

## UN General Assembly once more denounces US Blockade of Cuba

By W. T. Whitney Jr.

The United Nations General Assembly on June 23 overwhelmingly approved a Cuban resolution condemning the U.S. economic, commercial, and financial blockade of Cuba, in place for 60 years. The Assembly has done precisely that every year since 1992, except for 2020, when the vote was postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The vote this time was: 184 nations approving; two opposing — Israel and the United States; and three abstaining — Colombia, Ukraine, and Brazil.

All along, the United States and Israel have opposed the resolution, alone on ten occasions, especially since 2010. One or two other nations occasionally joined them, often the U.S. dependencies Palau and the Marshall Islands.

Prior to the vote this year, representatives of national delegations, some representing regional alliances, testified against the blockade. Many gave high praise to Cuba's international outreach in providing medical care in dozens of countries and welcoming tens of thousands of students from the Global South into Cuban medical schools (at no personal cost). They applauded Cuba's accomplishment of producing vaccines against the COVID-19 virus, despite restrictions imposed by the blockade. Speakers offered critiques on grounds of cruelty, immorality, and/or violation of international law.

In the weeks prior to this year's vote, a strong campaign against the blockade materialized within the United States and internationally. Automobile and bicycle caravans took place in U.S. and Canadian locations with support from the National Network on Cuba, the Canadian Network on Cuba, the US Hands Off Cuba Committee, and the Miami-based Puentes de Amor (Bridges of Love) initiative. In New York, the ProLibertad Freedom Campaign, NY-NJ CubaSi Coalition, Venceremos Brigade, and IFCO/Pastors for Peace were active.

Petitions against the blockade gained thousands of signatures. International organizations denounced the blockade, among them: the Non-Aligned Movement, the Group of 77 and China, and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Presently Oregon Senator Ron Wyden's United States-Cuba Trade Act of 2021 — the only proposed U.S. legislation that would completely end the blockade — has only 3 co-sponsors.

Cuba's Foreign Ministry each year produces a comprehensive report aimed at providing delegates with information on adverse blockade effects. The most recent report appeared October 22, 2020, just prior to the Assembly vote that was to have occurred in November. That report indicated that between April 2019 and March, 2020, the blockade caused financial losses to Cuba amounting to \$5.570 billion.

In an update made available recently, Cuban officials say that Cuba lost \$3.587 billion more in the period between April 2020 and December 2020. The losses reflected in these figures stem from blockade-related shortages of needed materials, export income never realized, and the high cost of having to purchase through third-party intermediaries those foreign goods that, subject to the blockade, are unavailable in the United States and elsewhere.

Hopes that the Biden administration would reverse President Trump's intensification of the blockade and restore the Obama administration's opening to Cuba have fizzled. In 2016, the United States actually abstained in the General Assembly vote.

Shortly after taking office, the Biden administration announced it would not be prioritizing new Cuba policies. In May, Biden, without evidence, assigned Cuba to the U.S. list of terrorist-sponsoring nations. He was following President Trump's lead in reversing President Obama's action in removing that designation.

Cuba's supposed association with terrorism serves as pretext for the U.S. Treasury Department to penalize international financial institutions that necessarily use dollars in dealings with Cuba. As a result, Cuba experiences great difficulties in transferring funds and gaining access to credit. Cuban officials emphasize the worldwide reach of the U.S. blockade. Not only does it utilize restrictions placed on third-country banks and lending agencies, but a regulation from 1992 penalizes companies in third countries that export goods and materials to Cuba containing 10% or more components produced in the United States.

The "extraterritoriality" of the blockade, a remarkable feature of its operation, came into its own with the Helms Burton Law of 1996, which, among other nefarious provisions, enabled the former owners of property nationalized in Cuba to sue in U.S. courts for damages incurred. U.S. presidents every six months had temporarily suspended that provision, until President Trump.

In May 2019, Trump implemented that provision, with the effect of frightening off much-needed foreign investment in Cuba. The economic toll, likely incalculable, is considerable. One of many tests facing the Biden presidency is that of once more inactivating that part of the 1996 Law.

The cruelty of the blockade, not to speak of its immorality and illegality, has been clear during this time of pandemic, when blockade-caused shortages of raw materials, specialized tools and instruments, fuel, and replacement parts have crippled or impeded the manufacture and distribution in Cuba of drugs, vaccines against COVID-19, other vaccines, syringes, hospital supplies, and surgical supplies.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez has the last word here on what amounts to big crime against a small sovereign nation at the hands of the arrogant capitalist capo of the world economy. Rodriguez, speaking in the Assembly before the vote, pointed out that:

“The human danger of the blockade is incalculable. The life of no family escapes the effects of this inhumane policy. No one would honestly be able to affirm that it doesn’t have a real impact on the population ... The blockade is a massive, flagrant, and systematic violation of the human rights of all of Cuba’s people, According to Article II, Section C of the Geneva Convention of 1948, it constitutes an act of genocide. What’s involved is economic war with extraterritorial reach against a small country, already adversely affected recently by the recession and the global economic crisis provoked by the pandemic that has deprived us of indispensable income.”