

STATEMENT by H.E. Mr. BRUNO RODRÍGUEZ PARRILLA,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA,
ON AGENDA ITEM 39, “NECESSITY OF ENDING THE ECONOMIC,
COMMERCIAL AND FINANCIAL EMBARGO IMPOSED BY THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AGAINST CUBA”, at The Seventy
First Session of The United Nations General Assembly. New York,
October 26, 2016.

Mr. President;
Excellencies, Permanent Representatives;
Delegates:

It's been almost two years since President Barack Obama announced his willingness to use his executive powers and engage the US Congress with the purpose of lifting the blockade against Cuba.

During this period, the three Cuban anti-terrorists returned to their homeland; the unjustifiable inclusion of Cuba in the so called list of States sponsoring international terrorism was abrogated; diplomatic relations were re-established between the two countries and embassies were re-opened in the respective capitals; President Obama, the Secretary of State and other members of the US government's cabinet, including Senators, Representatives and personalities of broad sectors of the American society visited Havana.

There is no doubt that progress has been made in terms of dialogue and cooperation in areas of common interest; and a dozen agreements rendering reciprocal benefits have been signed.

However, the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States against Cuba persists, seriously harming the Cuban people and impairing the country's economic development.

Given its marked extraterritorial character, the blockade also affects directly all the UN member States.

The US President, as well as other high officials, has described it as obsolete; useless to advance the US interests; a failed, nonsensical and unviable policy; a burden to all citizens that harms the Cuban people and plunges the United States into isolation which should be lifted.

However, most of the executive regulations as well as the laws that establish the blockade are still in force and are fully implemented by the US government agencies.

We recognize that the executive measures adopted by the US Government have been positive steps, but with a very limited scope and effect.

The actions taken in the area of telecommunications pursue openly declared political and interventionist objectives, but they show how broad the faculties of the President are. If he wished, he could authorize commercial operations, investments and the granting of private credits in all sectors of the Cuban economy.

Those measures related to commercial operations with small private businesses, also inspired by expressed political motivations, will not work at a substantial scale as long as the economic organization and commercial structures of Cuba's foreign trade are not taken into account. Nevertheless, they show that in the area of trade, progress could also be made, even if the blockade laws remain unchanged.

Some US spokespersons have stated that the Cuban system is the one that hinders the implementation of such measures. They know this is not true. The blockade laws are the ones that condition today's realities.

Too well known and notorious is the fact that the President of the United States has ample executive prerogatives - which he has not fully used, as he could still do- to substantially modify the practical

implementation of the blockade and its economic and humanitarian impact.

Only 12 days ago, the Treasury and Commerce Departments announced new measures which, although positive, have a very limited scope. Most of them are aimed at expanding previously authorized transactions, and rather than benefitting Cuba and the Cuban people, they favor the United States.

There is one funny piece of news: From now on, US citizens who are authorized by their government to visit Cuba, or those who travel to other countries, will be allowed to buy and take with them as part of their personal luggage, Cuban products with no limit in value, including rum and cigars. However, the exports of those products to the United States continue to be banned.

Unless specific licenses are issued, the new measures do not allow either for US investments or joint ventures in our country, not even for the production of Cuban pharmaceutical or biotech products, whose marketing and distribution in the US have been authorized -if they receive approval from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

US exports to Cuba have not expanded beyond the previously authorized limited sales which exclude the key sectors of the Cuban economy; nor have any new changes been announced in the financial sector, which means that Cuban banking institutions are still not allowed to open correspondent accounts in US financial institutions.

The US Congress, for its part, has not approved any of the 20 amendments or bills that, with a bipartisan support, are intended to eliminate some of the restrictions imposed by the blockade or that policy as a whole. Quite on the contrary, more than 50 legislative initiatives have been introduced that threaten to reinforce some fundamental aspects of the implementation of the blockade; prevent the President from approving new executive measures or obstruct the

implementation of those already approved. Neither has there been any particular effort made by the government in this regard.

It is necessary, therefore, to judge by the facts.

Mr. President:

The human damages caused by the blockade are incalculable. There isn't any Cuban family or sector in our country that has not suffered from its effects. Its impact has been felt in the areas of health; education; food; services; commodity prices; salaries and pensions.

The imposition of discriminatory and onerous conditions, together with the dissuasive effects of the blockade, restricts the purchases of food as well as pharmaceuticals, reagents, spare parts for medical equipment and instruments - among other products- in the US market.

The US company Medtronic was unable to sign contracts with Cuban companies for the sale of deep brain stimulators to treat Cuban patients suffering from Parkinson's disease and other neurological disorders on account of the restrictions imposed by the blockade.

Neither was it possible for the multinational SIGMA-ALDRICH to supply the protection means or the chemical and biotech products ordered by the Cuban company FARMACUBA for the manufacturing of pharmaceuticals in Cuba.

