

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 17, 1997

Dear Colleague:

You recently received a letter from a colleague calling for the repeal of both the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 (known as the "Torricelli Bill") and the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996 (known as "Helms-Burton Law"). We are confident that you are familiar with these two pieces of legislation and, most importantly, with the issues affecting the Cuban people and U.S.-Cuba relations. Nevertheless, we feel compelled to clarify certain inaccurate statements made concerning the content, purpose, and effect of the sanctions against the Castro dictatorship.

First and foremost, both initiatives conform to and further the objectives of U.S. foreign policy. They are real, tangible instruments used to help promote respect for human rights and basic civil liberties in Cuba; to support democratic political reform; and, most importantly, to demonstrate to the Cuban people that the U.S. will not contribute to their oppression by providing a lifeline to the Castro regime. It emphasizes that the U.S. is more concerned about the future of the Cuban people than it is with increasing its profits or its foreign investments that help to further entrench Castro; that it will not allow its citizens or its corporations to benefit from the continued subjugation of the Cuban people.

Only one thing, one person, is responsible for the suffering of the people in Cuba -- Fidel Castro. Let us not be fooled into believing that the Cuban people are starving as a result of the U.S. trade embargo. The Castro regime has always had access to other markets, yet the people on the island are living at sub-poverty levels. Today, non-U.S. investors provide a considerable influx of funds into Cuba, yet these never find their way to the Cuban citizenry. As if these facts were not enough in and of themselves, it should be emphasized that the embargo legislation includes provisions exempting humanitarian assistance from its prohibitions.

Helms-Burton specifies that economic sanctions may be lifted by the President upon the occurrence of fundamental conditions, of which the essential ones are: the legalization of political activity; the liberation of all political prisoners; and the announcement by the transition government that free elections will be held in Cuba in no more than 18 months. As the history of democratic transitions from totalitarian rule has shown, these conditions will be essential to the democratic transition that the Cuban people deserve.

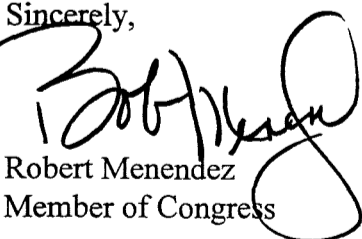
Lastly, before any decisions are ever made concerning reconciliation and dialogue with the Castro regime, the views and opinions of the Cuban people should be considered -- not those of individuals offered by the regime and coached to speak in sound bites and official rhetoric, but those who are persecuted or punished for their political ideals and beliefs. The vast majority of the Cuban people supports and respects the U.S. for taking a stand against the Cuban dictator and for supporting the reestablishment of freedom, liberty, and justice for the people of Cuba.

The U.S. has, in fact, assumed its leadership role guided by a moral and just foreign policy in the form of the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 and the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996. We thank you once again for your support of the right of the Cuban people to be free.

Sincerely,



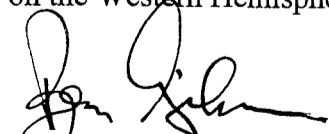
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Vice Chairman, Subcommittee
on the Western Hemisphere



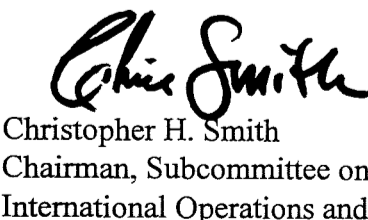
Robert Menendez
Member of Congress



Lincoln Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress



Benjamin A. Gilman
Chairman, Committee on
International Relations



Christopher H. Smith
Chairman, Subcommittee on
International Operations and



Dan Burton
Chairman, Committee on
Government Reform and