

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

May 11, 2023

The Honorable Veronica Escobar
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ms. Escobar and Mr. Grijalva,

I am writing in response to your recent letter to President Biden urging him to reverse U.S. sanctions policies on Cuba and Venezuela in response to the dire migration and refugee crisis we face in our hemisphere. I fully share your concern about the unprecedented levels of vulnerable populations arriving at our borders, including but not limited to Cubans and Venezuelans, and agree with the need to dramatically expand efforts to address the factors forcing refugees and migrants to flee their homeland. However, I vehemently disagree with your assessment that U.S. sanctions policies towards Cuba and Venezuela are a leading contributor to this crisis. The truth is that Cubans and Venezuelans are leaving their homeland because of one simple fact: they are suffering under the yoke of brutal dictatorships that violently repress their citizens and that have destroyed their countries' economies through widespread mismanagement and graft.

For decades, the Cuban and Venezuelan regimes have systematically curtailed the fundamental freedoms and basic human rights of their populations, fueling widespread discontent. As the State Department notes in its annual Human Rights Report, the Cuban regime prohibits human rights groups from functioning legally and regularly harasses, intimidates, and assaults human rights and prodemocracy advocates and their families, including detaining thousands of political prisoners. In recent years, Cuba's Diaz Canel regime has gone to extensive lengths to further repress free expression on the island, jailing hundreds of peaceful protesters during nationwide demonstrations in July 2021, including dozens of minors. Most of these protestors remain in prison on arbitrary sentences today. Similarly, since at least 2014, Venezuela's Maduro regime has repeatedly and violently repressed peaceful protests, persecuted democratic activists, and perpetrated thousands of extrajudicial killings. Because of these actions, the Maduro regime has been found to have committed crimes against humanity by the United Nations Fact Finding Mission and is the focus of an ongoing investigation by the International Criminal Court.

Deepening levels of political repression in Cuba and Venezuela have also been accompanied by the chronic mismanagement of the countries' economies, exacerbating the humanitarian conditions facing the Cuban and Venezuelan people. In Cuba, the Diaz Canel regime continues to prohibit any semblance of a market economy and has expanded the Cuban military's control over numerous economic sectors. Rather than provide a living wage for the Cuban people or provide real opportunities for independent Cuban entrepreneurs, the Diaz Canel regime remains committed to a state-run labor system that artificially depresses wages, affords promotions based on political loyalties, and prohibits foreign companies in Cuba from directly hiring or paying

their employees. Meanwhile, in Venezuela over the last decade, the Maduro regime's widespread mismanagement of the economy has fueled numerous waves of hyperinflation and driven monthly salaries to \$10. Moreover, regime officials have stolen tens of billions of dollars from the Venezuelan people, absconding with funds needed for social programs and economic development in the country.

These actions, not U.S. sanctions policies, are responsible for the ongoing exodus of Venezuelan and Cuban refugees and migrants. Removing U.S. sanctions on Cuba and Venezuela will only betray our democratic values and further empower criminal dictators. Such an approach would do nothing to resolve the underlying factors driving these crises, nor address the broader hemispheric challenges that are leading to unprecedented levels of migration, including another criminal dictatorship in Nicaragua, a failed state in Haiti, worsening criminal activity in Mexico and Central America, and enduring economic challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

If we want to get serious about addressing these urgent challenges, we cannot rely on misguided calls for the unilateral lifting of U.S. sanctions on Cuba and Venezuela, but must pursue a comprehensive approach to migration and refugee flows. As I recently called for in my plan to "Secure Our Borders by Managing Migration in the Americas," the United States must take additional steps to bolster humanitarian assistance, expand lawful migration pathways for migrant and refugee populations, and dedicate additional financial resources towards programs to help migrants integrate into communities hosting them across the Americas. Despite our disagreement on U.S. policy towards Cuba and Venezuela, I know we share a commitment to addressing our migration and refugee challenges in a humane manner and I look forward to continue working with you in finding common ground to engage the Biden administration in support of these efforts.

Sincerely,



Robert Menéndez
Chairman

CC:

The Honorable Nanette Diaz Barragán, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Greg Casar, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable J. Luis Correa, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Jesús "Chuy" García, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Yvette Clarke, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Sheila Jackson Lee, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Jamaal Bowman, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Juan Vargas, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable David Trone, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Jan Schakowsky, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Rashida Tlaib, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Nydia Velázquez, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Delia Ramirez, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Bonnie Watson Coleman, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Ro Khanna, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Andre Carson, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Cori Bush, U.S. House of Representatives