In May this year, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission of the United States notified the branch office of the German company Eckert and Ziegler in that country that it would deny any license application to supply the Dutch company Philips with the calibration sources required by a medical equipment that was purchased by the Institute of Oncology of Cuba in 2013, thus affecting a service that is vital for cancer patients.

On September 26 last, the Italian medical equipment supplier EMILDUE notified the Cuban company MEDICUBA that the US

company Boston Scientific Corporation (BSC) refused to sell to it a COSMAN radiofrequency generator used in cancer diagnosis.

The blockade also affects the interests of the US citizens themselves, who could benefit from various services that are offered in Cuba, among them the health services.

During the tragic moments of the Ebola virus epidemic in western Africa, the deployment of Cuban medical assistance was hampered by the refusal of the British Standard Chartered Bank to make transfers between the World Health Organization and the brigades of Cuban doctors who risked their lives by being in direct contact with patients, and even under such extreme circumstances, the issuance of specific licenses by the Treasury Department was required. The branch office of that bank in Uganda has just closed the private accounts of the Cuban health workers in that country; and the branch office of Barclays Bank, which is also British, prevents them from making transfers to Cuba.

The same occurs with the Cuban cooperation personnel working in other countries in the area of education.

In August, 2016, due to the refusal of correspondent banks Commerzbank, from Germany, and KBC Bank, from Belgium, the money transfers associated to the maternal and child care and ophthalmological services offered in Algeria could not materialize.

By means of the shameful “Cuban Medical Professional Parole Program” designed for the Cuban health staff working in other countries, the United States attempts to impede medical cooperation and deprive those peoples and our own from highly qualified and indispensable human resources.

Last month, several banks based in Pakistan refused to open a letter of credit requested by a company of that country for the purchase of 100 thousand vaccines against Hepatitis B, on the grounds that Cuba was a country under the US sanction system.

Still in force is a legal ban that prevents US citizens from freely traveling to Cuba, which is a violation of their civil liberties and rights, although travels have been facilitated through general licenses only in the case of the twelve categories that were legally authorized by that country.

Any US citizen would be under threat of a 100 thousand dollar fine for traveling to Cuba with several companions.

The blockade continues to be a massive, flagrant and systematic violation of the human rights of all Cuban men and women and qualifies as an act of genocide pursuant to the Geneva Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948. It is also an obstacle to international humanitarian cooperation.

Mr. President:

Between April, 2015, and March, 2016, the economic damages caused to Cuba directly by the blockade were worth more than 4.680 billion dollars at current prices, according to rigorous, prudent and conservative calculations.

The damages accumulated for almost six decades as a result of the implementation of this genocidal policy amount to 753.688 billion dollars, taking into account the depreciation of gold. At current prices, this figure is equivalent to more than 125 billion dollars.

The blockade is the main obstacle to the economic and social development of our people.

It is a violation of International Law, the UN Charter and the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, which was signed by the Heads of State and Government of that region in January, 2014. Its extraterritorial implementation adds a new dimension to its character as a violation of international law.

The announcement made by the US Treasury Department this March allowing my country to use American dollars in its international transactions was good news, but so far Cuba has not been able to make payments or cash deposits in that currency due to the fines that have been imposed and the intimidating effects of the blockade. The ceasing of operations, the closing of Cuban bank accounts abroad, the denial of credits and the refusal to make transfers to and from Cuba in third countries have also increased.

The Dutch bank Rabobank and the Italian bank UnicreditBanca Di Roma have surprisingly refused to accept Cuban transactions in Euros.

Transfers in currencies other than the US dollar that are made to pay Cuba's membership dues to some international bodies –such as the Association of Caribbean States and the Inter-Parliamentary Union-, have been hindered by non-US banks in third countries.

In 2016, several bank accounts and payments belonging to embassies and consulates; tourism and travel agencies; the Cuban airline Cubana de Aviación; diplomats; international messaging and package delivery services and NGOs were closed and frozen respectively because of their links with Cuba.

There is still a prohibition on foreign vessels touching Cuban ports, whereby they will not be allowed to touch US ports for a period of 180 days if they carry goods whose use is considered by the US Department of Commerce as allegedly dual or high tech equipment, which creates contracting difficulties and increases freight and insurance costs.

This year, OFAC imposed heavy fines on the French company CGG Services S.A. for supplying inputs used in oil and gas prospecting in Cuba.

In January the US company WATG Holdings Inc. was fined because its branch office in the United Kingdom had worked in the design of a hotel in Cuba.

The ASDA supermarkets in the United Kingdom cancelled the sale of all Cuban products or by-products.

When trying to access from Cuba the website of the Norton division of the company Symantec, which supplies services to block and eliminate malicious software, a warning pops up which reads as follows: “Under the US applicable laws, we are unable to process your request.” Many others respond that “the user has no permit to get the address of an Internet site from this server”; or simply “access denied”.

