

# *Economic Update October 16*

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## **Jesse Jackson Describes U.S. Policy against Cuba as Cold and Old-Fashioned War**

U.S. Reverend Jesse Jackson called for an end to the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States on Cuba over the last 52 years, as recently published by the Web site of the *Chicago Sun-Times* newspaper.

“The implacable opposition of the U.S. government to Cuba's presence in hemispheric meetings has practically offended all our neighbors,” underlined Jackson, who acknowledged that this policy of strangulation against the Caribbean island has contributed to isolate Washington.

Jackson, a prominent civil rights activist and a Baptist pastor, who was a candidate in the presidential primaries of the Democrat Party in 1984 and 1988, assured that the blockade against Cuba should have been lifted decades ago.

“The embargo (blockade) against Cuba has been maintained to a large extent for two reasons. First, Fidel Castro made the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the cold warriors feel ashamed, frustrating their attempts to invade the island, destabilize the regime and assassinate him,” highlighted the U.S. religious leader.

The civil rights activist mentioned domestic policy as another important reason to maintain the cruel measure, particularly through the bonds of the White House with Cuba-American voters in the state of Florida.

He underlined that this policy is outdated and that the new generation of Cuban-Americans wants to maintain relations with their country of origin.

Jackson said that this “cold and old-fashioned war” against a small island 90 miles away from U.S. coasts should have been ended long ago.

“Cubans are freer to travel to the United States than Americans to travel to Cuba -emphasized Jackson. Cubans are expanding private property and an encouraging foreign investment.”

The Reverend called upon the U.S. head of state, Barack Obama, to take a constructive step in favor of eliminating the blockade against Cuba.

“President Obama –he said sententiously- can revive the leadership of the United States in the region and put an end to a historic shame.”

### **Canadian Hotel Chain Blue Diamond Ranks High in Cuban Domestic Tourist Market**

The domestic market was a key factor in the success during the summer for the Canadian company *Blue Diamond*, the 3rd largest hotel chain with a presence in Cuba.

After the tourists from Canada, Cubans ranked 2nd among the customers that acceded the most to offers designed by the group from May to October, according to its executives.

In that season, considered the least favorable for tourism on the island, *Blue Diamond* recorded, in the facilities it manages, occupancy levels above 60%, Rafael Villanueva, commercial director of the company, said.

The hotels *Memories Varadero* and *Memories Caribe* in Cayo Coco, in particular, have even operated on weekends with over 80% occupancy, a figure typical of the high season, the Cuban manager told local news agencies.

All the actions we have taken to capture the domestic market were a success, hence we will continue betting for this segment in the coming periods, Villanueva noted.

In this regard, he reported that during the summer they made 7 outlets in Havana, and others in Ciego de Ávila and Villa Clara, actions that provided much higher sales in the domestic market when compared to the same period of 2013.

According to Valeriano Lanzarotti, *Memories Varadero* general director of the tourist facility, said this is a figure that shouldn't be put aside for the local market, as it represents the first potential; hence we are always reinventing our offers to capture their interest.

From her experience as a saleswoman, Mayda Hernandez, who belongs to *Cubatur* agency in the province of Sancti Spiritus, highlighted the activities of the representatives of the company for trade specialists to firsthand know the product to promote, through approaching and presentations travels.

She considered it is a chain with plenty of potential to continue attracting the public to its facilities, especially, the domestic market for the quality of its services and the variety of options.

With just three years in Cuba, Blue Diamond operates six facilities and four thousand rooms in the Caribbean country, under the brand *Memories*, with cheapest deals essentially directed to the family segment, and *Royalton*, luxury and adults-only.

## **New Rice Mill Almost Ready to Start Operations**

The rice mill, with capacity to process 5 tons of that cereal per hour, that is being built in the town of Amarillas that belongs to *Matanzas Grains Agro-industrial Company*, is nearing completion.

The implementation is scheduled for November, Jorge Luis Hernandez Alvarez, director of the entity located about 200 km. southeast of Havana, told CAN, adding that 3 silos with storage capacity of 1000 tons each are also being made.

Through this investment in Brazilian technology they can eliminate the transfer of rice to Hoyo Colorado, in Marti town (over 70 km.), north of the province and they will process rice for the consumption of the municipalities of Colon, Pedro Betancourt, Jagüey Grande and others located south central Matanzas.

The grains company also has a seeds plant, which gives work to plant health specialists, with the goal of selling better quality seeds to producing entities, Hernandez Alvarez said.

Still far from meeting the demand of 41 thousand tons of rice for consumption of the basic basket in the province of Matanzas, the industry delivers little more than 50% of the product, which is bought by cooperatives, and then, after industrial treatment, is sold to domestic trade.

The director of the company noted the quality of the product depends on the producers, who are having difficulties with machinery, while the industry still has problems with drying.

Due to agreements with Viet Nam, many workers receive training courses for cultural treatment and harvest of this crop, which by being an underwater plant needs plenty of water and special care.

## **Housing Materials Sales on the Rise in Central Cuba**

Housing construction by own efforts and rehabilitation of housing stock in the province of Cienfuegos were favored with increased marketing of building materials.

Cienfuegos territory meets and exceeds the public sale of those items, an action adopted in the last *Guidelines of the Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution*.

Hugo Villar González, Business Trading Group Development and Investment deputy director, told ACN that assortments and resources for more than 84 million pesos (CUP) were expanded to the end of September.

He said that this is equivalent to about 20 million CUP over the plan set in the sales for free program for the first 9 months of 2014.

The most demanded products are cement, steel and wall tiles, as well as coverings and bathroom sets, though the biggest problems are in the supply of ceilings, main beams, known as purling, and zinc windows produced in neighboring provinces such as Villa Clara, he added.

Milady Pérez Fernández, La Estrella store manager, said they are giving priority to people with low incomes that undertake constructive actions subsidized by the state.

Osiel Fernández Navarro, a self-employed worker who bought cement and electrical connections, stated that prices are still questionable, as is the finish of accessories like tiles and bathroom sets.

The network of specialized shops covers eight municipalities of Cienfuegos and other 20 points distributed along districts, where people can access the purchase of materials in existence.

Ensuring improvement of housing stock and living conditions of Cubans are the main incentive of this program, enacted since 2011 by the Ministry of Domestic Trade.

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