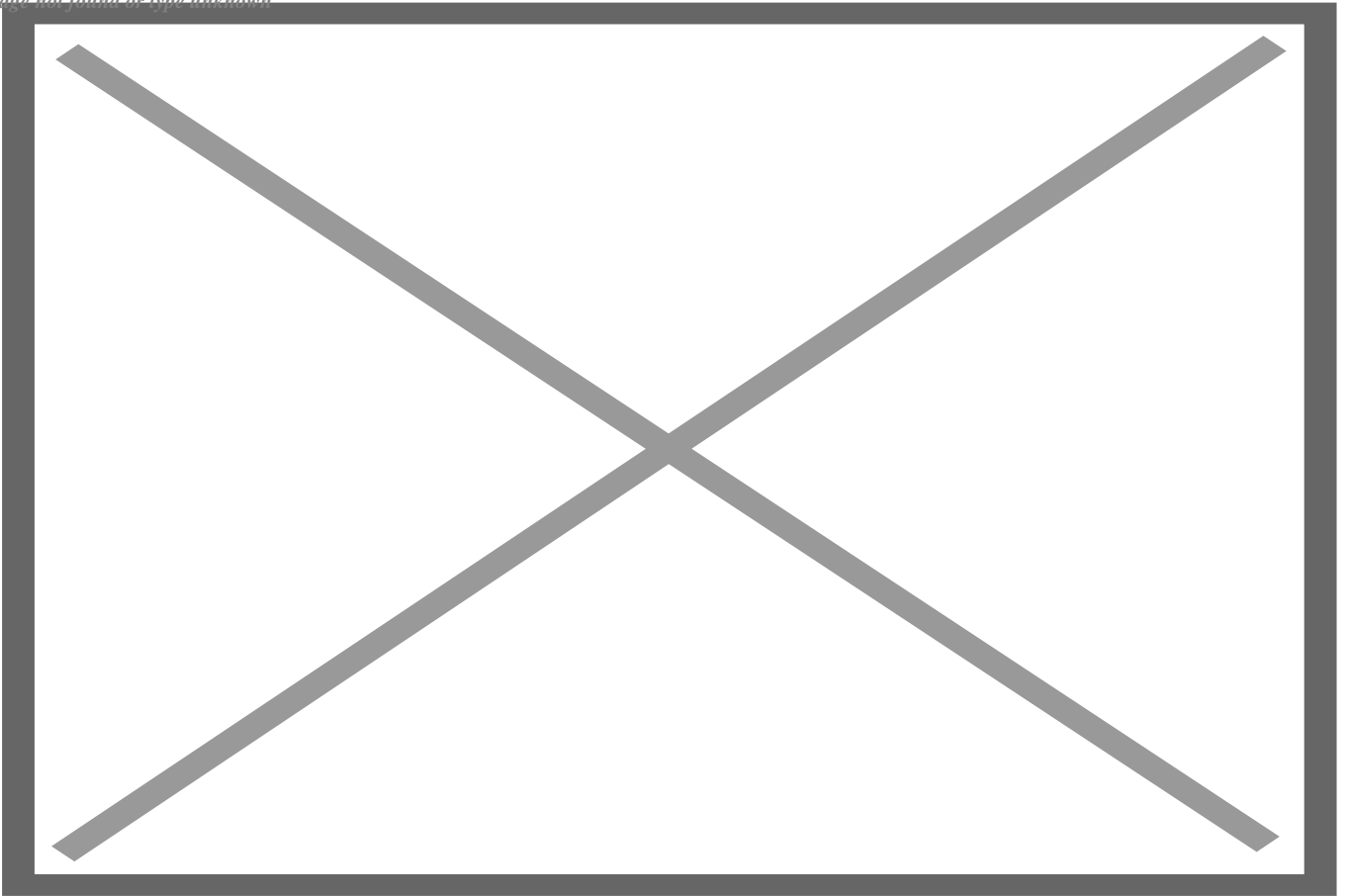


While the U.S. depresses Cuba's standard of living, it pours millions to urge its people to act against the government

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Cuba's deputy Foreign Minister, Carlos Fernandez de Cossio. Reuters.

Havana, September 4 (RHC)-- Cuba slammed U.S. funding for "democracy promotion" programs as interventionist and illegal, aimed at toppling the government just as the island nation faces its worst

economic crisis in decades, the country's Vice Foreign Minister said.

The Biden Administration in July announced a call for applications to award up to \$6.25 million to nongovernmental organizations and individuals as part of a decades-long program authorized by U.S. law to "promote peaceful, nonviolent democratic change in Cuba."

Vice Foreign Minister Carlos Fernandez de Cossio told Reuters in Havana that the programs - which over several decades have spent upwards of \$200 million on Cuba-related projects - in fact, leverage foreign funding to foment unrest on the island.

"In any nation, this is illegal," he said, noting the United States has legislation against people who act as foreign government agents.

"That is precisely what the United States is trying to promote in Cuba today," he said.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) call for applications warned of the challenges and risks of working in Cuba and said recipients "will not serve as an agent or act under the direction of USAID."

Cuba has long blamed the U.S. Cold War-era embargo and financing of dissidents for its economic and social woes, but De Cossio said the most recent U.S. funding for pro-democracy groups was specifically crafted to topple the island's government.

"They (the U.S.) are depressing the standard of living of the population and at the same time pouring millions of U.S. taxpayer dollars into urging people to act against the Cuban government," De Cossio told Reuters.

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