

Members of Cuban Civil Society

Havana, Cuba

May 30, 2010

Honorable Members of the United States House of Representatives

Honorable Members of the Agriculture Committee of the House of Representatives  
United States House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Representatives:

The members of Cuban civil society, who are signing this letter as individuals, have learned that you are currently considering the Travel Restriction Reform and Export Enhancement Act (H.R. 4645), to end travel restrictions on all Americans to Cuba and to remove obstacles to legal sales of United States agricultural commodities to Cuba.

We understand that this bill has the support of Republicans and Democrats in the Congress of the United States. We also know that for this bill to be considered by the full House of Representatives, it must first be passed through the House Committee on Agriculture.

We know that major non-governmental organizations support this bill, including, to name only a few: The United States Chamber of Commerce, the American Farm Bureau Federation, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Cuba Study Group and many other human rights organizations.

We share the opinion that the isolation of the people of Cuba benefits the most inflexible interests of its government, while any opening serves to inform and empower the Cuban people and helps to further strengthen our civil society.

We value the experience of all the western countries, including the United States, who favored opening and trade with all the countries of the former Eastern Europe. We are sure that isolation does not foster relationships of respect and support for people and groups around the world who are in favor of democratic changes in Cuba.

We would like to recall the memorable words of Pope John Paul II who, in his own life, had experienced a totalitarian and closed system: "Let Cuba open itself to the world and the world will open itself to Cuba."

Over time we have seen that the Cuban regime does not open itself fully to the world, nor to its own citizens, because what it fears most is an opening, of free trade and of free enterprise, and the direct flow of information and communication between peoples.

Those who oppose H.R. 4645 argue that lifting these restrictions would be a concession to the Cuban regime and a source of foreign income that could be used to repress the Cuban people. They also argue that given the ongoing violations of human rights and the repeated acts of repression, lifting these prohibitions would be an abandonment of Cuban civil society.

It is true that repression and systematic violations of Human Rights have recently increased in a cruel and public way. It is true that these funds could also be used to support and even worsen repression.

We believe, however, that if the citizens of the United States, like those of the rest of the world, increased their presence on our streets, visited the families of the political prisoners and other members of the nascent Cuban civil society they could: first, serve as witnesses to the suffering of the Cuban people; second, be even more sensitized to the need for changes in Cuba; and third, offer solidarity and a bridge to facilitate the transition we Cubans so greatly desire.

The supportive presence of American citizens, their direct help, and the many opportunities for exchange, used effectively and in the desired direction, would not be an abandonment of Cuban civil society but rather a force to strengthen it. Similarly, to further facilitate the sale of agricultural products would help alleviate the food shortages we now suffer.

Above all, we believe that defending each and every Human Right for all people must be an absolute priority, ahead of any political or economic consideration, and that no restriction of these rights can be justified on economic, political or social grounds. We believe that rights are protected with rights.

Because the ability to travel freely is the right of every human being, we support this bill. The current Cuban government has always violated this right and in recent years has justified its actions with the fact that the government of the United States also restricts its citizens' freedom to travel. The passage of this bill would remove this spurious justification.

Finally, Honorable Representatives, we strongly believe that the problems of Cuba and its path to freedom and democracy are a responsibility and a labor that belongs to all Cubans, those of us who live on the Island as well as those who suffer in exile in the Diaspora, who also love this nation we all share.

In the world today, all peoples of the earth are interconnected, even when their decisions are their sovereign right. These principles – of responsibility for our beloved country and of universal fraternity – encourage us to respectfully communicate our views to you with regards to this bill, because although it is the responsibility of Americans, it affects the Cuban people.

Thank you for your attention and respect.

*The following is the list of Cuban citizens who signed this letter, and which includes political prisoners, independent librarians, bloggers, independent journalists, magazine editors, clerics, intellectuals, artists, members of the civil society and of political organizations.*

1	Juan Juan	Almeida García	40	Olga Lidia	López Lazo
2	José Alberto	Álvarez Bravo	41	Yasnay	Losada Castañeda
3	Silvio	Benítez Márquez	42	Luis Ricardo	Luaces
4	Juan Carmelo	Bermúdez Rosabal	43	Juan A.	Madrazo Luna
5	Servando	Blanco Martínez	44	Ainí	Martínez Valero
6	Félix	Bonne Carcassés	45	Katia Sonia	Martínez Véliz
7	Luis	Cáceres Piñero	46	Ricardo	Medina Salabarría,
8	Claudia	Cadelo de Nevis		Santiago	presbítero
9	Leonardo	Calvo Cárdenas	47	Manuel	Morejón Soler,
10	Eleanor	Calvo Martínez		Alberto	presbítero
11	Marcelo	Cano Rodríguez	48	Félix	Navarro Rodríguez
12	Cecilio	Castellanos Martí	49	Jorge	Olivera Castillo
	Dimas		50	Pablo	Pacheco Ávila
13	Miriam	Celaya González	51	Leonardo	Padrón Comptiz
14	Francisco	Chaviano	52	Héctor	Palacios Ruíz
		González	53	Gustavo	Pardo Valdés
15	Hortensia	Cires Díaz	54	Yisel	Peña Rodríguez
16	Martha	Cortizas Jiménez	55	Ana	Perdigón
17	Manuel	Cuesta Morúa		Margarita	
18	Roberto	De Miranda	56	Arturo	Pérez de Alejo
		Hernández	57	Juana	Pérez Estrella
19	Gisela	Delgado Sablón		Yamilia	
20	Reinaldo	Escobar Casas	58	Tomás	Ramos Rodríguez
21	Oscar	Espinosa Chepe	59	Soledad	Rivas Verdecia
22	Guillermo	Fariñas Hernández	60	José Conrado	Rodríguez Alegre,
23	Guedy Carlos	Fernández			presbítero
		Morejón	61	María	Rodríguez Bernal
24	Juan Carlos	Fernández		Esperanza	
		Hernández	62	Lázaro	Rosales Rojas
25	Karina	Gálvez Chiu	63	Elena	Rosito Yaruk
26	Livia	Gálvez Chiu	64	Yoani	Sánchez Cordero
27	Margarita	Gálvez Martínez	65	Fernando	Sánchez López
28	Julio César	Gálvez Rodríguez	66	Elizardo	Sánchez Santa
29	Joisy	García Martínez			Cruz
30	José Luis	García Paneque	67	Mayra	Sánchez Soria
31	Juan del Pilar	Goberna	68	Pedro	Scull
32	Ricardo	González Alfonso		Antonio	
33	Iván	Hernández Carrillo	69	Sergio Abel	Suárez García
34	Maikel	Iglesias Rodríguez	70	Virgilio	Toledo López
35	Irene	Jerez Castillo	71	Dagoberto	Valdés Hernández
36	Yusnaymi	Jorge Soca	72	Wilfredo	Vallín Almeida
37	Eugenio	Leal García	73	Alida	Viso Bello
38	Miriam	Leiva	74	Liset	Zamora
39	Gloria	Llopis Prendes			