manuscripts and artifacts with little potential for publication or realization, except outside the country or for the consumption of visiting tourists. Celebrated dramatists can only see some of their works performed abroad. One Cuban cinematographer who was asked why his new made-in-Cuba movie had only been shown outside Cuba explained that this was the case simply because it had been impossible to figure out what the censors would allow in Cuba.

A vigorous civil society in Cuba—whether manifested through church organizations, professional societies and worker groups, community and fraternal associations, educational institutions, human rights advocates or political parties—is a vehicle for ideas, personal and collective expression, intellectual and spiritual development, social innovation and experimentation. It will respond to basic human needs as well as to satisfy humanistic yearnings for some means of expression. The institutions of civil society are there to answer citizen demands, and to hold governments and other institutions accountable to standards rooted in the values and traditions of the community. They are the pillars of human freedom and dignity. It is this sense, and only this sense, that non-governmental institutions, whether in this country or any other,

and their support for civil society are "subversive" of the established order.

The new measures announced by the President in support of the Cuban people are designed to allow private U.S. organizations to play a more active role in strengthening and fostering civil society in Cuba and to increase significantly the flow of information to, from and within Cuba.

We hope to see:

- the reciprocal establishment of news bureaus in Cuba and the U.S.;
- student and faculty exchanges between U.S. and Cuban universities, including formal study abroad programs for U.S. college students;
- private (NGO) support for activities of recognized human rights organizations in Cuba, and other activities of individuals and NGOs which promote independent activity intended to strengthen civil society in Cuba;
- the sale and donation of communications equipment, such as faxes, copiers, computers, modems and the like to Cuban NGOs and individual counterparts.

Some of these areas are entirely new ones for US policy. It is in that spirit that we have asked you here today. We hope to explain what we intend by the new regulations, share experiences, and, possibly, identify areas of uncertainty or confusion which we need to further clarify within the inter-agency process. We genuinely believe in the ability of non-governmental actors to find creative ways to strengthen civil society in Cuba. And we have assembled today an outstanding group of institutions and individuals who have been doing just that.

During each of the three somewhat separate discussions we will hold today, we hope to involve a lot of people in the give and take and to identify others that you can meet with during our coffee break or after the meeting concludes. We from the Administration will explain the intent of the President's new measures, and what kinds of criteria and procedures we will be using to license the activities that the measures have authorized in principle. To help me here today, we have the various members of the support for the Cuban people working groups which includes representatives from the Departments of State, Treasury, and Commerce, as well as the NSC, AID, and USIA.

We also want to welcome a number of people from the private sector and some of our leading NGOs who will offer brief accounts of some aspect of their experience with Cuba. We believe that it is vitally important to take advantage of what has been learned by these pioneers and to incorporate the lessons in new projects for Cuba. Indeed, we have had a true embarrassment of riches in

planning this program, despite the fact that we managed to schedule it at the same time as several other important meetings. I think that just goes to show the importance of this undertaking for Cuba. The result is that we hope that you will also pay attention to the people whom we introduce but who won't be able to say much more than hello. I am happy so many distinguished people were willing to join us today, and I am certain you will benefit from their insights.

We also hope to offer you plenty of opportunities to ask questions and share your ideas during each of the sessions. Please keep your questions and comments brief. On the other hand we want you to see this as the initiation of a dialogue that will continue more productively because you have been able to meet the persons who can help you the most, whether from the Administration or the private sector.

The type of outreach efforts to the Cuban people that we seek to encourage are in a way like the organization of this meeting has been. The effort has depended on the cooperation of a lot of people, and I would like to acknowledge them before I turn to introduce the following three sections of the program. First, I want to recognize the colleagues who helped plan the meeting. Peter Orr of AID, Gene Bigler of USIA, Clara David and Serena Moe of Treasury, Joan Roberts of Commerce, Kevin Sullivan and Tony Gambino of the Department of State, Rob Malley of the NSC staff, and of course my secretary Angie Frias who was involved along each step of the way. The Public Affairs staff at the Department of State, especially Yvonne O'Brien and Mary Ann Dixon, were a great help in sending out the invitations and taking care of attendance. Miguel Bretos and Francine Berkowitz at the Smithsonian Institution immediately responded to our shared purpose with the warmth and hospitality that you have already seen and will enjoy a lot more as the afternoon progresses.

