

*Statement by Cuban Foreign
Minister Bruno Rodriguez at the
United Nations General Assembly
on Washington's blockade of the
island*



Statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba, Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, at the presentation of Draft Resolution A/RES/78/l.5 entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States of America on Cuba."

Delivered on Thursday, November 2, 2023

Mr. Chairman:

Excellencies:

Distinguished Delegates:

The blockade violates the right to life, health, education and welfare of all Cubans.

Our families feel it through the shortages in the stores, the long lines, the excessive prices or the devalued salaries.

The government makes great efforts to guarantee the standard family food basket, which is not enough to satisfy all needs, but it meets the indispensable needs of all families, without exception, under extraordinarily subsidized prices.

For this year, it requires more than 1.6 billion dollars. Only with one third of the amount of the damages caused by the blockade between March 2022 and February 2023, these expenses could have been comfortably covered.

The blockade deprives the national industry of financing for the acquisition of agricultural machinery, animal feed, parts and spare parts for equipment and industry, and other necessary inputs for food production, which is severely affected.

Under strict licenses, Cuba can acquire agricultural products commercially in the United States, but subject to draconian and discriminatory impositions, which violate the universally accepted rules of international trade and freedom of navigation, and obliged to buy them by paying in advance, and to transport them in ships of that nation, which have to return empty to their ports of origin.

While trade throughout the world is two-way, Cuba is prohibited from exporting to the United States and cannot access credit, not even from private or multilateral financial institutions.

Cuban families suffer blackouts that at times have been crippling.

In the case of the energy and mining sector, the damages in this period exceed 491 million dollars. The main component of the damages is precisely in the national electro-energy system, which amounts to more than 239 million dollars.

With this money, it would have been possible to guarantee supplies and scheduled maintenance, as well as indispensable spare parts to avoid power outages and ensure the operation of the electricity industry.

The sick, including children, the elderly and pregnant women, are hurt by the lack or instability of medicines for hospital use, including cancer treatments and heart disease, and people face daily difficulties in acquiring insulin, antibiotics, hypotensive analgesics and other basic necessities in a timely manner.

Our country is capable of producing more than 60% of its basic list of medicines, levels that have not been guaranteed during this period of extreme tightening of the blockade due to the cruel blow to our finances.

Cuba is prevented from acquiring from U.S. companies and their subsidiaries in third countries equipment, technologies, devices and suitable end-use drugs, which our country is forced to manage, at exorbitant prices, with intermediaries or to replace them with generics of lower efficacy, even for newborns and sick children.

With due family consent, I will share with you, with deep sorrow, the situation of María, a Cuban girl, barely 6 years old, who underwent surgery to partially remove a grade 4 tumor, lodged in the intracranial area; She has received the alternative treatment of chemotherapy to combat the tumor, but it has not been possible to administer Lomustine, a U.S. drug which is not available due to the blockade and which, together with other first-line drugs for this type of high-grade tumors affecting the central nervous system, is the most effective treatment.

Today, the little patient is in relapse and a rescue chemotherapy scheme is being applied. For her, as for other Cuban children, the blockade continues to make the difference between life and death.

Yadier and Abel are 14-year-old teenagers. They suffer from cerebral palsy. This condition causes spasticity, which limits their motor function and involuntary movements that they cannot control, hindering their daily life processes.

The dedication of their teachers and other professionals who have accompanied them during these years, has allowed them to achieve the highest possible motor, intellectual and communicational functionality and their maximum social integration.

However, how different their lives could be if they were not prevented from having direct access, in the U.S. market, to Botulinum Toxin Type A, an injectable drug that prevents spasms and has encouraging results in this type of patients.

Like many other similar cases, they are direct victims of the merciless siege of Cuba.

The U.S. government is lying when it claims that the blockade does not prevent access to medicines or medical equipment.

During the most difficult moments of the Covid-19 pandemic, when the peak of cases had occurred and our intensive care wards were overflowing, Cuba was prevented from importing pulmonary ventilators under the pretext that the European supplying companies are subsidiaries of US companies, which is undoubtedly a cruel and inhumane act and also a gross violation of trade rules and international law.

Cuba had to develop its own domestic production of pulmonary ventilators with its own prototypes.

The extreme cruelty of the blockade was brutally demonstrated when our main medical oxygen production plant broke down at the peak of Covid's cases in our country.

When two U.S. companies tried to supply medical oxygen to Cuba, the requirement of a specific license from the U.S. government was demonstrated, even in times of pandemic.

Cuba also has evidence of the maneuvers of U.S. government agencies to prevent the sale of medical oxygen to our country by foreign companies from two Latin American countries.

The blockade generated difficulties and delays for the importation and arrival in our country of other supplies and medical equipment essential to face the virus, in particular, for the industrialization of Cuban vaccines.

