

The blockade has not ended

INTERVIEW WITH JOSEFINA VIDAL, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN RELATIONS DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR THE UNITED STATES

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Cristina Escobar.- Cuba and the United States are entering a new stage of diplomatic relations. How can these relations be constructed after so many years of confrontation, and what do the recent talks between the two countries mean? These were the questions posed to Josefina Vidal, Ministry of Foreign Relations (Minrex) Director General for the United States, in an exclusive interview with Cuban television.



Josefina Vidal stated, "The President of the United States has options, I would say unlimited, to gut the blockade of its fundamental content." Photo: Juvenal Balán

Josefina, there are people on the street here in Cuba, and also in the international media saying, or asking, if the United States blockade of Cuba has ended. Is this true?

Josefina Vidal.- No, no, the blockade has not ended; what has happened is that the President of the United States, making use of his executive prerogatives, which he has, announced a series of measures modifying the implementation of some aspects of the blockade. It was within this context that a series of regulations were issued – mandated by him and formulated by the Departments of Treasury and Commerce – to expand travel to Cuba, expand as well allowances for remittances, and permit some commercial transactions, still of a limited nature, in spheres such as telecommunications, for example.

Cristina Escobar.- When can we say that the blockade has ended? What must happen before we can say it has ended?

Josefina Vidal.- Since the blockade was first officially declared in February of 1962, until 1996 when the Helms-Burton law was approved, it was the prerogative of the President; that is, just as President Kennedy had declared the blockade in 1962, a later President could have declared an end to this policy.

In 1996 the Helms-Burton law was approved, which codified the blockade as law, which means it was established that, in the future, the President could not on his own terminate the blockade policy, but rather that it was the United States Congress which had the authority to declare an end to the policy.

Nevertheless, it is very important to point out that the Helms-Burton law itself, in an appendix following the codification of the blockade, clearly establishes that the law does not deny the President his executive prerogatives to authorize, through what is called a licensing procedure, the majority of things related to the blockade.

If this were not the case, President Clinton, in 1998 and 1999, would not have been able to modify some areas which allowed for the expansion of trips to Cuba by some categories of U.S. citizens. If

this had not been the case, nor would President Clinton have been able to permit, for example, the limited sending of remittances to our country, nor would Obama, in 2009 and 2011, have been able to reestablish family visits to Cuba, restore permission to send remittances to our country, or allow a group of U.S. citizens, those within 12 categories, to visit our country. And what Obama has done now, that is, using his Presidential prerogatives he has broadened the transactions, the operations which can be done within the framework of a trip, a remittance, some commercial operations, and this means he can continue to use these [prerogatives.]”

Cristina Escobar.- Has he used them all?

Josefina Vidal.- He has not.

Cristina Escobar.- How much more does he have?

Josefina Vidal.- The President of the United States has options, I would say unlimited, to gut the blockade of its fundamental content.

According to the attorneys who are advising us on this issue - because it is a question which has its complexities from a legal standpoint – there are only a few questions which the President can not modify, because they are prohibited by law.

Beyond these questions, which are a very few, the President can authorize, via licenses or the Departments of Treasury and Commerce, all of the other transactions, which include commerce, services, transportation.”

Cristina Escobar.- And what are the items he can not change? Which ones definitively depend on the Congress?

Josefina Vidal.- To begin with, it is only Congress which can one day say that the blockade of Cuba is over. The President can not say this; but the President can approve a series of things, as I have already said.

Now, excluded, among the things the President can do, are the following: Tourism in Cuba is prohibited by law. There is a law from 2000, a law which amended the commercial sanctions [previously] approved by Congress which prohibits tourism - actually the same law which allowed limited sales of food and agricultural products to Cuba. This means that the President can not even use his authorities to change this, that is, Obama can not allow U.S. citizens to travel freely to Cuba.”

Cristina Escobar.- Give with one hand, take away with the other, so to say, limited sales of agricultural products were permitted, but tourism was prohibited.

