

Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and Cuba

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On August 21, 2007, democrat and U.S. presidential candidate, Barack Obama called for an end to the inhumane economic sanctions that were imposed by the Bush administration in 2004 and 2006, which mercilessly divide Cuban families (1). The draconian measures, designed to strangle the islands economy and ultimately bring down the Cuban government, limit visits to the island by Cubans living in the U.S. to 14 days every three years. Cubans wishing to travel to Cuba must obtain State Department authorization and must intend to visit a direct relative. As defined by Bush, this includes grandparents, parents, siblings, children or a spouse. Therefore a U.S. citizen of Cuban origin does not have the right to visit cousins, uncles, aunts, nieces or nephews who have remained in Cuba (2).

Obama also denounced the restrictions on remittances that Cuban-Americans can send to their families (maximum \$100/mo). "This is both a humanitarian and a strategic issue. That decision [...has] had a profoundly negative impact on the welfare of the Cuban people," he declared. As president, "I will grant Cuban-Americans unrestricted rights to visit family and send remittances to the island," he promised (3).

The Illinois senator also stated his willingness to begin bilateral talks with the government in Havana. "To normalize relations and ease the embargo that has governed relations between our countries for the last five decades." Obama is the first presidential candidate to suggest the possibility of lifting the economic blockade against Cuba. This is an extremely positive development even though the distinct stench of colonialism that emanated from his some of his words illustrating his intention to impose conditions on a sovereign nation was lamentable (4).

Felipe Pérez Roque, Cuba's minister of foreign affairs, welcomed Obama's initiative, "These declarations express the opinion of the U.S. majority." The minister denounced the barbaric and anachronistic cruelty of the Bush administration toward Cuba (5) and pointed out that the restrictive measures violate the constitutional rights of U.S. citizens to free movement (6).

Conversely, democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, eyeing campaign contributions from the extreme rightwing heirs of the Fulgencio Batista regime, called Obama's rational point of view "irresponsible and frankly naive" (7). She called for continuing the economic sanctions, remaining faithful to her husband legacy. Bill Clinton signed the senseless, retroactive and extraterritorial Helms-Burton law of 1996 in hopes of delivering the coup de grâce to the Cuban Revolution. "She supports the embargo and our current policy toward Cuba," stated her spokesman, Mo Elleithee (8).

The vast majority of the general public in the U.S. as well as the Cuban-American

community strongly support lifting the economic sanctions that seriously suppresses the standard of living on the island. The blockade imposed on Cuba since 1960 demonstrates Washington's inability to recognize the independence of the Caribbean nation. Not to mention that it has been totally ineffective. The government of Fidel Castro has proposed dialogue based on mutual respect several times to the White House. But so far, the northern neighbor has not come to terms with and still refuses to acknowledge Cuba's liberation from U.S. tutelage in 1959.

Jen Psaki, spokeswoman for Barack Obama, summed it up this way: "Ultimately, this election is a choice between staying with the failed policies of the past [...] or turning the page and taking a new approach to global diplomacy." It is yet to be seen whether reason and common sense will prevail and the cruel and unjust punishment exacted on the Cuban people will disappear forever.

Notes

(1) Barack Obama, « Our Main Goal: Freedom in Cuba », The Miami Herald, August 21, 2007.

(2) Colin L. Powell, Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, (Washington: United States Department of State, May 2004). www.state.gov/documents/organization/32334.pdf (site consulted May 7, 2004), pp. 40-41.

(3) Barack Obama, « Our Main Goal: Freedom in Cuba », op. cit.

(4) Ibid.

(5) Reuters, « Cuba's Foreign Minister Applauds Obama Stance on Sanctions », August 22, 2007.

(6) The Associated Press, « Cuban Official: Obama Echoes U.S. Sentiment », August 22, 2007.

(7) Obama Calls For Lifting U.S.-Cuba Travel Limits For Family », The Associated Press, August 21, 2007.

(8) Beth Reinhard & Lesley Clark, « Candidates Bring Cuba Into Race », The Miami Herald, August 22, 2007.

(9) Ibid.

[Article in french](#), 21 of August 2007.

Translated by Dawn.

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