During the pandemic, the U.S. government applied temporary humanitarian exemptions to countries that were victims of its unilateral coercive measures and other sanctions.

I ask: why was Cuba excluded from this temporary humanitarian relief?

The reality is that the US government opportunistically used COVID 19 as an ally in its hostile policy against Cuba.

The blockade qualifies as a crime of genocide according to the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of this crime, clearly typified in its article II, paragraphs b and c.

The vicious decision to strengthen the blockade in an unprecedented manner at that epidemic juncture and to take advantage of the world economic crisis derived from the pandemic to promote the destabilization of the country clearly reveals the profoundly cruel and inhumane nature of that policy.

The feat of saving and preserving the lives of our compatriots in such difficult circumstances can only be explained by the governmental and collective effort of all our people, for decades, to build a robust system of science and health, of profound humanistic character and high quality, accessible to all Cubans, at no cost.

Despite the fact that attention to the human being has been and will continue to be the priority of the Cuban government, the impact of the blockade on the quality of life and the services provided to our population is undeniable and painful.

Mr. President:

For more than six decades, Cuba has resisted a ruthless economic, commercial and financial blockade. More than 80% of our current population has only known a blockaded Cuba.

The government of the United States has not ceased in its intentions to deprive our country of indispensable financial income, to depress the standard of living of the population, to impose a continuous shortage of food, medicines and other basic supplies and to provoke economic collapse.

With viciousness and surgical precision, the most sensitive sectors of the economy are attacked and the greatest possible damage is deliberately sought to be inflicted on Cuban families.

The blockade is an act of economic warfare in times of peace, aimed at annulling the government's capacity to attend to the needs of the population, creating a situation of ungovernability and destroying the constitutional order.

Those objectives were clearly described in the infamous memorandum of Undersecretary of State Lester Mallory, April 6, 1960, declassified many years later, which I quote:

"All possible means must be quickly put into practice to weaken economic life (...) by denying Cuba money and supplies in order to reduce nominal and real wages, with the objective of provoking hunger, desperation and the overthrow of the government." End of quote.

That is the nature and those are, from its origin until today, the purposes of the policy of economic coercion and maximum pressure applied by the current U.S. government against Cuba.

The U.S. conduct is absolutely unilateral and unjustified. There is not a single measure or action by our country to harm the United States, to damage its powerful economic sector or its commercial activity.

There is no act by Cuba that threatens the independence of the United States or its national security, that undermines its sovereign rights, interferes in its internal affairs, or that affects the welfare of its citizens.

It is neither legal nor ethical for the government of a power to subject a small nation, for decades, to incessant economic warfare in order to impose a foreign political system on it and re-appropriate its resources. It is unacceptable to deprive an entire people of the right to peace, self-determination, development and human progress.

The Cuban people are not alone in suffering the terrible consequences of an illegal, cruel and inhumane policy. Many others in the world are also victims of these injustices, of the "philosophy of dispossession" that leads to the "philosophy of war", as the Commander-in-Chief, Fidel Castro Ruz, denounced on this podium in 1960.

At this tragic moment, I reiterate Cuba's full support and solidarity with the brotherly Palestinian people, who today are being massacred in their own land, illegally occupied. This barbarism must be stopped.

Mr. President:

The U.S. authorities have tried to sow the idea of the inefficiency of the Cuban government and the failure of our system.

They cynically say that they "support the Cuban people" and try to make people believe that the unilateral coercive measures do not affect families, nor are they really a significant factor in the difficulties of the national economy.

Of course, the blockade is not responsible for all the problems facing our country today, as President Miguel Díaz-Canel has said; but anyone who denies its very serious effects and does not recognize that it is the main cause of the deprivations, shortages and suffering of Cuban families would be lying.

It would be a lie to deny the blockade as a massive, flagrant and systematic violation of the human rights of all our people and as the greatest obstacle to our development.

Let us look at the facts and review the data.

Between March 1, 2022 and February 28 of this year, the damages caused by the blockade are conservatively estimated at 4,867 million dollars.

This represents a damage of more than 405 million dollars a month, and more than 13 million dollars a day. If the blockade had not existed, Cuba's GDP could have grown by 9% in 2022.

At current prices, the accumulated effects in more than 60 years exceed 159 billion dollars. If the calculation is made on the basis of the value of gold, they reach one trillion 337 billion dollars.

These are extraordinary figures for any economy in the world, even more so for a small, insular and developing economy like ours.

What would Cuba be like today if it had had those resources?

