

OPEN LETTER FROM  
IGNACIO RAMONET TO PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN

**“Take Cuba off the list of sponsors of terrorism!”**

**Ignacio Ramonet**

Professor. Writer. Journalist

Paris (France)

**Mr. Joseph R. Biden**

President of the United States of America

Washington DC (USA)

Mr. President Joe Biden,

Your presidential term is coming to an end in a few months. With all due respect, I am writing to you on behalf of a significant number of individuals, social movements, trade unions, humanitarian associations, and non-governmental organizations worldwide who sign this letter with me. We are waiting for a gesture from you to redress a profound injustice committed on January 12, 2021, by your predecessor, Donald Trump, when, a few weeks before leaving the White House, he decided —without any real legal basis— to re-inscribe Cuba on the infamous list of State Sponsors of Terrorism (SSOT list).

Mr. President, as you know, that SSOT list is a foreign policy mechanism conceived by the US Secretary of State (Foreign Ministry) to sanction those countries that *“repeatedly support acts of international terrorism”*.

Mr. President, in an act of justice and political clarity, the administration of President Barack Obama, of which you were a part, removed Cuba from that dishonorable list in 2015. This represented a very positive step towards forging, at last, a more constructive relationship with Havana.

During the administration of Barack Obama, when you were Vice President of the United States, it was possible to move towards normalizing diplomatic relations between two neighbors with different political systems willing to understand each other based on mutual respect.

Mr. President, you are not unaware that Cuba has always denounced and fought terrorism. It has never encouraged or sponsored it. It has never practiced it. For 65 years, despite the tensions that may have existed between the United States and Cuba, not a single case of violent action that has taken place in US territory has been sponsored, directly or indirectly, by Havana. Not a single case!

On the other hand, Cuba has been one of the countries most attacked by terrorist organizations. More than 3,500 Cuban citizens have died in attacks committed by terrorist groups financed, armed, and trained by violent organizations based, for the most part, in the United States. In other words, it is the world upside down. And you know it.

Mr. President, you are also not unaware that by having —unjustly— included Cuba in that SSOT list, numerous and painful unilateral coercive measures are applied to this country and all its innocent population. The most atrocious consequences derive from the risk associated with any humanitarian aid, business, investment, and trade involving Cuba and, by extension, its citizens. For example, Cubans with foreign citizenship who qualify for an Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) waiver to travel to the United States have been denied that waiver. Cubans residing in the European Union have had their bank accounts closed because, as their country is on the SSOT list, they automatically become “*high-risk customers*.” Many religious groups have had their funds frozen and humanitarian aid shipments to the island blocked. Individuals attempting to transfer money via PayPal or Wise to family members in Cuba may have their funds frozen and their accounts blocked. Most banks refuse to process Cuban payments and have frozen sums of money for

humanitarian activities. The presence of Cuba on the SSOT list limits, for individuals, the opening of bank accounts abroad, the use of instruments for international collections and payments, access to digital banking, the contracting of servers and online services, and a thousand other impediments.

Mr. President, including Cuba in this SSOT list also means that foreign travelers from countries included in the ESTA who wish to visit Cuba must apply for a special visa at the Consulate General of the US Embassy in their country of origin. This policy, implemented by your administration, has disastrously impacted Cuba's tourism industry, a sector of decisive importance for the island's fragile economy.

Mr. President, as you know, all this comes on top of the terrible consequences of the cruel and illegal economic, commercial, and financial blockade against Cuba that the Government of your country has maintained for more than 60 years. This blockade ignores the clear position of the international community and the successive resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and continues with its purpose of generating shortages and discontent among the population, which would lead to protests against the Cuban authorities.

Mr. President, such an aggressive design, which has caused so much pain and so much ordeal among the innocent civilian population of Cuba, has reached inhuman dimensions of punishment during the last decade —as your wife Jill Biden was able to confirm during her visit to the island in October 2016. The Cuban people lack access to many essential goods and resources: medicines, food, construction materials, fertilizers, energy, industrial machinery, and spare parts that cannot be imported because Cuba is on that list. The current migratory wave of Cuban expatriates to the United States, unprecedented in its magnitude, is perhaps the most illustrative example of the devastating impact and suffering caused by the extreme and brutal measures against the Cuban economy derived from

both the criminal blockade and the unjust inclusion of Cuba in the infamous SSOT list.