Josefina Vidal.- That was the condition imposed, during the negotiation of the law, by sectors which opposed granting permission for the sale of agricultural products to Cuba.

That is the reason, at that time, in accordance with decisions previously made by President Clinton, 12 categories of persons who could visit Cuba were established. This is what was approved in the law, that the President can expand travel to Cuba within these 12 categories, and that is what Obama has just done; but he can not allow tourist travel to our country. This is the domain of Congress; until Congress approves a law, U.S. citizens can not freely come to Cuba as tourists. Another thing prohibited by law is commerce with Cuba by subsidiaries of U.S. companies in other countries.

Cristina Escobar.- But is commerce with U.S. companies allowed?

Josefina Vidal.- Obama could tomorrow, for example, using his prerogatives, permit a U.S. company to do business with Cuba, trade in both directions, both export and import; but Obama can not allow the branch, the subsidiary of this same company in another country, to trade with Cuba.

Cristina Escobar.- **This is the extraterritorial part of the blockade.**

Josefina Vidal.- Exactly, and this is contained in the 1992 Torricelli law.

Another item which is prohibited by a Congressional law, that the President can not modify, is the prohibition on granting credit to Cuba to purchase agricultural products. The same 2000 law, the law reforming commercial sanctions which allowed limited sales of agricultural products, under certain conditions, established that credit could not be granted to Cuba for the acquisition of these products, and the only means available to us to make a purchase was to pay in cash, in advance. Therefore Obama can not change this; but Obama could allow other non-agricultural products to be sold to Cuba on credit. He could use his Presidential prerogative to authorize licenses, which is not prohibited by Congress.

Cristina Escobar.- **And this isn't among the regulation changes announced by the Treasury Department?**

Josefina Vidal.- It is not among the regulations [announced.] That is why we said that the measures recently announced by the President were positive, a step in the right direction, but are still limited to a small number of spheres, areas, and this doesn't mean that he has exhausted all of his prerogatives.

Recently, among the measures which the President approved is the possibility granted to U.S. financial institutions to establish correspondent relations with Cuban banks. Presumably we can begin using the dollar in authorized transactions between Cuba and the United States, of which there are not many; but for example, Cuba's use of the dollar in financial transactions with other countries remains prohibited. This is something the President could allow.

Cristina Escobar.- **That's to say we can buy from the United States with dollars, but not from any other country using dollars?**

Josefina Vidal.- Exactly, according to the new regulations which include the possibility of exporting to Cuba, for example, certain telecommunications equipment. Presumably we are going to pay for these commercial operations in U.S. dollars, although Cuba will continue to be denied the option of using dollars in our transactions with other countries.

Obama could allow trade far beyond what has been limited to the telecommunications sphere. This is not prohibited by law. Obama could allow the import of products from our country to the United States, the import of services.

The President of the United States has the authority to, for example, permit Cuba to also purchase products with more than 10% U.S. made components in other markets, which is today prohibited. He could issue a general license to facilitate this.

He could also permit, for example, that products from other countries, manufactured with Cuban raw materials, be imported to the United States. This is not included in the current regulations. What I would like to convey with this is that there is, we could say, a practically unlimited opportunity for the President of the United States to eliminate a very significant part of the blockade's content, through the use of his powers and through the issuance of licenses, leaving to

Congress only that which is their exclusive purview, which are the things I have mentioned, and of course, definitively burying the blockade of Cuba, which must be done through a Congressional act.

Cristina Escobar.- One of the issues most discussed during the talks which took place recently between the United States and Cuba was the Cuban Adjustment Act, Cuba's insistence that it be eliminated, and the U.S. delegation's opinion that the government has no intention of doing so. And, one of the issues specifically mentioned by the Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs was that the "wet foot/dry foot" policy was a law, a sovereign decision of the United States. Is it a law?