Since the second half of 2019, the U.S. government has escalated the siege against our country to an extreme dimension, even more perverse and harmful, and adopted wartime measures to try to prevent fuel supplies to Cuba, stepped up attacks against Cuban international medical cooperation, increased harassment of commercial and financial transactions in third markets, and proposed to intimidate investors and commercial entities from other countries with the extraterritorial application, in U.S. courts, of Title III of the Helms-Burton Act.

There is also a List of Restricted Cuban Entities that affects most of our companies and also, curiously, a List of Prohibited Accommodations, unique in the world, among many other prohibitions and restrictions.

In a globalized international economy, it is not only absurd, but criminal, to continue prohibiting the export to Cuba of articles produced in any of your countries, when they have 10% or more of U.S. components; and to prevent the import to the United States of products manufactured in the countries you represent, if they contain Cuban raw materials, intangibles or components.

What would happen to other economies, even in rich countries, if they were subjected to similar conditions?

Mr. President:

The United States reinforces its siege mechanisms against Cuba in the banking-financial sector. It maintains the ban on the use of the dollar and the persecution of financial transactions in other currencies, trade and investments is incessant and obsessive.

The persecution has been further reinforced by the arbitrary inclusion of our country in the State Department's unilateral list of countries allegedly sponsoring terrorism.

It was a lethal measure imposed by the previous Republican administration, only 9 days after leaving the White House. The current Democratic President could have and could correct it tomorrow, if he wanted to, with just a signature.

The U.S. government lies and does enormous damage to international efforts to combat terrorism when it accuses Cuba, without any basis whatsoever.

There is not a single valid and reasonable argument for the permanence of Cuba on this spurious list. Such action is inadmissible, particularly against a nation that is a victim of terrorism, which even today suffers the unpunished instigation of violence and terrorist acts from U.S. territory, and whose conduct of firm rejection and persecution of any form or manifestation of terrorism is unimpeachable and recognized.

The effects of this are particularly harmful in the conditions of an international economy that is increasingly interconnected, interdependent and, above all, subject to the dictates of the financial centers of power controlled from Washington.

Under cover of this arbitrary accusation, the U.S. authorities extort hundreds of banking and financial entities around the world and force them to choose between continuing their relations with the United States or maintaining their ties with Cuba.

Between January 2021 and February 2023, there were a total of 909 actions by foreign banks refusing to provide services to our country.

Dozens of Cuban diplomatic missions in capitals of their countries have lost the relationship with their traditional banks and do not have bank accounts or financial services today. This happens even in countries that develop friendly and cooperative relations with our country, and that consistently reject the blockade, but become victims of the extraterritorial power of U.S. hostility, of its harmful and disproportionate influence in the international financial system and of its desire to encircle the Cuban economy.

With this false qualification, the so-called Country Risk that forces Cuba to pay for any merchandise even at double its price in the international market rises exponentially.

Cuban entrepreneurs, whom the U.S. government cynically claims to support, are often denied the use of payment and e-commerce platforms, such as PayPal and Airbnb. They are even prevented from opening personal bank accounts just because they are Cubans. In third countries, they encounter banking restrictions and suffer discrimination resulting from the effects of the blockade.

Not even academic and scientific advancement escapes the effects of this absurd policy. Evelio is a young 25 year old Cuban who is currently studying Computer Science Engineering.

With the support of his University, Evelio decided to share with students from other countries the results of a scientific research and chose to participate in person in the World Congress on Undergraduate Research (WorldCUR), which is an international scientific event held from April 4 to 6, 2023 at the University of Warwick, United Kingdom.

He was accepted as a participant because of the quality of his research. However, shortly after, the organizers of the event informed him that, given the inclusion of Cuba in a list of sanctioned countries, funding for his participation in person was withdrawn.

He aspires to an end to the blockade because, like thousands of other young Cubans, this policy excludes and discriminates against him, preventing them from interacting on equal terms in the academic, scientific and student communities.

Cuban athletes and artists who suffer discrimination and sometimes harassment should receive the well-deserved income that accompanies their medals and awards.

Mr. President:

The blockade restricts the rights of Cubans residing in the United States, prevents family reunification through visas and regular mechanisms, does not allow the granting of travel visas in Cuba, and hinders the sending of remittances. It also causes uncertainty and the search for personal fulfillment in other countries, even in families of highly qualified young people.

However, the increase in Cuban emigration, with a painful cost for families and adverse demographic and economic consequences for the nation, is directly linked to the tightening of the blockade and also to the privileged treatment given, for strictly political reasons, to Cubans arriving at the U.S. borders, regardless of the route by which they arrived.

It is impossible to understand the nature of the migratory flows of Cubans through countries in the region, destined for the United States, without considering the weight of these factors, which are used for purposes of destabilization, theft of talent, and discredit against Cuba. Its unfavorable impact is also evident in some countries of our area, when Cuban migrants become irregular and use unsafe and dangerous routes or are victims of organized crime.

