

August 12, 2021

President Joe Biden,  
c/o The Embassy of the United States  
Queens Park West,  
Port of Spain,  
Trinidad and Tobago.

Dear President Biden

**End the Illegal and Illegitimate Blockade against Cuba Now!**

**We the undersigned individuals and representatives of social movements in Trinidad and Tobago are writing to you to express our deep concern over the continuation of the economic blockade against Cuba and of the Trump era measures taken against Cuba. Our position is consistent with that of CARICOM Governments. Cuba is an integral part of our Caribbean. Mr. President, you have it within your power to take certain actions and, therefore, this Open Letter is being addressed to you very directly.**

**We state at the outset that we strongly disagree with what you have done recently. History will not absolve you unless you reverse your policy course.**

Some years ago, your predecessor as President – a person who you publicly and correctly described as the worst President of the United States ever – announced that he would build a wall between the United States and Mexico to deal with the issue of immigration. His supporters, wound up by fears fuelled by racism, shouted, “Build the wall! Build the wall!” On the other hand, your Pope, the leader of your faith, said that it is wrong to build walls. Build bridges instead, Pope Francis counselled. It was, we are sure you would agree, wise counsel. Indeed, one of the early decisions that you took as President was to reverse, by Executive Order, the policy of building the wall.

Mr. President, for more than sixty years the United States has put up a wall around Cuba. That wall is not physical – as Trump’s wall is. That wall is economic, commercial and financial. It is constructed through various pieces of US law – the Toricelli Act and the Helms-Burton Act, among them – and has been reinforced by Executive Orders signed by your predecessor. We call this wall a blockade.

Interestingly, this wall, this blockade, is not meant to keep Cubans from illegally entering the United States. In fact, for most of the 60 years of the blockade, the US has had the opposite policy on Cuban immigration to your country. Cubans were encouraged to enter the US ILLEGALLY as your Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 explicitly provided for Cubans who entered US waters illegally to be given legal residency and later citizenship. This UNILATERAL arrangement applied to no other country. In 1995, the policy was amended somewhat to allow Cubans to get to

US shores (the so-called wet foot, dry foot policy) when they would be given legal residency and then citizenship. Again, this applied only to Cubans.

It is to be noted that legal immigration was made almost impossible as the US rarely gave visas to Cubans. You would no doubt recall, Mr. President, that when you were Vice President, President Obama in January 2017, by Executive Order, ended this odious system of deliberately encouraging illegal immigration and cynically putting at risk the lives of people. Today, however, because of your predecessor's policies, a Cuban national living in Cuba who wishes to obtain a US visa can't get it at the US Embassy in Havana! They must travel to a third country to be interviewed at your Embassy in that third country and then await the decision before returning home. Would you accept another country treating a US national in this manner?

The wall, the blockade, Mr. President, was created for the explicit purpose of inflicting pain on the Cuban people. Let us remind you of this rationale as stated in 1960 by the then Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Lester Mallory in a Memo: *"The only foreseeable means of alienating internal support is through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship... . It follows that every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba. If such a policy is adopted, it should be the result of a positive decision which would call forth a line of action which, while as adroit and inconspicuous as possible, makes the greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government."* **"To bring about hunger and desperation."** What manner of humanity is this, Mr. President? Is this part of your oft-repeated "American values"? Is this in keeping with Your Lord's edict to treat others as you would wish them to treat you? Is this the lesson of the Good Samaritan?

Mr. President, one of the issues that you campaigned on – and some claim that it was decisive in your winning office – was how to deal with the Covid 19 pandemic. Saving lives was your mantra, and quite correctly so. But how do you justify either the continuation of the blockade against Cuba or Trump's 243 additional measures while Cuba and the rest of the world are battling the pandemic? Is the life of an American more valuable than the life of a Cuban? Whose life must be saved? Mustn't all lives be saved, especially in this pandemic?

You see, Mr. President, the US blockade has prevented Cuba from buying ventilators! Yes, ventilators that can save lives cannot be purchased because of the US blockade. And not just ventilators but also other vitally needed medical items like syringes to put jabs in arms; PPE for health care workers; raw materials that are needed for Cuba's manufacture of its own vaccines; other medicine.

You may say that if Cuba can't buy it from the US, then they can buy it from other countries. That would, however, be a dangerously wrong understanding of the blockade since provisions of the Toricelli Act prevent subsidiaries of US companies that may be located outside the US from doing business with Cuba, under penalty of sanction of the parent company. Worse, provisions of the Helms-Burton Act specify that non-US companies and third countries that do business with Cuba can be sanctioned by the US. This means, for example, that a ship that has gone to Cuba can be blocked from entering the US and seized if it does.