The decision of the Court of First Instance of the German city of Dortmund against the US company PayPal for blocking an account related to a concert offered by Cuban artists was significant, thus making all the more notorious the fact that national or antidote laws are not invoked in Europe against any violation of its sovereignty that might result from the implementation of the blockade.

There are other causes, in addition to the blockade, that determine our economic difficulties, such as the unjust international economic order; the global crisis; the historical distortions and structural weaknesses of underdevelopment; the high dependence on energy and food imports; the effects of climate change and natural disasters; and also –and we do not hide it- our own mistakes. Both our people and government are struggling very hard to overcome this reality.

Mr. President:

On April 17, 2016, President Raúl Castro Ruz stated: “We have the will to develop a respectful dialogue and build a new type of relation with the United States, as never before has existed between the two countries, because we are convinced that it can only bring mutual benefits.”

And on September 17 last, he added: “We ratify our will to have a relation of civilized coexistence with the United States, but Cuba will not give up one of its principles or make concessions inherent in its sovereignty and independence.”

Looking back in history, the US Government attempted, first of all, the annexation of Cuba and, failing that, to exert its domination on the country. Upon the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, it pursued to create “disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship...denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government.”

While the Presidential Policy Directive published on October 14 affirms that the US Government recognizes “Cuba's sovereignty and self-determination” and that “it is up to the Cuban people to make their own choices about their future”, its deceitful language does not hide the purpose of altering the constitutional order and bring about changes in the economic, political social and cultural system of Cuba; nor does it hide the intention to continue to implement interventionist programs that serve the US interests and involve specific sectors of the Cuban society.

They say they are not seeking to impose “regime change on Cuba”, but admit that “we will support Cuba's emerging...civil society and encourage partners and nongovernmental actors to join us in advocating for reforms. While remaining committed to supporting democratic activists ... we will also engage community leaders, bloggers, activists, and other social issue leaders who can contribute to Cuba's internal dialogue on civic participation.” They also point out that they will maintain “our democracy and broadcasting programs, while protecting our interests and assets, such as the Guantanamo Bay Naval Station... The United States Government has no intention to alter the existing lease treaty and other related arrangements.”

Upon introducing the Directive, it was said: “we cannot simply stand back and wait for Cuba to change.”

The Directive states that Cuba “remains in default to the United States Government on pre-Cuban revolution bilateral debts.”

They should understand that we are already free, precisely because in 1959 we rid ourselves of the US imperialism and the dictatorship it imposed on us.

George W. Bush’s “Initiative for a New Cuba” of May 19, 2002, which intended to condition a relaxation of the travel and trade bans to internal political and economic changes, was responded to by Cubans on June 26 of that same year with eight million signatures in support of the Constitutional amendment which proclaims the irrevocable character of socialism in Cuba.

It would be worthwhile acknowledging that changing Cuba is an issue that only pertains to the sovereignty of Cubans, and Cuba is a truly independent country. It is so because it achieved its independence on its own, and has defended and will continue to defend it at the price of the greatest sacrifices and risks.

Our people conquered power; it “empowered” itself long ago, and day after day they exercise the sovereign power, the people’s power. That is why we are here today.

We are proud of our history and our culture, our most prized treasure. We will never forget our past because that’s the only way to never go back to it. We have already chosen our path to the future, which we know will be long and difficult, but we will not divert our course out of naivety or by mistake. There is no force on Earth capable of forcing us to do that.

We have seen many dreams come true –both ours and others that we have shared with other peoples. We have plenty of dreams that are yet

to be realized, but those are our dreams. We don't need dreams that are alien to our culture and our history.

The Cuban Revolution was made and is being made every day by the youth and for the youth. And while the Cuban youths resemble their times more than they resemble their parents, they are as patriotic and anti-imperialist as their parents and grandparents.

We have and we will defend our own values and symbols which we will continue to enrich, but they will always be Cuban. We will never change them for others that are strange to us.

We will struggle to build a sovereign, independent, socialist, democratic, prosperous and sustainable nation. We will never go back to capitalism.

As was stated by the leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro Ruz, on April 19 last: "We will perfect whatever needs to be perfected, with utmost loyalty and united force, as was done by Martí, Maceo and Gómez, in an unstoppable march."

Mr. President:

Distinguished Permanent Representatives:

Esteemed delegates:

Lifting the blockade is the key to be able to advance towards the normalization of relations with the United States; it is what will give some meaning, depth and soundness to what has been achieved so far.

The blockade is unjust, inhuman, immoral and illegal and should unilaterally and unconditionally cease.

We are deeply grateful to all governments and peoples, parliaments, political forces and social movements, representatives of the civil society, international and regional organizations, who have contributed their voices and votes, year after year, to substantiate the fairness and urgency of the abolishment of the blockade.

We would like to convey our gratitude to the US people for their ever-growing support to this lofty purpose.

I ask you to vote in favor of draft resolution A/71/L.3 entitled “Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.”

Thank you, very much.