



Embassy of Cuba in Cambodia

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Facts on Cuba

March 15, 1878:

Anniversary 140th of the Baraguá Protest.

March 23, 1878:

Constitution of Baraguá enacting and relauching of the independence struggle against Spain.

Cuban Elections Turnout 82.9 Percent, Says CEN



Author: <http://www.plenglish.com>

Havana, Mar 12 (Prensa Latina) The National Electoral Commission (CEN) of Cuba reported Monday 82.9 percent of voters participated on the Sunday legislative elections, though this is not the final count, it indicated. According to CEN president Alina Balseiro, 7,399,891 voters showed up at polling stations to cast their ballots, out of a list of 8,926,575 registered voters.

CEN said in a press conference on Monday afternoon that the final results of the elections will be issued after a detailed assessment. Balseiro said that, based on preliminary results issued today, the 605 candidates for deputies to the National Assembly of the People's Power (parliament) and the 1,265 candidates for delegates to the provincial Assemblies of the People's Power were elected after winning more than half the valid votes. In this regard, she said that the vote for all candidates (which is a feature of this electoral round) reached 80.44 percent, while the individual selection (of one or several candidates from the ballots) was 19.56 percent. She said that the valid ballots represented 94.42 percent, higher than the 2012-2013 electoral process, while the spoiled and void ballots represented 1.26 percent and 4.32 percent, respectively. She said that the new parliament would be made up of 47.44 percent of deputies who were candidates previously chosen by the people from the grassroots; 53.22 percent, women, and 13.22 percent who are under 35 years old. She said that 40.17 percent of the elected deputies are younger than 50 years.

Regarding the percent of the voters participating in the process, which on Sunday was slightly lower compared to previous elections, she said that CEN does not analyze the process, it respects the right of voters whether or not to turn out to vote. However, she insisted that yesterday's elections were characterized by the massive attendance of the population to the polling places, 'the reaffirmation of the Cuban electoral system and the confidence of the people in it.' The general elections 2017-2018 in Cuba were called last June and its first stage concluded in December with the vote for the municipal assemblies of the People's Power.

The process will conclude on April 19th with the vote for the National Assembly of the People's Power, the election of the State Council and the country's new President.

Voters: 8 926 575
Voted: 7 399 891 (82.90 percent)
Unified vote: 80.44 percent
Selective voting: 19.56 percent
No vote: 18.10 percent
Valid ballots: 94.42 percent
Canceled: 1.26 percent
Blank: 4.32 percent

Anti-Cuban provocation plot foiled on eve of elections



Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cuba

An attempt has been made to orchestrate a new act of anti-Cuban provocation from abroad, through the awarding of a “prize” with the aim of interfering in the internal affairs of Cuba, generating instability, affecting the country’s image and Cuba’s diplomatic relations with other States.

The operation was carried out with financing and support from counter-revolutionary groups based abroad and other international organizations such as the so-called Democratic Initiative of Spain and the Americas (IDEA); Pan American Democracy Foundation; the

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Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation; and using a small, illegal anti-Cuban group as instrument.

As is customary in any reactionary initiative in our region, the involvement of the OAS Secretary General was not lacking.

It should also be remembered that a similar operation was attempted last year in which, as well as the aforementioned groups, the Democracy and Community Center; the Center for the Opening and Development of Latin America (CADAL); and Interamerican Institute for Democracy, run by terrorist and CIA agent Carlos Alberto Montaner, all of which have been actively working against Cuba and whose links with the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which receives funding from the U.S. government to carry out subversive programs against Cuba, are well known.

These organizations have extensive credentials as agents of intervention and subversion against progressive governments of Our America, with the aim of destroying them, and toward which they have dedicated significant efforts and resources. Interestingly, they maintain complicit silence regarding the threats of the use of force and recent U.S. incitement of a military coup against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; they fail to speak out against coups on the continent, to denounce poverty and hunger, or the racial and religious discrimination present in our region.

Nor can our peoples count on these organizations and their leaders to fight for greater social justice and equality, or to support the families of progressive and trade union leaders and journalists murdered for their political ideals, or to other victims of paramilitarism and organized crime.

This time they attempted to put on a show that would affect the normal development of general elections in Cuba. The actions combined a communications strategy, through the use of international media outlets and social media, with measures aimed at evading our country’s laws, and undermining the legitimacy of the just and legal action of our authorities.