This would be illegal as these laws, which penalise countries other than the US, as well as companies that are not US owned, are not the result of any multilateral decision. These laws/sanctions were unilaterally imposed by the United States. Mr. President, while many countries quite rightly ignored your country's highhanded illegal behaviour, the blockade has meant that the cost to Cuba of doing business with the rest of the world is exceedingly high, while Cuba's exports face many restrictions and limitations. Nothing is exempt from these laws; food, medicines, plant and equipment and much more are all impacted.

This is why, Mr. President, the United States stands alone, totally isolated in the world on the issue of Cuba. For 29 consecutive years, the United Nations General Assembly has voted almost unanimously in support of the Resolution tabled by the Government of Cuba calling for the end of the "Economic, Commercial and Financial Embargo" (which we call 'the blockade'). Six weeks ago, 184 countries voted in the UN General Assembly for the end of the blockade. Only two – the United States and Israel – voted for the blockade to be continued. Why did you not at least abstain in that vote in June this year as the US did in 2016 when you were the Vice President? Do you really think that your position is an example of principled and enlightened leadership by the US?

Mr. President, the blockade is akin to the knee on the neck of the Cuban people! They cannot breathe! But then, this was the objective, wasn't it? ***"To bring about hunger and desperation."*** Is that your objective today? Your actions will give us the answer. We know that it was the objective of your predecessor. That is why he implemented 243 new measures to intensify the blockade. That is why he reversed all of the Executive Orders issued by President Obama when you were the Vice President. Your predecessor, like the bully that he is, took great glee in increasing the pressure of the knee on the necks of the Cuban people. We – yes, we proudly identify with them – are not real people; our lives don't matter. After all, countries like ours in the Caribbean were seen by him as "s...hole countries".

This reinforcing of the wall/blockade by your predecessor became even more odious with the designation – again, unilaterally – of Cuba as a country engaged in so-called "state-sponsored terrorism." This was done, like many of your predecessor's decisions and pronouncements on a lie. This is a "Big Lie". Cuba is not a state sponsor of terrorism. Indeed, Cuba has been the victim of terrorist acts.

We cite just one, one which is close to us here in the Caribbean. Mr. President, do you recall the October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1976 bombing of a Cubana airplane? We certainly do because the two persons who planted that bomb boarded flight CU 455 in Trinidad and got off in Barbados. The bombs went off shortly after the plane took off from Barbados and killed all 73 people on board. On that flight were many young people – Guyanese students on their way to university in Cuba; and all 24 members of the 1975 national Cuban fencing team that had just won all the gold medals in the Central American and Caribbean Games. After the two who planted the bombs came off the plane, they headed back to Trinidad where the police arrested them.

Your CIA was implicated in that terrorist attack. The two perpetrators of the horrific deed admitted their guilt and fingered the masterminds, Orlando Bosch and Luis Posada Carriles, both known CIA operatives, who were in Venezuela. The US harboured these terrorists for years.

We can cite many other acts of terrorism – assassinations; attempted assassinations; military coup d'états – carried out in our hemisphere over very many years with the direct support of the US.

Mr. President, what if other countries had the military and economic power to unilaterally declare the US a state sponsor of terrorism? Do you know what the consequences of that would be? It would mean that financial institutions the world over would not want to process legal and legitimate transactions for payments related to trade for fear of them being “blacklisted” as involved in financing terrorism. Since those institutions that do accept transactions charge higher rates of interest to cover the risk, it would mean that firms supplying goods and services would suddenly back away for the same reason. It would mean that transactions that must go through a US corresponding bank cannot be processed.

That is what Cuba experiences now, sir. The knee on their neck is cutting off their air!

We are sure, Mr. President that you are well aware of the many other measures implemented by your predecessor, including: US-owned/-based cruise ships stopped from visiting Cuba; no more remittances from folks in the US to their families in Cuba; Western Union and other wire transfer firms losing the ability to process transactions to Cuba, not only from the US but from third-party countries as well; travel restrictions re-imposed on US citizens/residents wishing to visit Cuba, thus restricting that country's earnings of foreign exchange in an environment where its primary source of such earnings – the tourism industry – has been crippled by the pandemic.

We repeat, your predecessor implemented 243 measures to reinforce the wall – the blockade. Many of these were implemented post the onslaught of the pandemic. This borders on committing genocide as it seeks to condemn people to illness and death!

If you are concerned about a humanitarian crisis in Cuba, then **THE SIMPLE SOLUTION IS TO END THE BLOCKADE**, Mr. President! That would enable Cuba to breathe, to engage in unfettered trade, to earn foreign exchange to purchase the good and services that it needs to address the needs of its people.

