

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 1, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As members of Congress with a strong interest in supporting freedom and democracy in Cuba, we write to express our support for the longstanding embargo against the Cuban dictatorship and urge your administration to reaffirm your commitment to supporting human rights and democracy in Cuba.

As you know, the embargo against the Castro dictatorship is codified in U.S. law and cannot be lifted without an act of Congress. Sanctions must not be lifted unless and until free, fair elections are scheduled, political prisoners are released, and independent press, organized labor, and political parties are legalized.

Despite minor and nominal recent statements by the Cuban regime to the contrary, Raul Castro has continued his brother's brutal legacy and egregious human rights record. According to the Human Rights Watch 2014 report, repression in Cuba has in fact increased in recent years. That report states: "Officials employ a range of tactics to punish dissent and instill fear in the public, including beatings, public acts of shaming, termination of employment, and threats of long-term imprisonment. Short-term arbitrary arrests have increased dramatically in recent years and routinely prevent human rights defenders, independent journalists, and others from gathering or moving about freely."

The Castro regime continues to align itself with known state-sponsors of terrorism which pose a threat to the United States and continues to provide safe haven to more than seventy fugitives from U.S. justice. Meanwhile, the Cuban dictatorship continues to strengthen alliances with other U.S. adversaries in North Korea, Russia, and Venezuela, and maintain an active espionage network against the United States. In fact, the very sanctions codified in 1996 against the Castro regime were readily passed by Congress and signed into law following the dictatorship's brutal shoot-down of two civilian aircraft in international waters which killed four people, including three American citizens. Last year's discovery that the Castro dictatorship was assisting North Korea with its military weapons program, in violation of U.N. sanctions, only confirms that the malevolent nature of the regime in Cuba has not changed.


In addition, since the beginning of 2010, the deaths of five pro-democracy activists -- Orlando Zapata Tamayo (d. February 23, 2010), Juan Wilfredo Soto Garcia (d. May 8, 2011), Laura Pollan (d. October 14, 2011), Oswaldo Payá (d. July 22, 2012) and Harold Cepero (d. July 22, 2012) -- are a testament to the tenacity of Cuba's pro-democracy movement, but also to the ruthlessness of the tyranny that they oppose. Furthermore, humanitarian aid worker Alan Gross has remained imprisoned in Cuba for over four years for the "crime" of helping Cuba's small Jewish community connect to the internet. We appreciate the Administration's efforts to help secure the unconditional release of Mr. Gross and also understand the importance of working with other regional leaders to call for democratic reforms in Cuba. We stand ready to assist you in these efforts.

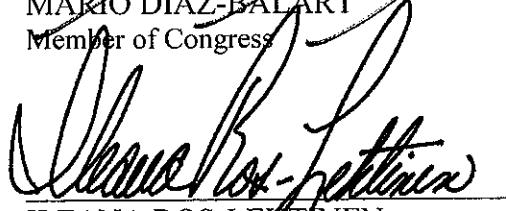
In the meantime, we hope that you will affirm to us, in no uncertain terms, that you remain committed to longstanding U.S. policy which supports the Cuban people in their struggle for freedom while denying the pretense of legitimacy, and access to U.S. dollars, to their oppressors.

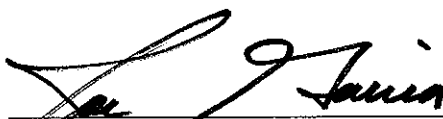
Sincerely,



ALBIO SIRES
Member of Congress


MARIO DIAZ-BALART
Member of Congress


DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ
Member of Congress


ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN
Member of Congress


JOE GARCIA
Member of Congress


MATT SALMON
Member of Congress


TED DEUTCH
Member of Congress

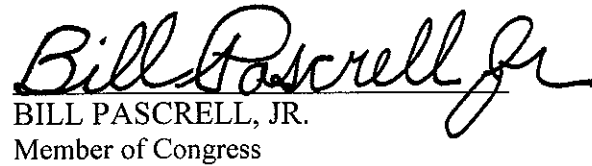

RON DESANTIS
Member of Congress


GERALD E. CONNOLLY
Member of Congress

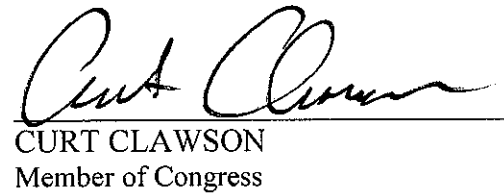

WILLIAM R. KEATING
Member of Congress

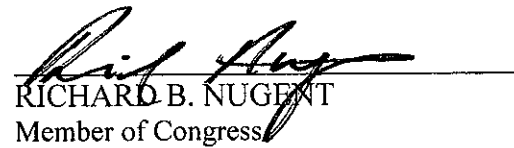

PATRICK E. MURPHY
Member of Congress


LOIS FRANKEL
Member of Congress


BILL PASCRELL, JR.
Member of Congress


JOHN BARROW
Member of Congress


CURT CLAWSON
Member of Congress


RICHARD B. NUGENT
Member of Congress


GUS M. BILIRAKIS
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable John Kerry, Secretary of State