Although they were well aware and warned that they would not be welcome in Cuba for such purposes, Andrés Pastrana Arango and Jorge Fernando Quiroga Ramírez, former presidents of Colombia and Bolivia, respectively, and Chilean Deputy representing the Independent Democratic Union (UDI), Jaime Bellolio Avaria, volunteered to participate in this act of provocation in Cuban territory, which is why, based on our laws and international norms, they were not permitted to enter our country.

Said action is part of the imperialist offensive against the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, in which the United States government has declared the relevance and validity of the “Monroe Doctrine,” and has provoked a setback in bilateral relations with Cuba.

The protagonists of this ploy are not at all interested in Cuba or the Cuban people, who they offend on attempting to violate the constitutional order that we have freely chosen. This is why they have had to resort to foreign resources and figures to achieve their goals.

Every time they do so, be it this or any other way, they will receive the firm response of the Cuban people, who remain united and loyal to the principles of the Revolution, as we will show this coming Sunday, March 11, when we vote en masse for the people’s candidates. **Havana, March 8, 2018. “Year 60 of the Revolution”**



Cuba Reiterates Its Commitment to Human Rights at UN-Geneva



Cuba's ambassador to UN in Geneva, Pedro Luis Pedrosa

Author: Juventud Rebelde

After addressing the General Segment of the 37th regular session of the Human Rights Council, the diplomat highlighted the priority attention to issues such as access to health services and higher quality education, greater protection and social assistance, food security and sustainable access to drinking water, among others.

'Achieving greater social justice and well-being for all our people, in the exercise of the broadest freedoms recognized by the Constitution and laws, is one of the objectives of the updating of the Cuban economic and social development model,' he said.

Pedrosa recalled that the country reached the lowest infant mortality rate in its history in 2017, four per 1,000 live births, a higher result to that registered by many developed countries and 'it has been possible thanks to the work of the Revolution.'

The ambassador said that to achieve these results, Cuba has had to 'overcome the negative consequences of the genocidal economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States.' 'The blockade, which continues to be in force and intensifies, is the main obstacle to the development of the country, is a flagrant violation of the human rights of the Cuban people, and undermines the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and International Law,' he said.

He stressed that Havana maintains its cooperation and interaction with the United Nations human rights procedures and mechanisms that have universal application, on non-discriminatory basis. 'Cuba will continue advocating for dialogue and cooperation in the field of human rights, and for recognition and respect to differences,' he stated.

The ambassador also stressed that his country is committed 'to the efforts to build a world order where respect for the independence and sovereignty of each State prevails, and in which the war and the threat or use of force are banished.'

Kathy Castor urges Rex Tillerson to restore U.S. Diplomats to Cuba



U.S. Rep. **Kathy Castor** is calling on Secretary of State-**Rex Tillerson** to return consular officials and diplomatic personnel to the U.S. Embassy in Havana as soon as possible. "While I appreciate your overriding concern with the health and safety of our diplomats following the unexplained health incidents, it is time to increase staffing and re-establish an American presence to serve our interests and our citizens," the Tampa Democrat wrote in the she sent letter to Tillerson. Shortly after Tillerson ordered the removal of U.S. diplomats from Cuba, the State Department then opted to suspend all visa processing in Havana, moving that function to Bogota, Columbia.

Castor, representing a district that is home to one of the largest Cuban-American populations in the country, said it's "unreasonable and unaffordable" for Cubans who want to travel to Tampa or Miami to go to another country to do so. In 2013, Castor became the first member of Congress from Florida to call for removing the Cuban economic em-

bargo, a decision that can only happen via a congressional vote. She has consistently championed the liberalization of the relationship between the U.S. and Cuba since the early part of this decade. But the diplomatic breakthrough started by President **Barack Obama** in late 2014 came to a screeching halt when **Donald Trump** was elected in 2016. Among the policy changes his administration rolled back from the Obama White House was travel. The U.S. had provided 1,100 visas a month to Cuban immigrants last year before the diplomatic imbroglio; that number has since trickled down to just 350 per month. Last summer, Trump announced that Americans would no longer be able to plan their own private trips to Cuba, and those who did had to go through authorized educational tours, subject to strict new rules and audits to ensure that they are not going just as tourists. Castor calls that plan "overreaching." "This is counterproductive and complicates America's ability to support everyday Cubans and promote the exchange of ideas," The Tampa Democrat complains.