Mr. President, we have no choice but to question your intentions when you boast that “America is Back!” What did you mean? Is America back to the days of the Monroe Doctrine? In fact, has it ever left that Doctrine behind? Is every sovereign nation in this hemisphere to do the bidding of the US and accede to what the US determines, unilaterally, as being in its national security interest, or else face sanctions (or even military intervention)? What does America, “leader of the free world” mean? Remember, the US claimed this status when it supported the racist apartheid regime in South Africa; contributed to the overthrow of democratically elected governments in Chile, Guatemala and Dominican Republic; militarily occupied Haiti; and hugged up brutal dictatorships throughout Latin America – all in the name of so-called US interests.

Is America going to accept the will of the United Nations and end the blockade or will it thumb its nose at world opinion because, like a bully, it has might on its side?

Mr. President, you have the power to decide. You have the power in your hands to reverse all the Trump era Executive Orders. That will be a start. With a Democratic Congress, you can also move

to end this odious blockade once and for all. That is the right thing to do. It may cost you some votes in some states, but it cannot be morally right to do the wrong thing just to win votes. Surely that is the platform on which your opponent in November last year campaigned. You vehemently opposed that by saying, “We are better than that.” Today, the world is looking on in judgement. Actions speak louder than words. Are you not better than your predecessor was?

For us, the humanity of Cuba has been proven time and time again. The humanity of the US is still very much in question. Cubans fought and died in southern Africa to help liberate people who were colonised and end apartheid while the US supported the racist, undemocratic, apartheid regime. In this time of pandemic, Cuba has provided hundreds of health care professionals to assist countries, including Trinidad and Tobago, in need of human resources to battle the disease and save lives. The US denied Cuba medicines and ventilators and even threatened our countries with sanctions because we have Cubans working in our health sector! Cuba, in spite of all its challenges, is the only country in the global south to produce its own vaccines – not one but several and, therefore, can vaccinate its people without recourse to the vaccines that are inaccessible either because of the blockade or the selfishness of countries that pursue the policy of “vaccine apartheid”.

We have, we think, Mr. President, said more than enough to make our case. Do the right thing! Build bridges, not perpetuate the wall that was a construct of a bygone era and has served no purpose other than to inflict pain on the Cuban people. Your meeting with only those sections of the Cuban-American community in Florida who have been historically opposed to the Cuban government was certainly not about building bridges with the Cuban people. It was about vote seeking in the most opportunistic way. And the additional sanctions that you have implemented since becoming President are reinforcing the wall. It is a repudiation of the Obama policies of which you were an integral part in implementing as “the last man in the room”. It is a demonstration of a total lack of principle to walk back from those positions.

Come to the side of world opinion and join the other 184 countries in the UN family that voted to end the blockade.

Respect the sovereignty of Cuba and its right to determine its own system and way of life.

Engage them in respectful dialogue.

Stop seeking to interfere in other countries’ internal affairs since you have, quite rightly, objected to countries that have tried to interfere in your nation’s affairs. To do otherwise would be hypocritical.

Stop being self-righteous. Every country has its flaws. Certainly, the US has many, including democratic deficits. But that is not for us to say – though we read about it and see it very day in the media.

Mr. President, you can either be in defence of humanity or in defiance of it. You cannot be both.

End the blockade against Cuba now!

We are, respectfully,

- David Abdulah - Political and Social Activist
- Rawle Aimey - Educator
- Dean Arlen - Installation Artist
- Atiba Bostic - Attorney at Law
- Chantal Esdelle - Musician, Producer, Educator
- Dr. Merle Hodge - Writer, University Lecturer, Activist in the Women's Movement
- Dr. Gabrielle Hosein - Lecturer, The University of the West Indies, Caribbean Feminist
- Dr. Winford James - University Lecturer and Political Analyst
- Dr. David Johnson - Former Professor at the City University of New York
- Gregory Prevatt - Attorney at Law
- Raffique Shah - Social Activist
- Professor Winston Suite - Chairman, UMROBI
- Dr. Jerome Teelucksingh - Lecturer, The University of the West Indies
- Rubadiri Victor - President, Artists Coalition of Trinidad and Tobago
- Professor Patrick Watson - Professor Emeritus, The University of The West Indies
- Clyde Weatherhead - Attorney at Law
- Rhonda G. Wilson - Project Manager
- Hamida Baksh, Nick Cumberbatch, Robert Hernandez, John Julien - Trinidad and Tobago-Cuba Education and Cultural Exchange

**Organisations:**

- Assembly of Caribbean People, Trinidad and Tobago Chapter
- Banking Insurance and General Workers' Union
- Communication Workers' Union
- Federation of Independent Trade Unions and NGO's (FITUN)
- Industrial Sanitation and General Workers' Union
- Joint Trade Union Movement (JTUM)
- Movement for Social Justice (MSJ)
- Oilfields Workers' Trade Union
- Trinidad and Tobago Farmers' Union
- Trinidad and Tobago Friends of Cuba
- Trinidad and Tobago Postal Workers' Union
- Youth for Social Justice (YSJ)