

Mujica to Obama: Lift the unjust and unjustifiable blockade and free the prisoners from Cuba and Puerto Rico

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Translated and introduction by Tom Whitney

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Jose Mujica, about to retire as president of Uruguay, recently sent his U.S. counterpart Barack Obama an open letter epitomizing sentiment in Latin America and the Caribbean – in “Our America” – that the U.S. Government should respect, and should have respected, the sovereignty and independence of all Western Hemispheric nations. In his announcement December 17 as to a new direction for U.S. policies toward Cuba, President Obama made no reference to international views on U.S. policies toward Cuba, Latin American views in particular. The U.S. approach toward the region will be on display in April 2015 at the Summit of the Americas in Panama, sponsored by the Organization of American States. Cuba will be attending for the first time since 1962, the result of Latin American insistence.

“Solidarity is people showing love,” Pablo Neruda proclaimed in the midst of the immense and urgent task of evacuating, helping, and finding asylum for tens of thousands of Spanish republicans of whom so many succeeded in arriving at the Rio Plata (in Uruguay) after the tragedy of 1939.

This President in his student youth was confused and today has great appreciation of one of those exiled intellectual luminaries. Peace-loving and peacemaking Uruguay is our great legacy and a vital strategy at the same time. This country formed part of the intellectual vanguard in the creation of international instruments for peace.

Drawing that vocation from the best elements of our past, we have offered our hospitality for human beings who suffered in Guantanamo from an outrageous kidnapping. There is no other reason but humanitarian. Since our independence and even before, people and groups, often quite numerous, have come to these lands from far away or nearby looking for refuge from international wars, civil wars, tyrannies, religious and racial persecution, and poverty — really from any extreme misery.

They came from all the European countries, even from distant Russia, and from America, and – the most painful – from Africa, brought as slaves. The vast majority arrived from compromising and very dangerous situations. They built this Uruguay: created well-being, brought professions, seeds, knowledge, cultures, and, ultimately, they sunk deep roots. They scattered their vast number of descendants here – and also their burial places, when as old people, they died. With their bones they formed our soil, so deeply beloved.

At the same time, along the way, at a bad time for us, we received asylum in many countries, a warm and timely hand extended to us, even though we were being accused by our own tyrannous regime of being very dangerous people. And before, during, and after, tens of thousands of compatriots left for every horizon because of poverty and no prospect for the future.

Many of them, and their descendants who speak other languages, have not been able to return, and they constitute for us even more sadness and an obligation not yet resolved – the Wandering Homeland.

It's on account of all of this that, following the road of the famous parable, we feel the experience. We suffer in our own flesh, more from the pain of those who are hurt, pain the selflessness of the Good Samaritan does not reach. We make up that part of the world that is beaten upon and assaulted. We belong to the immense majority of humankind.

We must not, nor do we want to, forget or lose the point of view of looking at basic realities. Unfortunately they are as numerous as they are cruel, that today they are knocking and shouting out at the door of a million consciences.

On the occasion now of retiring, it's fitting for me to demand once more the lifting of the unjust and unjustifiable embargo against our brother Republic of Cuba, whose national hero was consul for Paraguay, Argentina, Uruguay in New York.

We demand the liberation of Oscar Lopez Rivera, Puerto Rican independence fighter who is 70 years old, a political prisoner in the United States for more than 30 years, 12 of which he spent in an isolation cell.

We demand the liberation of Antonio Guerrero, Ramon Labañino, and Gerardo Hernandez, Cuban prisoners in the United States for more than 16 years.

We are sure that on satisfying these demands broad avenues would open up for a process of peace, understanding, progress, and well-being for all the peoples that

inhabit that crucial region of our America.

José Mujica