Castor visited Cuba earlier this month with fellow Democratic Reps. **James McGovern** from Massachusetts and **Susan Davis** from California, as well as Senators **Patrick Leahy** of Vermont, **Gary Peters** from Michigan and **Ron Wyden** from Oregon. The entire delegation, except for Castor, chose to meet with Cuban President **Raul Castro** during the visit. Castro will step down in April.

U.S. makes cuts to embassy staff in Havana official



From March 5, the United States Embassy in Havana will operate as an “unaccompanied post,” according to an official media note from the U.S. Department of State, published March 2. The document explains that “The U.S. Embassy in Havana has operated under ordered departure status since September 29, 2017, due to health attacks affecting U.S. Embassy Havana employees. It will reach the maximum allowable days in departure status on March 4.” Meanwhile, a wire from Associated Press highlights that the announcement makes the U.S. decision last year to withdraw 60 percent of its diplomats from its embassy in Cuba, under the pretext of supposed “sonic attacks” against its personnel, practically permanent. However, after months of investigations by Cuban and U.S. authorities, no evidence explaining the cause or origin of the alleged health issues suffered by U.S. diplomats has been found. AP adds that by law, the State department can only order diplomats to leave temporarily for six months before either sending them back or

making the reductions permanent.

Meanwhile, the State Department noted that “The embassy will continue to operate with the minimum personnel necessary to perform core diplomatic and consular functions.” This is exactly how the Embassy has been functioning since September 2017, when the U.S. government withdrew the majority of its staff, paralyzing consular services for Cubans and only maintaining core diplomatic services and functions relating to emergencies. The measure comes amidst growing calls from different sectors in the U.S. to normalize operations at both embassies and rescind travel warnings to Cuba. A bicameral delegation of U.S. Congress which visited the island last week described the withdrawal of diplomatic personnel as “a mistake,” noting that the decision affects people on both sides of the Florida Straits and puts collaboration initiatives between both countries since December 17, 2014, at risk. Meanwhile, On March 1, around twenty tour operators demanded that Washington eliminate travel alerts regarding Cuba, noting that the island is recognized as one of the safest destinations for international travelers by specialist tour agencies and international bodies.

The U.S government’s decision to permanently cut staff at its embassy in Havana was immediately met with criticism. Congress woman Barbara Lee tweeted: “This decision from the State Department undermines years of progress towards normalizing relations with #Cuba. Our diplomats should be allowed to do their jobs & return to their posts in Cuba.” Meanwhile, in a statement James Williams, President of the bipartisan coalition Engage Cuba working to end the U.S. blockade against the island, said that “It is deeply disappointing that Secretary Tillerson chose not to return U.S. diplomats to their assigned posts in Havana. “Perhaps the biggest losers will be the hundreds of thousands of Cubans and Cuban Americans, who travel back and forth to see family, celebrate milestones, and attend to sick relatives, since we are unable to properly process visas and facilitate travel,” noted Williams, adding that “We implore Secretary Tillerson not to abandon the Cuban people during this critical time.”

Unilateral decision by the government of the U.S. is politically motivated



<http://www.minrex.gob.cu>

HAVANA, March 5, 2018.- The decision by the United States Government, which unilaterally maintains the drawdown of its staff at the U.S. Embassy in Cuba indefinitely, is politically motivated and has no relation whatsoever with the safety and security of its officials in Havana, said the General Director for U.S. Affairs of the Cuban Foreign Ministry, Carlos Fernández de Cossío in his statement to the press. According to the diplomat, the measure has particular impact on the consular services on which dozens of thousands of citizens depend, who are forced to incur on additional expenses, as they have to travel to third countries to apply for temporary or immigrant visas. Therefore, he said, the United States has imposed a financial punishment on dozens of thousands of people, as well as anguish and insecurity on the relationship of those people with their families and close friends. He underscored that the U.S. government is responsible for the humanitarian cost of this measure.

In addition, he rejected the reuse by the State Department of the term attacks as it knows for certain that there have been no attacks nor has it

been any deliberate act against U.S. diplomats in Cuba. Fernández de Cossío also stated that none of the reports issued by the State Department or by the different experts, including the scientific community, provides evidence indicating that an attack took place in Cuba. The specialized agencies and the U.S. scientific community have confirmed that there is no evidence of an attack having taken place.