Before I move to the substantive components of our program, I also want to take a moment to introduce the ranking U.S. government officials who are responsible for the implementation of our Cuba policy. You have already met Michael Ranneberger our very able Director of Cuban Affairs at the Department of State, or ARA/CCA as it is designated organizationally. His office and his helpful staff are generally your best source of overall information and orientation on Cuban affairs. Richard Newcomb is the Director of the Office of Foreign Assets Control at the Department of the Treasury. The majority of the interactions you will have with the USG during the licensing process will be with him and his colleagues. One other colleague that I would also like to acknowledge is Maria Elena Torano, one of the U.S. Commissioners on Public Diplomacy, the group that oversees the work of the United States Information Agency.

I have one last exhortation before turning to the discussion of educational and scientific exchanges. It is to stress to all of you the importance of delving as deeply in Cuba as you possibly can to learn how to develop the projects and programs that are of interest to you and to take advantage of the U.S. Interests Section in the process. Our Principal Officer Joseph Sullivan is a consummate diplomat who now knows Cuban society extremely well after more than two years on the job, and he is aided by a remarkable staff. Manuel Rocha left the Latin American directorate at the NSC to become Joe's deputy, and he works tirelessly to know and understand the Cuban people. Merrie Blocker has made a sensational start as the new PAO, while Sandy Salmon, the chief of the consular section, Bob Witajewski, the political-econ chief, and the rest almost verge on famous for what they have already accomplished. They can and will help you make contacts, figure out how to do things, and will also know when to get out of the way when that is needed. Cuban officialdom often goes out of its way to prevent contact between visitors and the Interest Section, so don't hesitate to prepare your connection in advance by working through the Cuba desks at State and USIA.

Expanding educational, scientific and cultural exchanges between U.S. institutions and Cuba is an important component of our effort to increase the flow of information and ideas between the U.S. and Cuba. These activities may also indirectly engender the development of civil society. The American students and faculty, scientists, artists and others who participate in these activities will hold a range of opinions, more likely critical than not, of our Cuba policy. We believe that regardless of their views, their habits of critical independent thinking can't help but have a positive impact on the Cubans with whom they come into contact. What better way than through personal encounters can we convey the eagerness of the American people to usher in a new era of friendship and cooperation with the people of Cuba. The Cuba Democracy Act contemplates the licensing of travel for "clearly defined educational purposes," and the new regulations that we are here to discuss today spell out more clearly what educational travel we are prepared to license. I want to emphasize that all programs for study in Cuba will have to be specifically licensed by the Department of Treasury. These programs may include shorter courses of study as well as the pursuit of degree programs in Cuban universities.

The USG is prepared to assist you by providing orientations and advice, but we do not want to get involved in negotiating for you. We expect that U.S. institutions will follow the same professional standards they do in any international undertaking: seeking the most enlightening, varied and professional experience they can, and resisting attempts by foreign institutions or governments to structure their travel, contacts citizens, or with their professional counterparts or fellow students.

The President's decision to open the way for broader involvement of U.S. NGOs in Cuba is perhaps the most important of his announcements on October 6. The Administration wants to allow U.S. NGOs to apply their creativity and energy to the challenge of strengthening civil society in Cuba. Yet as we open this door, we are concerned about the array of "government organized" NGOs or GONGOs that the Cuban regime has created to attract and channel the flow of international humanitarian assistance to the Cuban people. As many of you know from direct experience, these organizations vary considerably in the way they work, the closeness of their ties to the party and the government, and the degree of politicization of their activities. It is your own organization's reputation and experience and your ability to design the best program for accomplishing your goals on behalf of the Cuban people that will ultimately guide us.

One of the most exciting recent developments in Cuba is the emergence of new groups of independent professionals. The formation of a group of doctors was recently announced, and there are also budding organizations of economists, teachers, lawyers and others. The first of these groups, and in many ways still the pioneer, is the Association of Independent Journalists of Cuba that was established almost five years ago. We have decided to invite a representative of this organization to initiate our discussion today of the situation related to journalists and the prospects for the formation of press bureaus in Havana. Then rather than have us bureaucrats go on about this topic, we will turn to two outstanding journalists to conclude our program. Again, thank you for joining us this afternoon. Now, manos a la obra!