Josefina Vidal.- No, no it is not a law. There are two questions here. We have tried for years in our rounds of migration talks with the U.S. government to emphasize our opinion that migratory movement between the two countries must be normalized. Because it is not in Cuba's interest, or in the interest of the United States, that a pattern of irregular migration continue, an illegal maritime flow, or irregular entries into U.S. territory from third countries by Cubans who leave the country in a legal fashion, and this occurs as a result of the combination of two factors. That is why we say this is the principle incentive to illegal emigration and trafficking in persons from Cuba. These two factors are the Cuban Adjustment Act and the "wet foot/dry foot" policy.

The Cuban Adjustment Act was approved by the U.S. Congress in 1966 to regularize the migratory situation in which many Cubans found themselves, those who had left the country since the triumph of the Revolution in 1959, and had not legalized their immigration status in the United States, taking into account that many aspired to return to Cuba with the help of the United States. This situation continued over some time, and the U.S. government arrived at the conclusion that this immigration limbo, in which thousands of Cubans in the U.S. found themselves, should be eliminated, and the Cuban Adjustment Act was approved. The Cuban Adjustment Act is very simple, it is one paragraph which says that the U.S. Attorney General, who heads the Justice Department in this country, has the discretionary authority to adjust the status of Cubans who at the time are in the United States; but this law does not say that this discretionary authority must be automatically used in the case of every Cuban present in U.S. territory, regardless of the way they got there. And what has happened is that, over the years, the law's stipulations have been applied in an automatic manner to all Cubans who arrive in the United States, regardless of the ways and means used to arrive there. Therefore, there is an executive power, in the hands of the executive branch of the United States government, to implement the Cuban Adjustment Law as the law states, in a discretionary, non-automatic, manner.

To this is added the "wet foot/dry foot" policy, a policy which has existed in the U.S. since the beginning of the 1990s. It is not associated, as some media erroneously report, with the departure of illegal immigrants from Cuba. Its antecedents lie in other migration flows, above all from Haiti to the United States, and it is a policy which is governmental, not a Congressional law. It is a policy according to which a person intercepted at sea is returned to his or her country of origin, while those who manage to arrive in the United States are allowed to remain in the country. It is a policy, as you can understand, which also encourages illegal emigration. Not only this, it also encourages trafficking in emigrants and puts the lives of people in a very dangerous situation at sea, and exposes them to the activities of criminal groups involved in the trafficking of emigrants, that is, it generates a series of additional problems, and more recently has produced phenomena related to migration document fraud, considering that today it is useful for other nationalities to acquire some Cuban document, given the exclusive, preferential treatment Cuban citizens receive.

To summarize, this is the principal stimulus to illegal emigration, which we have reiterated to the United States as essential to address and focus on, with a view toward normalizing migratory movement between our two countries, and avoiding situations which put the lives of people in danger, dangerous situations during their attempts to reach that country.

Cristina Escobar.- Could we state then that it is impossible to have normal migratory relations with the United States as long as the Cuban Adjustment Act remains in effect?

Josefina Vidal.- Of course we could state that. In fact, the Cuban Adjustment Act and the “wet foot/dry foot” policy are instruments which apply exclusively to Cuba, similar laws for other countries do not exist, on the contrary, we are seeing the uncontrolled, massive arrival of emigrants from the entire world, as part of the natural tendency which has always existed in the world, for centuries, that some persons attempt to move, tend to move from countries with lower levels of development to those with more development.

Cristina Escobar.- There is a perception, Josefina, when U.S. diplomats are heard referring to this issue, and in the international media as well, that, if the U.S. is criticized, it is because they have conceded without Cuba conceding, as if Cuba was obliged to do things to meet the interests of the United States, if we are to have diplomatic relations with them. Is this the case? In diplomatic terms, what is your opinion about this? Is Cuba obliged to do things to please the United States?

