

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 6, 2015

COMMITTEES:  
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND  
TRANSPORTATION  
FOREIGN RELATIONS  
SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE  
SMALL BUSINESS AND  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I wholly disagree with your recent decision to normalize relations with the Castro regime in Cuba. In particular, I am deeply concerned that beyond the supposed release of 53 Cuban political prisoners, no specific commitments were made by the regime regarding political reforms, the release of all political prisoners, or a halt to the use of arbitrary detentions as an instrument of state power.

As we have now seen in vivid detail, less than two weeks after your announcement, the arrests, arbitrary detentions, and use of violence and intimidation to stifle dissent continue. The late December detentions of more than a dozen artists and dissidents who were simply trying to highlight their concerns about the government through a performance entitled #YoTambienExijo (#IAAlsoDemand) again shows the true nature of the regime that you have now decided to legitimize and enrich. Others, like young artist Danilo Maldonado and activist Marcelino Abreu Bonora, were arrested during Christmas and remain imprisoned.

Throughout its history, the Cuban dictatorship has used the revolving door of its political prisons to extract concessions, and it seems to be doing so once again. Moreover, the regime seems to be emboldened by its negotiations with your Administration and its unearned diplomatic recognition. It is unfathomable that while your Administration was holding secret talks with the Cuban dictatorship, political arrests totaled 8,899 in 2014, according to the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation – quadrupling 2010 levels, and approximately 2,000 more than in 2013.

Even your announcement that Cuba has agreed to release 53 current political prisoners remains shrouded in doubt and secrecy. To date, no information has been provided about the political prisoners to be released – regarding their identities, conditions or whereabouts, even on a confidential basis, to members of Congress. Just yesterday, your own State Department was unable to provide an explanation about the political prisoners in question. How is the United States supposed to hold the Cuban dictatorship responsible for the well-being of these political prisoners if your Administration is unable or unwilling to provide this transparency?

Despite all of this, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson, who is reportedly being sent to Havana later this month to discuss normalizing relations, has already stated that there will be no human rights conditionality to America's normalization of relations.

While I believe that the entirety of your new Cuba policy is overwhelmingly one-sided in the Castro regime's favor and based on the flawed premise that giving it more legitimacy and money will result in a freer Cuban people, the least your Administration can do now is hold the regime accountable for fully freeing these 53 political prisoners as well as those who have been detained in recent weeks. A failure to do so will further embolden the regime to continue its oppression.

To this end, I urge you to cancel the travel of Administration officials to Cuba to further discuss the normalization of diplomatic relations at least until all 53 political prisoners, plus those arrested since your December 17th announcement, have been released and are no longer subjected to repression that often takes the form of house arrests, aggressive surveillance, denied Internet access, forced exile and other forms of harassment. Almost three weeks after your Cuba announcement, there is absolutely no reason why any of these individuals should be in prison or the targets of repression – or for their identities, conditions and whereabouts to remain such closely held secrets.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Marco Rubio', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marco Rubio  
United States Senator