Mr. President, you are also not unaware that, in May 2024, the State Department decided to remove Cuba from the list of “*States that do not cooperate in the fight against terrorism.*” A right and just decision. Despite this, and in a contradictory, incongruous, confusing, and unjustifiable manner, your administration insists on keeping Cuba on the SSOT list, the list of State *sponsors* of terrorism. How is it possible to affirm, at the same time, that Cuba does cooperate in the global fight against terrorism and, at the same time, accuse Havana of openly sponsoring terrorism? The best way to clarify this contradiction is to remove Cuba from the SSOT list immediately.

Mr. President, Cuba is not a sponsor of terrorism. On the contrary, Cuba is a sponsor of peace. And you know it. No doubt you remember that, while you were Vice President of the United States, in 2016, the Peace Agreements were signed in Havana between the State of Colombia and the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), at that time considered a “*terrorist organization,*” which put an end to more than half a century of war and massacres, and which even earned Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos the Nobel Peace Prize. This would not have been possible without the active diplomatic participation of the Cuban Government.

Mr. President, that pacification was so impactful that, as of 2018, the Colombian Government of President Juan Manuel Santos asked Cuba to host a process of talks with leaders of another armed organization, the National Liberation Army (ELN), following Ecuador's decision to decline to host. As you recall, these talks with the ELN stalled following a heinous car bombing in Bogota in 2019 that ripped through a police academy, causing numerous casualties, and claimed by the ELN.

Mr. President, as a result of that tragedy, the Government of Iván Duque requested the extradition to Colombia of the ELN leaders who, protected

by a special diplomatic status, were in Cuba for peace negotiations. Havana was unable to grant the request. Indeed, international diplomatic agreements do not allow it since extradition would violate the protocols established as guarantor of the peace talks between the ELN and the Colombian Government. Norway, another key guarantor of those peace talks, fully agreed with Havana's position, as did most governments. However, this legitimate rejection by Havana was the pretext used by his predecessor, Donald Trump, in January 2021 to put Cuba back on the dreadful SSOT list.

Mr. President, Cuba has not ceased to promote peace. This is proof that, in 2022, Gustavo Petro, the new President of Colombia, announced that the request for extradition of ELN leaders would be withdrawn as part of his “*total peace*” initiative. For its part, Havana agreed to host and guarantee peace talks between Bogotá and the ELN again. As you know, thanks to Cuba's mediation, on June 9, 2023, in Havana, President Gustavo Petro and Antonio Garcia, ELN guerrilla commander, shook hands in a meeting where they agreed, for the first time, on a point of the agreed agenda and a bilateral ceasefire that constitutes a historic step towards the silence of weapons and definitive peace in Colombia. This ceasefire, by the way, was renewed in Havana six months later after crucial efforts by the Cuban Government. Months later, Cuba accepted a new proposal from the Colombian Government to be the guarantor and *alternative venue* for another peace process, this time with the armed rebel group Segunda Marquetalia.

Mr. President, Cuba is not only a promoter of peace but, like no other country in the world, it promotes health. Over the past twenty years, Havana has sent more than 600,000 health professionals and technicians to 165 countries. This has meant alleviating the suffering of many sick people and saving the lives of millions worldwide.

Mr. President, Cuba is not only a promoter of peace and health; like no other country, but it also promotes education, as has been widely

recognized by UNESCO. Thousands of Cuban teachers and professors have intervened in dozens of countries to combat illiteracy and encourage the schooling of millions of girls and boys. This is the very opposite of “*promoting terrorism*” ...

Mr. President, in 2021, shortly after you were installed in the White House, several senior officials in your administration promised to review Cuba's inclusion on the SSOT list. In October 2022, your Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, reiterated that promise. In 2023, forty-six Congressmen, many of them Democrats, sent you a letter asking you to make good on that promise. In June 2024, in a joint statement in the 56th session of the UN Human Rights Council, no less than 123 countries demanded the same of your government. But despite these promises and important requests, you have done nothing to end this scandalous injustice.

Mr. President, this situation must end. You know it. There is not a single valid and reasonable argument to accuse Cuba and keep its population under an illegal and inhumane collective punishment. You have the authority, before leaving the White House, to correct such a cruel absurdity and remove Cuba from the SSOT list. Do it now!

In the hope that you, Mr. President, will know how to rise to this historic moment and heed this request, I respectfully bid you farewell,

Ignacio Ramonet