Josefina Vidal.- Relations between Cuba and the United States have historically been asymmetrical. Therefore, a focus can not be applied, as it is called in diplomacy, of quid pro quo - I give you something, and you give me something - can not automatically be applied, taking into consideration that there are many more things to dismantle on the U.S. side than on the Cuban side. Because we don't have sanctions in Cuba against U.S. companies or citizens; nor do we hold occupied territory in the United States which we could exchange for the territory occupied by the Guantánamo Naval Base; we don't have programs financed by Cuba intent upon influencing the situation within the United States or promoting changes in the internal order of the United States; we don't have radio or television broadcasts, specially conceived in Cuba and directed toward the United States, but the opposite exists.

Thus, there is a greater group of policies and measures which must be changed on the U.S. side than on the Cuban side. Of course, as in all diplomatic negotiation processes, in some areas it is possible to encounter points at which we can say: Well, I would be willing to give this, and I would be willing to give that, even if it may be asymmetrical, with a view toward moving closer to a solution to many problems. What is happening is that there is confusion, and the press, to a certain degree the international press feeds this confusion, in the sense that there are people who think, aspire, or intend that, as a part of this negotiation process, Cuba puts on the table issues which are totally internal to Cuba, and are issues of Cuban sovereignty. This will not occur.

We have reiterated, including in interviews with the U.S. press, that these questions of an internal nature are not negotiable, as they are not negotiable for any other country.

Cristina Escobar.- Those in the U.S. itself, for example.

Josefina Vidal.- Not theirs or those in any other country; these questions are the purview solely and exclusively of the Cuban people, which in sovereign referendum has decided the direction of this country, and it will always be the Cuban people who decide.

Therefore, questions of an internal nature or questions directed toward promoting changes in our internal order will never be put on the table during this process of negotiation, to resolve pending issues. And I think it is important that this be clear. That is why, when they asked me last week in a press conference, I said: It cannot be expected that in order to improve relations with the United States, or to advance in this long, complex process toward normalization which we have before us, that Cuba is going to negotiate questions of an internal nature, in exchange for a policy change on the part of the United States, when they themselves recognize that it has failed. Nor are we going

to negotiate questions of an internal nature, of Cuban sovereignty, in exchange for the lifting of the blockade. Beyond this, during the negotiation process, anything which does not compromise state sovereignty, everything else can be part of the negotiation process. If this were not the case, we would not have had the results of this past December 17, after 18 months of negotiation between the two countries. We were able to identify, on the basis of absolute respect for sovereign equality and the independence of our countries, very important questions in which we share common interests and which we could resolve.

These are always complex processes, processes which I would describe as prolonged and arduous, but we demonstrated that even on sensitive issues, a solution can be found, when there is good will, and this is the good will we have shown as part of these talks, and of this process which we are beginning. And we have reiterated to the United States government that we are approaching these talks in a constructive spirit, completely willing to seek solutions to the problems which have accumulated over 54 years, and also to identify areas - which are many - in which we have common interests, and on which our two countries can cooperate for mutual benefit."

Cristina Escobar.- You sat across the table from the U.S. delegation, what about their willingness?

Josefina Vidal.- Well, after our Presidents simultaneously announced the decision to first reestablish diplomatic relations, and secondly, advance in a process toward normalization, I think willingness exists on both sides.

Cristina Escobar.- But beyond the reestablishment of relations, has there been a change of objectives in U.S. policy toward Cuba?

Josefina Vidal.- I can not say there has been a change in the objectives. I would say, a new stage has begun, a new stage in the relations between Cuba and the United States. The previous stage, we shall say, existed until December 14, 2014; it was a stage characterized, marked, by confrontation. I would say that we have now moved beyond the stage of open confrontation, with aggressive, hostile policies, to a stage in which we have decided that we are going to reestablish relations to seek solutions to some of these hostile policies which persist, and which must change, in this new phase we have begun, and a stage in which the contradictions are not going to disappear; political differences between Cuba and the United States, which are deep, are not going to disappear; the different conceptions are not going to disappear, therefore the frictions are not going to disappear, the problems. But yes, it is expected that we are going to move to a period when we reestablish relations, we are going to provide ourselves with mechanisms which have not existed - which do not yet exist, but which we expect to construct - to address these problems, with these difficulties, with these frictions, in a civilized manner, to seek a solution in a joint fashion, even when the differences do not disappear.

