

# *Cuba and Nicaragua Expand Bilateral Cooperation*

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The Governments of Cuba and Nicaragua have signed an important agreement that opens the road to an increase in economic relations that should match the excellent level of their bilateral political links.

Both nations are members of ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples of Our America, and although their political links have always been very solid and active their economic relations were much more modest.

Officials of both countries have just signed in Havana a commercial agreement on a partial basis that stipulates the reciprocal concession of low tariffs. Described by the Nicaraguan Minister for Development, Industry and Commerce, Orlando Solòrzano, as a high potential agreement with excellent perspectives, it is already ruling the bilateral trade and provides a legal basis for a considerable expansion in trade and commerce between the two countries.

The new agreement keeps both nations far away from the so-called Free Trade Agreements and shady deals promoted by the United States in its dealings with subservient Latin American governments, which reserve to Washington the lion's share of the trade deals.

ALBA, on the contrary, fosters the coordination of political issues and development programmes aimed at truly reducing poverty and promoting economic growth and social welfare in its member nations. Such has

been the orientation of Cuban-Nicaraguan cooperation in health issues, which has afforded the Central American nation with widespread medical support Cuban medical brigades have been deployed all over Nicaragua, but especially on the Atlantic coast, where most of that Central American nation's native population lives.

Cuban medical teams have combed the area providing treatment with persons with eyesight difficulties and others with physical incapacities.

Tens of thousands Nicaraguans have recovered their eyesight and a similar figure are now able to walk as a result of the work of Cuban medical teams.

Now, the economic panorama has come up front and center in particular moments for both countries. Cuba is updating its economic model and is just about to modernize its foreign investment legislation, and although it faces difficult economic times it is ready to extend its links with neighboring countries, especially those members of ALBA.

Nicaragua is not a rich country, a condition aggravated by the legacy of the genocidal dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza and its servile delivery of the national resources to US companies. Nicaragua is working hard to erase the dramatic consequences of that period. Despite all difficulties, the national economy grew by 4.6% in 2013, and that trend continued in the first two months of this year.

Despite all difficulties, Cuba and Nicaragua are facing the future with their heads high and are vouching to increase their trade and other commercial links in a political climate conducive to a profitable mutual relationship.

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