Cuba will always advocate for a regular, safe and orderly migratory flow. It is in the hands of the U.S. government to modify the structural causes of most Cuban migration, both regular and irregular.

However, the blockade paradoxically curtails the freedom of U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba and interferes with their right to freedom of information and to form their own opinion.

It also discriminates, intimidates and deprives the citizens of other countries who enjoy that privilege of the automatic visa system, known as ESTA, for the mere fact of visiting Cuba, of the automatic visa system, known by its acronym.

Mr. President:

The tightening of the economic siege has been accompanied by a sustained media and communications campaign against Cuba.

The new information technologies and other digital platforms are used to try to capitalize on the shortcomings caused by the blockade and to project an absolutely false image of the Cuban reality,

destabilize and discredit the country.

The media crusade, mainly from toxic platforms financed and based in U.S. territory, is aimed at fomenting unrest, creating the perception of an internal political crisis, undermining government institutions and hurting the enormous efforts that the country is making to overcome the challenges of a blockaded economy.

It is an unconventional, cognitive war, to which the U.S. government is publicly and notoriously devoting multimillionaire funds from the federal budget and, covertly, large sums of money.

Their plan is perverse and incompatible with the democracy, freedom and right to information they supposedly advocate.

Mr. President:

The current U.S. government is continuing the inhumane policy instituted during Donald Trump's presidency, and, paradoxically, has made it its own.

In practice, it has kept intact and applies with full severity the laws and regulations that support and give effect to this policy, including the most hostile and inhumane ones.

The blockade, intensified to the extreme, continues to be the central element that defines the policy of the United States towards Cuba.

The extraterritorial impact of the blockade harms the sovereignty of all the countries you represent, distinguished delegates; it infringes on their national legislations, subjects them to the decisions of US courts, damages the interests of their companies, punishes their businessmen and restricts the freedom of their citizens, all in violation of International Law.

Mr. President:

More than three decades have passed since this Assembly began to demand, every year, the end of the blockade against Cuba.

However, the expressed will of the international community is disrespected and disregarded by the government of the greatest economic, financial and military power.

It is neither permissible nor acceptable that the successive resolutions of this forum, the most democratic and representative of the United Nations, be ignored with impunity.

On behalf of the Cuban people, I am grateful for the statements rejecting the blockade made by Heads of State and Government and high dignitaries from 44 countries during the general debate of this session, 21 of which explicitly condemned the arbitrary inclusion of Cuba in the unilateral and fraudulent list of State sponsors of terrorism.

I express our deep appreciation and gratitude to the many delegations that have expressed this position in yesterday's and this morning's sessions.

I am also deeply grateful for the statements and fraternal support of our compatriots, of the broad and universal movement of solidarity with Cuba and of the many friends in different latitudes.

We are encouraged by the growing support of people of good will all over the world who are calling for an end to the blockade.

Despite the hostility of the government, we will continue to build bridges with the American people, as we do with all the peoples of the world.

We will increasingly strengthen ties with Cubans living abroad and we will soon host the IV Conference "The Nation and Emigration," which will contribute to deepen the dialogue between the Cuban government and our compatriots.

Mr. President:

The colossal challenges do not discourage us.

The Cuban people will not cease in their determination to honor, enhance and defend the free and sovereign homeland.

We will continue our transformational and revolutionary effort, in the search for ways out of the siege imposed on us by U.S. imperialism and for ways to advance towards prosperity with social justice, to support the transformation of our communities, and to sustain and expand social programs.

We will continue to ensure the growing participation of our youth and all citizens in the political, economic, social and cultural processes of the nation.

No other people has had to take on a development project under such conditions, under such systematic and prolonged aggression by a superpower.

But Cuba will continue to renew itself, in the construction of a sovereign, independent, socialist, democratic, prosperous and sustainable nation.

Mr. President:

Excellencies:

Distinguished Delegates:

In exercising your vote shortly, you will not only be deciding on a matter of vital interest to Cuba and to every Cuban family.

Your vote in favor of the draft resolution presented will also be a statement in support of reason and justice, and an act of support for the Charter of the United Nations and International Law.

In the name of our noble, dignified and supportive people, who have long since decided to be masters of their history and their future; in the name of the millions of Cubans who resist and believe every day in the face of the cruelest and most lasting system of unilateral coercive measures ever applied against any country and which must be abolished once and for all, for the good of all;

I respectfully request you to vote in favor of draft resolution A/RES/78/L.5, entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba".

Better without a blockade! No genocidal blockade!

Let Cuba live without a blockade!

Thank you very much.

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/nacionales/338282-statement-by-cuban-foreign-minister-bruno-rodriguez-at-the-united-nations-general-assembly-on-washingtons-blockade-of-the-island>



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