Unilateral decision by the government of the U.S. is politically motivated

"It is a term whose use entails an ill intention and is not in keeping with the vocabulary or the content of the official exchanges", he stated.

Likewise, the General Director for U.S. Affairs characterized as hostile and slanderous the alert that recommends travelers to reconsider visiting Cuba, which was issued on March 2. In his opinion, said travel alert is based on political motives and has no relation with the health of officials or with the concern for travelers. "It is not true that the diplomatic staff of the Embassy is or has been at risk. It is not true that said staff has been targeted. It is not true that a deliberate action against diplomats from the United States has been allowed or taken place in Cuba by anybody. It is not true that U.S. citizens have reasons to fear for their safety and security in Cuba", he said.

"The U.S. government has enough evidence that Cuba is a safe country for U.S. diplomats and for diplomats from any country, as it is for Cuban citizens, foreign residents and for millions of travelers from all corners of the world who visit Cuba every year". "The government of the United States and its State Department know perfectly well that Cuba fully observes its responsibilities with regard to the attention and protection of the Diplomatic Corps".

On the arbitrary and unwarranted expulsion of 17 diplomatic officials of the Embassy of Cuba in Washington D.C., in the past October, Fernandez de Cossio stated that said act was an additional confirmation of the fact that with regard to this issue the State Department acts in response to political motives. "Cuba is and will continue to be a safe, stable and attractive country. It remains willing to engage in a respectful dialogue and to advance issues that concern the lives of millions of peoples". "The announcement by the State Department on the past March 2 is based on another political fabrication that adds to the long history of hostility which is very well known to the people of Cuba", he concluded. (Cubaminrex)

Cuba Received its One-Millionth Visitor despite US Campaigns



United States Embassy in La Habana, Cuba.

The arrival on Thursday of its first one-millionth vacationer to Cuba reaffirms the recognition of the island as a peaceful and safe destination despite the travel warnings issued by the US State Department.

The result, obtained four days after the similar date of 2017, has been possible amidst the reinforced campaign organized and directed by the US government to stop the flow of US visitors to the Caribbean island, reported on Thursday the Ministry of Tourism.

The US State Department announced a new traveling warning against Cuba last Monday for alleged sonic attacks against US diplomats at its embassy in Havana. However, months of research on both sides have not contributed with one single evidence of the alleged incident.

US citizens are prohibited from coming to Cuba

as tourists. The Tourism Ministry note pointed out that the main market are Canadians, followed by France, Germany, Italy, Britain, Russia and Spain in addition to Mexico and Argentina. The communique also highlights that Cuba reached its first one-millionth vacationer despite the severe damages inflicted by Hurricane Irma, in September of 2017.

Tourism in Cuba has increased each year, reaching a record number of some four million 700 thousand visitors in 2017. Tourism is one of the main growing sectors of the Cuban economy.

"The Old Havana City Cathedral was built in 1777 and it is one of the most visited sites in Cuba for tourists"



Our peoples have no future without unity, without integration



Summit ALBA-TCP

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Compañero Nicolás Maduro Moros, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela;
Esteemed Heads of State and Government;
Esteemed Heads of delegations and guests:

This March 5, on which we commemorate the fifth anniversary of the passing of President Hugo Chávez Frías, founder together with Fidel of ALBA, my first words are dedicated to reaffirming our tribute to his work and his example and the unwavering loyalty to his legacy.

Today, ALBA has as its strategic and urgent task the joint defense of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The military threat, hostility and economic aggression of U.S. imperialism against Venezuela; the neoliberal onslaught to reverse the social gains; the interference against the sovereignty of progressive governments; the attempts to dismantle the progress in the integration of Latin America and the Caribbean, destabilize the region and pose risks to regional peace and security.

ty.

The United States, since 1999 when Comandante Hugo Chávez became President, and even more so when compañero Nicolás Maduro did so, has resorted to methods of unconventional warfare, with the aim of defeating this country, the owner of immense riches coveted by imperialism. President Donald Trump has just renewed the executive order that declares Venezuela an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.

Some appear to have forgotten the lessons of the past, the cruel years of the military dictatorships, the impact of neoliberalism; that they attempt to reinstate the disastrous consequences that the policies of extortion, humiliation and isolation had for our region that, as then, have the United States as their chief articulator. They openly announce the full validity and relevance of the Monroe Doctrine which proclaims colonial subordination to the governments and corporations of Washington and that, as Bolívar warned, plagued Our America with sorrow and misery in the name of liberty. Once again, they underestimate our peoples.

