

Cuban Foreign Minister discusses report to United Nations on U. S. blockade

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“The economic, commercial, and financial blockade imposed by the United States against Cuba persists. The blockade endangers the Cuban people. There’s no Cuban family that doesn’t suffer the effects of the blockade ... The blockade is the principle cause of our economic problems, the principal obstacle to our development.”

These were Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez’ opening words at a press conference in Havana September 9, as he launched into yet one more presentation of the report on the U.S. anti-Cuban blockade that Cuba sends every year to the United Nations General Assembly. On October 26 the Assembly will be voting for the 25th consecutive year on a resolution introduced by Cuba calling for the lifting of the blockade.

Cuba provides the report to General Assembly member states so they can see the blockade through Cuban eyes. And they’ve responded: for 24 years nations have overwhelmingly backed Cuba’s resolution, almost unanimously in recent years with 191 nations in favor in 2015 and two against - the United States and Israel. The 39-page report for 2016 [may be read in English](#).

Wide dissemination of the report serves to inform peoples of the world about the U.S. policy. The subject here is the presentation by Minister Rodríguez at the news conference. A summary of the report itself will appear later. The object in both instances is to expand awareness of adverse effects of the blockade.

Rodríguez recalled first that, “President Obama said the blockade wasn’t working ... and they had to lift it; he said it hadn’t worked [to achieve] the historical objectives of the United States ... He didn’t say it was illegal, a violation of international law ... a violation of Cubans’ human rights; he didn’t say it’s immoral and violates all ethics, nor did he say that it’s cruel and endangers human beings.”

“...Between April 2015 and March 2016, the direct economic damages caused by the blockade went up another \$4.68 billion ... Damages accumulated over almost six decades have reached at least \$753.67 billion, expressed as their value in gold.

“The damages include income that our people never saw, that our country never saw through goods and services never exported ... particularly from the bio-pharmacology industry.” There are “losses through geographical disruption of our commerce – long distances, the need for large inventories, the unpredictability of goods arriving, and extra freight, insurance, and distribution costs.

“... A third direct effect of the blockade is monetary and financial. Confronted with the ban on using the dollar in international transactions, Cuba has to use other currencies. All these operations are costly; for example, they depend a lot on relative value of the

currencies ... Last year the dollar appreciated in value, increasing its value over the year relative to other currencies by an average of 3.58 percent.”

Rodríguez denounced “the U. S. prohibition on Cuban banks opening accounts in U.S. Banks” and also the “intimidating effect of \$14 billion in fines – a world record – during the Obama presidency, basically against European and Asian Banks [handling dollars in Cuba’s transactions with the outside world].”

“... There’s no sector in Cuba that doesn’t suffer consequences from the blockade: in the service economy – health care and education; in the economy in general, and in people’s lives – feeding themselves, prices, salaries, social security.”

Rodríguez mentioned “the impossibility of gaining access both to products, technologies, and equipment patented in the U. S. and access to indispensable, high-technology surgical devices ... There’s still a ban on acquiring products or medicines directed at assuring improved treatments and above all assuring fewer adverse effects of treatments.”

The foreign minister pointed out that “the extraterritorial application of the blockade persists, in violation of the sovereignty of other nations, of all nations on the planet.” He surveyed U.S. laws on the blockade. For example, the U.S “Trading with the Enemy Act ...now is applied only to Cuba. It’s a law that originated in 1917. We have to ask ourselves, ‘Is it possible the United States considers us an enemy?’ Does that make sense?”

He also cited the “Torricelli Law (1992)... that ended ... our trade with subsidiaries of U.S. companies located in other states, and registered under their laws. That’s a gross invasion against the sovereignty of those nations. [And] the Helms – Burton Law (1996) is the sum and substance of everything. It probably has an element of a Gordian knot that needs to be cut.”

Expanding on his reflections, the minister first noted U.S. desires to change Cuba and then suggested that “to change Cuba is the business of Cubans. But also we have accepted that challenge [of changing things] because it fits with the interests of our people, of our development.” As regards the blockade, “the heart of a newborn, the verve of a young girl, quality of life for an older person: there’s no price put on any of that. And now, today, everything is subjected to the hard, cruel effects of the blockade.”

All of this, he concluded, “is reality, is the truth; they are facts. We have to judge things through facts, through data, not through declarations or speeches.”

He turned then to Pastors for Peace in New York: “I remember the horrible scenes of Pastors for Peace, of Lucius Walker. Our people will never forget him under fierce repression so that obsolete personal computers would be given up and not be brought across the border. Pastors for Peace is today, right now, under threat from actions directed at impeding the recognized humanitarian work of that religious organization.”

Tom Whitney translated.