

The Economic Sanctions Against Cuba: the Failure of a Cruel and Irrational Policy

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For 15 consecutive years, the general assembly of the United Nations has voted in favor of lifting the economic sanctions that seriously harm the Cuban people, especially the most vulnerable sectors. The international community is unanimous on this issue, with the majority continually increasing. In 2006, 183 countries condemned the cruel and illegal state of siege that Washington imposes on Cuba. In vain. As if deaf, the U.S. government persists in applying an inhumane, anachronistic and ineffectual policy that has been in place since July 1960. [1]

The sanctions have cost the Cuban economy more than \$89,000 million since then. In 2006 Cuba lost nearly \$4,000 million as a direct consequence of this brutal policy. Not only can the Caribbean island not export any product to the U.S., nor import anything, but it does not even have the authorization to establish commercial dealings with U.S. companies located in other countries, which is in flagrant violation of international law. Cuba cannot obtain credits of any kind from international financial institutions and are prohibited from using the U.S. dollar in its transactions with the rest of the world. [2]

Since going into effect, Washington's hostile economic policy has become increasingly severe with the adoption of the Torricelli Act in 1992, the Helms-Burton Act in 1996, the first report of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba in 2004 and the second edition of the report in 2006. U.S. tourists are restricted from traveling to Cuba under penalty of an exceedingly harsh punishment that could include up to 10 years in prison and \$150,000 fine. In 2005 the sanctions imposed by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) against U.S. citizens who visited Cuba increased by 54%. Moreover, since 2004, Cubans residing in the U.S. have not been allowed to visit their families in Cuba for more than 14 days every 3 years and only if they obtain authorization from the Treasury Department. In 2005 the number of these trips decreased more than 50% in comparison to 2003. [3]

The economic sanctions have also had a disastrous impact on the food availability of Cubans. In fact, the U.S. strictly limits Cuba's acquisition of foodstuffs. Between May 2006 and April 2007 U.S. measures caused losses valued at \$258 million in this sector. With this lost money, Cuba could have purchased 180,000 tons of beans, 72,000 tons of soybean oil, 300.000 tons of corn and 275,000 tons of wheat. [4]

The health sector also suffers; losses are evaluated at \$30 million. What is more, the Cuban Ophthalmology Institute "Ramón Pando Ferrer" could not obtain an apparatus for studying the retina that was marketed by the company Humphreys-Zeiss. The same with the medicine Visudyne distributed by the multinational Novartis. Similarly, Abbot Laboratories was blocked from selling Cuba the anesthetic Sevorane, which was destined for pediatric

use. The Treasury Department also prohibited the sale of artificial heart valves for use in children who suffer cardiac arrhythmia. The education, culture, transportation, housing, industrial and agricultural sectors are also seriously affected by the economic sanctions. [5]

Democrat Barack Obama, 2008 U.S. presidential candidate, has already spoken out against the economic punishment exacted on Cuba. [6] Democratic Connecticut Senator Christopher Dodd, who is also a candidate, followed his lead. If elected he assured that he would lift the sanctions, open a new embassy in Havana, put an end to the subversive and illegal Radio and TV Martí programs and abolish the Cuban Adjustment Act that encourages illegal immigration. "Other than the war in Iraq, no other American policy is more broadly unpopular internationally," he declared, calling it an "abject failure." [7]

The objectives of the economic sanctions - which continue to be the toppling of the Cuban government- were clearly defined by Lester D. Mallory, Deputy Under-secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs on April 6, 1960 in a memorandum to Roy R. Rubottom Jr., then Under-secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs:

"Most Cubans support Castro. There's no effective political opposition (...) the only foreseeable means to alienate internal support is by creating disillusionment and discouragement based on lack of satisfaction and economical difficulties (...) We should immediately use any possible measure to (...) cause hunger, desperation and the overthrow of the Government." [8]

This is nothing less than a genocidal assault as defined by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of December 9, 1948, which stipulates in Article II that "In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." Points B and C respectively specify "Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group" and "Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part." [9] It couldn't be any more clear.

The vicious economic harassment that has lasted for nearly a half century has failed in its mission. The Revolutionary government is still in power and more solidly than ever despite the temporary retirement of President Fidel Castro. The independence of Cuba is a reality that continues to obsess Washington to the point of causing it to persist in a policy so cruel and irrational.

[Article in french](#), September 28th, 2007.

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Notes

[1] CubavsBloqueo, «Resultados de las votaciones en la ONU en contra del genocida bloqueo económico de Estados Unidos contra Cuba», September 2007. <http://www.cubavsbloqueo.cu/Default.aspx?tabid=1596> (site consulted 23 September 2007).

[2] Republic of Cuba, «Informe de Cuba sobre resolución 61/11 de la Asamblea General de

las Naciones Unidas. Necesidad de poner fin al bloqueo económico, comercial y financiero impuesto por EEUU contra Cuba», 2007. <http://www.cubavsbloqueo.cu/informe2007/index.html> (site consulted 23 September 2007), section 6, Conclusion.

[3] Republic of Cuba, «Informe de Cuba sobre resolución 61/11 de la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas. Necesidad de poner fin al bloqueo económico, comercial y financiero impuesto por EEUU contra Cuba», 2007. <http://www.cubavsbloqueo.cu/informe2006/index.html> (site consulted 23 September 2007), section 1.2.

[4] Ibid., section 3.1.

[5] Ibi., section 3.1., 3.2.

[6] Barack Obama, «Our Main Goal: Freedom in Cuba», The Miami Herald, 21 de agosto de 2007.

[7] Associated Press, «Dodd Would Throw Out Cuba Embargo as President», 9 September 2007.

[8] Lester D. Mallory «Memorandum From the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Mallory) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Rubottom)», Department of State, Central Files, 737.00/4-660, Secret, Drafted by Mallory, in Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1958-1960, Volume VI, Cuba: (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1991), p. 885.

[9] Salim Lamrani, Fidel Castro, Cuba et les Etats-Unis (Pantin: Le Temps des Cerises, 2006), p. 121.

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