We proclaim unwavering support for the Bolivarian Revolution and the civic-military union of its people, led by their President, compañero Nicolás Maduro Moros. We condemn the unilateral coercive measures and external interference against the Bolivarian and Chavista process that threaten the peace and dialogue between Venezuelans, with destabilizing purposes, and create hardships for its population. Cease the economic aggression against Venezuela so that its people can enjoy the rights conquered by their Revolution.

We reject the exclusion of President Nicolás Maduro from the 8th Summit of the Americas. This illegal decision is unacceptable and interventionist, whilst it takes the hemisphere back to stages that appeared to have been overcome. Exclusions do not contribute at all to peace, dialogue or hemispheric understanding.

It is unacceptable that a group of countries, with no right or mandate, intend to speak for the region and serve as an instrument of aggression against a member of the Latin American and Caribbean family, using as a pretext an alleged rupture of the democratic order, precisely in a country that has undertaken more than twenty electoral processes and has now called presidential elections, as was previously demanded, even via violent methods.

Why don't they denounce the covert coup d'états, the massacres, the forced disappearances suffered by the peoples of the region? Nor do we recognize any moral authority of the discredited Organization of American States (OAS) to give lessons in democracy, governability or constitutionality.

They violate the postulates of the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, signed by Heads of State and Government of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, during the 2nd CELAC Summit, in Havana, and evade strict compliance with the obligation not to interfere, directly or indirectly, in the internal affairs of any other state, and observe the principles of national sovereignty, equality of rights and the self-determination of the peoples.

The only solution to the problems of Venezuelans is in the hands of Venezuelans themselves.

Esteemed compañeros:

I speak on behalf of our Revolution and our people, as will any other Cuban compatriot from this position in the future, who will always know, as Fidel believed, that "Our peoples have no future without unity, without integration."

Bolívar and Martí, Fidel and Chávez bequeathed us invaluable teachings, among them loyalty to principles. Their lessons show us the course to follow in this decisive hour of the Great Homeland, which calls for our unity to forge together our second and definitive independence. Thank you very much. (Applause).

"The threats to peace and stability in Venezuela also represent a threat to regional peace and stability."

International Tourism Fair of Cuba, FITCuba 2018



The Villa Clara Keys will once again be hosting the International Tourism Fair of Cuba, FITCuba 2018, which is on its 38th edition.

From May 2 to 6, 2018 this space will be open, where professionals and visitors will enjoy the varied offers that characterize Cuba and this time Villa Clara, as a tourist destination in the central region of the country. A fair of a professional nature, where they will dedicate days to commercial and promotional exchange.

The keys of Villa Clara will be presented: Santa María, Ensenachos and Las Brujas, incredible islets of excellent beaches; an impressive natural environment and a first class infrastructure in terms of com-

fort and facilities; harmoniously inserted in nature.

To this spectacular destination, specialists and promoters of the leisure industry will also visit and appreciate in addition to the bounties of their keys, other cities in development: Caibarién, Remedios, Sagua la Grande and Santa Clara, which complement the offer of Cuban tourism.

On this occasion, it will be dedicated to the United Kingdom as the guest of honor and to the sun and beach modality as a product.

FITCuba 2018 to Relaunch Cayo Santa María as a Tourist Destination



<http://www.plenglish.com> // Prensa Latina

The celebration of the International Tourism Fair, FITCuba 2018, in Cayo Santa María (central Cuban province of Villa Clara), will become a relaunching of that tourist destination to boost its commercialization, authorities of the sector said.

The Cuban Ministry of Tourism posted on its Facebook account today the interest in turning Villa Clara into a tourist bridge.

About seven important hotels will be implemented in the municipality of Santa Clara, provincial capital, Sagua la Grande due to its natural beauty, rich culture and history, as well as Camajuaní, Remedios and Caibarién, municipalities that give way to the keys of the northern Cuban area.