I do not believe that the U.S. policy objectives toward Cuba have changed, in fact Ms. Roberta Jacobson, who visited us last week at the head of the U.S. delegation, said so: the United States has not modified its strategic objectives in Cuba, what is changing is the way, the tactics. But, well, we are ready to enter this phase of interacting in a new way.

Not all countries of the world agree on their approaches and conceptions, and there are countries which interact with each other despite contrary objectives, but it can be shown that, despite contrary objectives, we can seek a better, more civilized manner of interacting, without renouncing what either side believes, but, as I have said, using instruments and mechanisms to settle the problems, the differences, and at the same time, seek points of contact which exist, and points of common interest to advance in a relation of civilized and peaceful co-existence between our countries - a difficult co-existence, but I believe it is possible.

Cristina Escobar.- In the event that by the end of this year, Josefina, the U.S. blockade remains in effect, as can be presumed since Congress will not soon make a clearer decision on this, will Cuba again present a resolution to the United Nations General Assembly condemning the blockade? If this is the case, can you imagine that the United States would vote against its own government? How do you see this situation?

Josefina Vidal.- I do not know how the U.S. would vote, that's something they will have to decide, discuss and settle. As for Cuba, of course, as long as the blockade is maintained, and the blockade is being maintained, as President Obama himself recognizes, and President Obama himself has already been saying that he will get personally involved in a Congressional debate with the goal of ending the blockade. On a recent date, the same week he insisted, called upon the United States Congress, in his State of the Union address, to lift the blockade. Therefore, the blockade is in place, present, it is maintained; the very government of the United States recognizes it as such, and as long as this situation persists, of course Cuba is going to continue in calling for its lifting, because it is an obsolete policy; it is a policy which has damaged the interests of the United States, but it damages the Cuban people, as the President himself recognized this past December 17. Therefore, it is a battle, and something we will continue to do as long as this policy is not definitively eliminated.

Cristina Escobar.- We will have to wait, then, to see with whom they will vote - with the administration, with the world or with Congress.

Josefina Vidal.- That remains to be seen.

Cristina Escobar.- That remains to be seen... Roberta Jacobson, in her press conference, emphasized the situation of U.S. diplomats in Havana and their request to be able to travel throughout the country, but she did not mention the situation of Cuban diplomats in the United States, both at the United Nations headquarters in New York and the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, D.C. What is their current situation? Is it expected that the situation will improve?

Josefina Vidal.- You see, Cristina, when the Interest Sections were opened in September of 1977, this was done with total freedom of movement for the diplomats from the two countries within the respective capitals, in fact the U.S. government decided as well to approve freedom of movement for Cuban diplomatic personnel at the United Nations. Later, with the years, as a result of the policies toward Cuba which different administrations followed, restrictions were introduced on the movement of our diplomats on the part of the United States, It was President Reagan who again imposed limitations on New York - I say again because New York already had their movement limited in the early 1970s - and implemented the first restrictions on our staff in Washington. President Clinton eased these restrictions, but these restrictions were made much greater at the time of the George W. Bush presidency.

Therefore, we are today at a moment when there are restrictions on the movement of Cuban and U.S. functionaries in both countries. At this time, in order to leave Havana, and Washington, permission must be requested.

For the last two years we have been proposing to the U.S. government an intermediate situation, let's say, eliminate a few of these restrictions in the sense of implementing what is called travel notification, not totally eliminating the restrictions, but having a slightly more flexible framework for movement. But the U.S. government has not agreed to this.

