

# *Cuba and U.S. Sign Search and Rescue Agreement*

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Havana, January 18 (RHC)-- Cuba and the United States have signed an agreement for cooperation on aeronautical and maritime search and rescue that provides for joint, coordinated life-saving operations.

The agreement, the first legally-binding instrument in the field of transport between the United States and Cuba, is seen as timely, given the resumption of regular, direct flights between the two nations last August.

In 2016, a total of 614 thousand 433 tourists arrived in Cuba from the United States, representing a 34% rise over the previous year. Under the new agreements, a U.S.-flagged cruise ship docked at Cuban ports –the first one to do so in over 50 years.

Also in 2016, a total of 284 thousand 937 U.S. citizens visited Cuba, representing a 74% increase as compared with 2015, despite travel restrictions under the U.S. blockade, which bar Americans from visiting Cuba as tourists.

The agreement was signed on Wednesday in Havana by Cuba's Deputy Transportation Minister Marta Oramas Rivero and Jeffrey DeLaurentis, Chargé d'Affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Cuba.

In statements to the press, Oramas Rivero said that the accord is the result of intense exchanges by search and rescue authorities from both the U.S. and Cuba over the past several years.

The Cuban senior transportation official added that the new agreement also provides for joint drills, periodic checks of communication channels, reciprocal visits by officials and experts and information sharing.

Jeffrey DeLaurentis, noted that the U.S. and Cuba have carried out joint search and rescue operations for more than 20 years. He stressed that the new agreement will further strengthen bilateral cooperation in the common effort to save human lives.

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