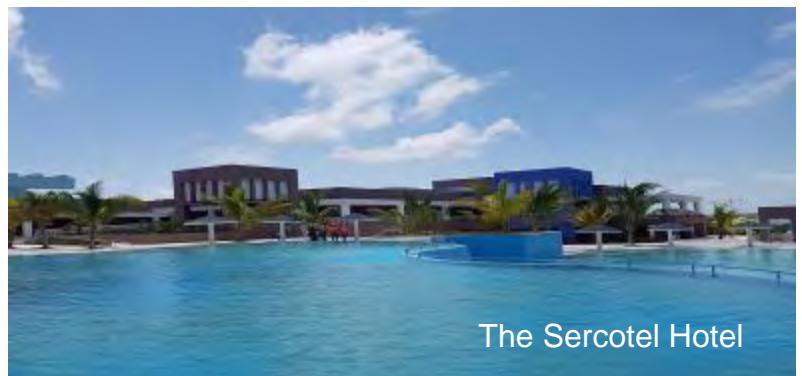
Other important investments to be undertaken are the expansion of the emblematic Los Caneyes Hotel and La Granjita Hotel, in Santa Clara, and the rescue of heritage buildings due to their ideal and attractive characteristics to turn them into accommodation places, the note said.

The 38th edition of FITCuba will take place on May 2-6, dedicated this time to promote the sun and beach modality and the United Kingdom as a guest country.

The Fair is considered the major event of the Leisure Industry in the Caribbean island, which has achieved to position the country in the world as a tourist destination.

The Sercotel Experience Cayo Santa María Hotel, recently opened, will be the venue of FITCuba 2018.

Cayo Santa María is an island of 21.4 square kilometers (about 63.8 percent constitutes land and the remaining marshes and submerged lands occupied by mangrove forests).



The Sercotel Hotel

Cuba continues to attract cruise lines



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Photo: Juvenal Balán

WASHINGTON.— The culture, security and natural beauty of Cuba continue to attract the cruise industry, despite the measures of the current U.S. administration that reinforce the blockade. U.S. company Carnival Cruise Line announced that in 2019 it will offer 17 new trips to Cuba on board the *Carnival Sensation*, with five-day trips departing from South Florida.

According to a statement from the firm, cited by **Prensa Latina**, the trips will include a day in Havana, as well as stops at popular ports in the Caribbean and the Bahamas, including Grand Turk Island, Grand Cayman, Nassau and the private destinations of Half Moon Cay and Princess Cays.

According to surveys conducted with visitors, Cuba stands among their favorite destinations of the Caribbean, a region with high international standards for this industry.

Christine Duffy, president of Carnival Cruise Line, noted that Cuba is a sought after destination and the firm is delighted to offer its customers even more opportunities to experience and explore this “fascinating island.” All cruise trips organized from the United States to Cuba must comply with strict U.S. Treasury Department regulations. The Republican administration headed by President Donald Trump announced last June a series of measures that restrict travel between the two countries and reinforce the economic blockade applied against Cuba for more than half a century. U.S. cruise companies have had to adapt their itineraries to the travel categories approved by Washington, as Cuba remains the only destination to which U.S. visitors are forbidden by law to travel as tourists.

In the same way and using excuses without any scientific basis, the State Department issued a level 3 (of 4) travel warning on Cuba with the recommendation to “reconsider travel” to the island. These attacks contrast with the international recognition of Cuba’s safety as a tourist destination and the level of satisfaction shown by more than four million visitors to the country last year. Despite Washington’s new regulations, Cuba received almost 620,000 U.S. visitors in 2017, more than twice as many as in the previous year.

The interest in visiting Cuba does not seem to be subsiding. The announcement by Carnival Cruise Line appeared just a few days after the U.S. companies Regent Seven Seas Cruises and Norwegian Cruise Line also announced an increase in trips to the Caribbean island. Despite the restrictions imposed by the U.S. blockade to advance bilateral relations and especially maritime-port activity, and the new measures announced by the Trump administration, Cuban authorities have stated that the country plans to implement a broad program of port infrastructure development, aimed at boosting cruise tourism in the different ports of the country, taking into account that the arrival of cruise passengers is increasing year on year.

“U.S. company Carnival Cruise Line will offer 17 new trips to Cuba in 2019 on board the *Carnival Sensation*, with five-day trips departing from South Florida”



Carnival Cruise in Habana, Cuba.

Foreign investment in Cuba and its advances



Photo: Jose M. Correa . Mariel Special Development Zone (ZEDM)

Foreign investment in Cuba is an active and fundamental element of the country's development and economic growth. However, achieving stability in this sector takes time. It is a gradual process, and even though discrete achievements are made each year, it continues to represent a challenge in 2018.