At this time, the U.S. government is saying that freedom of movement is important to the opening of embassies. We have told them that we are open to holding discussions to move in this direction, but it is very important that U.S. diplomats change their behavior in Havana, and in particular we

are saying that the manner in which these diplomats behave must change with regards to stimulating, organizing, supplying and financing elements within our country which take action against the interests of our state, against the interests of the Cuban government and people. And we have said this because the Vienna Convention, which must be the foundation upon which the new embassies function stipulates very clearly that the laws of a receiving country must be respected, and we are emphasizing this very strongly, and we are doing so because our diplomats in Washington have maintained impeccable conduct and would never take any action which could be interpreted by the U.S. government as interference in their domestic affairs. This is the same thing we are saying here in these talks, that the analysis of the issue, that is, the subject of freedom of movement, and what the U.S. side is saying, is associated with a change in the behavior of their diplomatic mission and their functionaries, here in Havana.

Cristina Escobar.- There is a concern expressed by various people here in Cuba as well, about the possibility that, when the Obama administration ends, what has happened could be reversed. What has been done has been at the President's discretion. If, for example, a Republican President should win, or even a female or male Democratic President, this could come to an end. Is that possible?

Josefina Vidal.- It is possible. It must be taken into consideration, as I have said, that President Obama has taken action by using his executive powers. This means that, just as he has made some decisions, a subsequent president, the president who succeeds him, could make the same decisions in the opposite direction. However, of course, these decisions would come as a result of an analysis of the political context, and in order for these decisions to be totally irreversible, I think they must be accompanied by some laws approved by the United States Congress, and even so, nothing is irreversible. Because, just as a Congress can take action in a certain direction, a subsequent legislature can do so in the opposite direction, but all this would depend on the political context, and I would ask myself if it would be more or less costly, more costly for a president who succeeds the current U.S. President, President Obama, to reverse some of the measures which could be of benefit to many sectors within the United States, and I am speaking of business sectors, but also of Cubans resident in the United States, of academics, universities which are going to benefit now from the modifications the President has made in the travel to Cuba policy, to allow for greater interaction between our countries, cultural exchanges. That is, such a reversal would always, I would imagine, be subject to a cost-benefit analysis, in the political sense. But, yes, it can be reversed, of course, because means to do so exist, and a President has the authority to make these decisions.

Cristina Escobar.- Josefina, there are high expectations on the street here. First, enthusiasm around the December 17 announcements, the return of our three heroes, the joy of seeing a new stage beginning with the reestablishment of relations between Cuba and the U.S. - but also, sometimes this enthusiasm can lead to confusing certain things. There are people who expect everything to be settled. There are people who hope for an easing of the economic persecution which the U.S. blockade of Cuba implies, and that this will lead to an improvement in our quality of life. That is to say, there are high hopes on this issue, after 55 years of such a hostile policy. What is your message to these people who are watching, and have so many expectations in terms of Cuba-U.S. relations?

Josefina Vidal.- Well, we have decided to reestablish diplomatic relations and begin talks to move toward normalization of these relations, but this is a process, that is, everything will not be resolved in the short term. The first step, or the initial step, we must take is the formalization of diplomatic relations, and this is what we are negotiating at this time. But once we have concluded this step, then we can get into a much longer, more complex process, which is the process of what we are calling normalization. This is going to be in the longer term, because it requires that we find solutions to many problems which have accumulated over 56 years, if we count from the very beginning of the triumph of the Revolution.

Therefore, I believe there is no reason to be either pessimistic or optimistic. This is a process, and all processes involve time frames, involve arduous periods of negotiation. There are issues to be resolved which are very complicated, for example, the lifting of the blockade, and a solution will only be found to these economic difficulties affecting us, the day the blockade is entirely eliminated, although I reiterate, the President has executive powers and prerogatives to go much farther beyond what he has done to date, and eliminate a great many restrictions which today are part of the blockade policy. But, to summarize, it is a process, it is going to require time, it is going to require effort, it is going to require much work on the part of Cuba and on the part of the United States, as well. Solutions to complicated issues must be negotiated, but, at the same time, parallelly, because we can not think of this as a process which requires that one thing be finished before beginning to address another. Many conversations can take place at the same time, to try and find solutions to problems which may take some time, while at the same time, begin to make progress in other areas which are not as complex, which would allow us, for example, to strengthen cooperation between Cuban and U.S. entities, to improve communication between our countries, scientific-technical collaboration, exchanges of a cultural nature, interaction between Cuban and U.S. society. That is, this process can develop along parallel lines, which I believe, in and of itself, has its own dynamic, and can create favorable conditions to help advance the other part of the process which is more complex, that of resolving pending issues.