With the approval of the Foreign Investment Law in 2014, a process of changes began which, together with the Economic and Social Policy Guidelines, create an economic scenario more in line with the needs of the country and the regional outlook. At that time, macroeconomic estimates pointed to around 2 billion USD a year of foreign capital as necessary to complement the country's efforts, achieve the goals set and ensure medium and long-term development.

Up until November 2016, Cuba had managed to attract foreign capital commitments of around 1.3 billion dollars. However, as Déborah Rivas Saavedra, director general of Foreign Investment at the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Investment (Mincex), explained to the press, in this first stage, no discernible progress was made in terms of the required Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of between 5 and 7%.

In 2017, Minister of Foreign Trade and Investment Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz announced, in the context of the Havana International Trade Fair (FIHAV 2017), that the country had managed to secure capital commitments for an approximate amount of 2.3 billion USD. This figure translates today into the presence of established businesses in the country, feasibility studies, as well as investment schedules to disburse these funds.

According to Saavedra, this is an important step, since Cuba is beginning to position itself in this field as planned.

This first amount of committed capital, the official added, is being received in the tourism, energy (mainly renewable), construction, logistics, and mining sectors, as well as some agroforestry businesses. In this sense, one of the goals fulfilled concerns the multiplicity of investors, a matter that, in turn, complements the policy of not establishing dependence on a single country or market, but diversifying the origin of foreign capital.

The clearest examples of advances to date can be seen in the Mariel Special Development Zone (ZEDM) and in two sectors of the economy: tourism and energy.

“A total of 15 countries, in addition to Cuba, are represented in the Mariel Special Development Zone (ZEDM) ”

MARIEL SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT ZONE

There are already 15 countries, in addition to Cuba, represented in the Mariel Special Development Zone. The zone is today, the country's most ambitious foreign investment project, and after four years of efforts, it currently has 34 approved business projects, while it is simultaneously developing its necessary infrastructure.

ZEDM General Director Ana Teresa Igarza Martinez told reporters that for 2018, the imperatives of the zone are to increase the amount of users operating in the area (currently ten), to ensure that these ongoing investments conclude their construction processes, start production and begin to see returns, as has happened with other companies present; and that these in turn can reinvest.

TOURISM

One of the most dynamic sectors of the Cuban economy today is tourism. Its presence in the ZEDM, with the first joint venture for real estate development, has served to rethink new investments within the zone, which in turn can contribute to the development of this sector.

“Complementing the Development Plans through 2030 are the premises of the tourism sector, not only with its own investment but also with foreign investment. A process is underway to boost investment throughout the country. We are talking about heritage cities and many other sectors and resorts that can be developed, and in which investment is being called for,” explained José Reinaldo Daniel Alonso, general director of Development at the Ministry of Tourism (Mintur), speaking on national television.

Hotel management contracts, joint ventures, especially for real estate development, and the expansion of non-hotel

options, are the three categories in which the sector has managed to attract the most foreign capital.

The greatest growth, the Mintur official noted, is seen in the hotel management contracts. There are 20 companies from 10 countries currently operating in the country, including luxury brands such as Kempinski and Banyan Tree of Southeast Asia.

By the end of January this year, 90 contracts had been signed and 118 hotels had been approved to be run under foreign administration, representing 65% of the hotel rooms in the country. Among the investments this year, are the construction of two new hotels in Trinidad and the restoration of many others in the country to improve the comfort of these facilities. One of the demands of the sector is non-hotel development, with the planned creation of marinas, theme parks and other attractions that complement hotel offers.

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND OIL

With the aim of transforming the structure of renewable energy sources, reducing dependence on fossil fuels and increasing environmental sustainability, in 2014 the Policy for the Prospective Development of Renewable Energy in Cuba was approved.

In this area, the investment process has been turned toward sugarcane biomass, to install bioelectric plants in 25 sugar mills across the country. Currently, as Javier Rubén Cid Carbonell, deputy minister of Energy and Mines (Minem) explained to the press, work is underway on the execution of this project with one joint venture and another company of one hundred percent foreign capital.

Likewise, the deputy minister added, efforts are underway in the oil sector, in which it is becoming increasingly difficult to find investors given current low market prices for this fuel. However, in 2017 progress was made on two projects related to increasing production, one in Varadero and another in the Mariel Special Development Zone.

Other advances in 2017 include negotiations with joint ventures, one for the commercialization of liquefied gas in the center of the country, and another for fuel storage in Matanzas.

Also, the Minem official noted, a project is underway for the purchase, processing and interpretation of 25,000 line-kilometers of high resolution seismic data, which is being carried out for the first time in the history of the Cuban oil industry, and will serve as a basis for possible exploration projects on the island.

Together with these, other projects related to energy and the manufacture of solar panels and heaters, the use of wind energy, the manufacture of pylons and other fundamental elements for a sustainable economy are being promoted.

Specifically in this sector, projects related to the use of lead and zinc are in progress. Currently, 9,000 tons of concentrate of these products are exported, already representing a real contribution to the economy of the country.

WHAT DOES INCREASING FOREIGN INVESTMENT DEPEND ON?

As the governing body of this policy, the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Investment today has the highest share of responsibility for ensuring that all projects are quickly and efficiently negotiated, agreed and approved.

On this issue, Déborah Rivas Saavedra explained that until now there are shortcomings in the process. Among these, she mentioned unnecessary delays that continue to be present in different negotiating processes; the holdup of feasibility studies; the lack of training in terms, for example, of commercial law, private international law, the evaluation of cost sheets, technology and others.

Likewise, she highlighted the existence of a group of procedures and permits that are not achieved in a comprehensive and organic manner, and that are essential to place productive chains at the center of the process, and achieve the harmonious development required by the country in the medium and long term.

"Even though awareness of the importance of seeking foreign capital has been raised and brought to the attention of businesspeople, in order to achieve the set objectives for growth and development, what the country is receiving in terms of attracting capital is still insufficient," Saavedra stressed.

The country demands significant amounts of committed foreign capital annually in order to raise GDP and achieve development. Although today foreign investment reaches Cuba, this first step still falls below what is required. Executing investments and achieving stability in this sector is a gradual process, however, this does not mean that it is not also an imperative.



Mariel Special Development Zone (ZEDM)

OPEC Fund to help finance Cuban solar energy project



HAVANA, Cuba, Mar 2 (ACN) The International Development Fund (OFID) with the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) will contribute to finance Cuba's Solar Energy Development Project, following a bilateral accord signed Thursday by the two sides in Vienna, Austria.

The accord was penned by the acting Charge d' affairs at the Cuban embassy in Austria, Marieta Garcia, and by the OFID director-general Sleiman Jasir Al-Herbish. The OFID executive said that a 45 million dollar credit line has been granted to Cuba to contribute to the modernization and diversification of the island's energy matrix through the increase in the capacity of current solar energy systems.

The project will help increase power generation with more efficiency based on the use of domestic solar

panels and water heaters both for the industry and the residential sector.

The Cuban official praised the support given by the international organization over two decades by explaining that such cooperation included 13 financial accords granting funds for projects in agriculture, rehabilitation of electric grids and sewage systems and aqueducts as well as renewable energy actions in several Cuban provinces.

The OFID was set up in 1976 as a financial institution aimed at offering assistance to low income countries in different areas of economic and social development.

Construction of Cuba's largest power station underway



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CIENFUEGOS.— Construction of the largest diesel power station in Cuba, located in Cienfuegos, is advancing at a satisfactory pace, according to the work schedule. Using German technology and the most modern of its kind in the country, a total of 40 engines are being installed at the site, which will be responsible for generating 84 Mwh, enough to guarantee 60% percent of local power demand.

Eight of the plant's diesel engines have already been installed and are ready to generate power, noted Jesús Rey Pérez Crespo, director of the Provincial Electric Company, in charge of investment at the site. Completing the works are construction enterprises supported by local industries.

The plant is located close to the Camilo Cienfuegos Oil Refinery, in order to receive diesel through a pipeline from the refinery, a decision that avoids the further costs of transportation. In addition to the installation of the pipeline, other projects such as a water conductor, the 110kv transmission line linking the generators to

the National Electric Power System, and the expansion of the 220/110 kv substation in Cantarrana, where a 35 hectare plant is being installed, are included in the overall project. The plant in Cienfuegos is scheduled to be inaugurated in November this year, with works already 68 percent complete by the end of February. This project is part of a national program through 2023, aimed at installing 200Mwh of power generation in the provinces of Cienfuegos, Villa Clara, Matanzas and Pinar del Río.



Cienfuegos