Therefore, I believe we have before us, I would say, an interesting stage for Cuba and the United States, interesting in the sense of beginning to construct a relationship of a different nature, while many opinions and visions of the two countries do not change, because they are not going to change. I believe we can construct a different period in our bilateral relationship. We are conscious of the challenges, of the difficulties which we must resolve; but at the same time, we believe there are opportunities to develop areas for a better relationship between Cuba and the United States. That is why it is a combined focus, and we are ready and willing.

We have initiated this process and are approaching it with a constructive focus, again, conscious that it is complex, requires work, effort, energy; but at the same time conscious that it is possible, to the benefit of Cuba and the United States, that we find - at least find - a better co-existence, as I say, coexistence upon a foundation of respect, while knowing that our conceptions - which are very strong, and very firm above many other things - are not going to change.

Cristina Escobar.- Are you an optimist or pessimist?

Josefina Vidal.- I am, I would say, at an intermediate point; I can not say that I am totally an optimist, because there are things which are beyond my control. The Cuban side can not control everything. There are two countries, and on the U.S. side there is not only a government. There is an administration; there is a Congress; there is a society; there is a political context, thus, everything is not under our control. But neither can I say I am a pessimist; on the contrary, we would not have reached this point, where we now find ourselves. But I believe we are being fairly realistic in our focus and in our appreciation of the circumstances, to attempt to advance as much as possible in the resolution of problems, and at the same time, attempt to take advantage, in the best possible fashion, of opportunities which may emerge for us.

Cristina Escobar.- Thank you very much, Josefina, it has been a real pleasure to listen to you.

Josefina Vidal.- Thanks to you, Cristina, the pleasure has been mine.

Thank you

Press Release issued by the Cuban delegation to the round of talks on the resumption of diplomatic relations with the United States



WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 27, 2015.

On February 27, 2015, a new round of talks was held between the delegations of Cuba and the United States on the process of formalization of the resumption of diplomatic relations and the opening of embassies, which was announced by Presidents Raúl Castro Ruz and Barack Obama, on December 17, 2014.

The Cuban delegation was headed by Josefina Vidal Ferreiro, Director General of the US Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and the US delegation was headed by Roberta S. Jacobson, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs. The meeting took place in a professional, respectful and constructive environment.

The Cuban representatives reiterated the importance of solving a series of issues, which will allow for the creation of the appropriate context to resume diplomatic relations and open embassies in both capitals, in particular, Cuba's removal from the list of "States sponsor of international terrorism" and the provision of financial services to the Cuban Interests Section in Washington which, for more than one year, has been unable to find a bank willing to handle its financial transactions due to the blockade laws and Cuba's designation as a country that sponsors international terrorism.

Likewise, the Cuban delegation insisted on the need to ensure compliance with the principles of International Law and the Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic and Consular Relations, which should be the basis of our future diplomatic relations and the work of our respective embassies. Special emphasis was made on the observance of the norms governing the functions of diplomatic missions, the behavior of diplomatic staff, compliance with national laws and non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

Besides, both delegations worked through the details about the visits and bilateral technical meetings to take place in the next few weeks on issues such as trafficking in persons, civil aviation, telecommunications, human rights, marine protected areas, prevention of migration fraud and changes in the regulations modifying the implementation of the blockade.

During the exchange, the Cuban delegation ratified its willingness to continue the dialogue and make progress in the relations between Cuba and the United States based on respect, sovereign equality and reciprocity.

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