

# *Caribbean Leaders Hold Discussions with U.S. President in Jamaica*

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Kingston, April 10 (teleSUR-RHC) U.S. President Barack Obama visited Jamaica on Thursday as regional and international media have speculated that Obama might be seeking to offer the regional bloc an alternative to the highly concessionary Venezuelan oil, as part of an ongoing U.S. offensive against Venezuela.

Many Caribbean Community (CARICOM) states are part of the ALBA alliance and the PetroCaribe initiative, both of which include Venezuela. CARICOM heads of government have expressed support for PetroCaribe, which has helped millions of people across the Caribbean.

Obama addressed over 350 young people gathered at a forum for CARICOM youth on Thursday. They questioned him on Cuba relations since the U.S. policy change with that country. "Cuba will be participating in the Summit of the Americas and I think, it is my strong belief that if we engage it is a good prospect for escaping some of the constraints of the past. I think the Cuban people are extraordinary and have huge potential and what's encouraging is that the overwhelming majority of Cubans are interested in ending the Cold War, the last vestiges of the Cold War," he said.

The President also urged CARICOM countries to work together to address the ongoing issue of high energy costs in the Caribbean. “This region has some of the highest energy costs in the world. Caribbean countries are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and we have to act now,” he said.

Dominica’s Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit led CARICOM’s presentation on energy. He said the member states’ imports of oil and oil products have been a major burden on their foreign exchange earnings. He praised ALBA and PetroCaribe for assisting CARICOM countries for the past decade. “Fortunately, for most of us in the region, we have been able to secure a reliable source of oil and oil products from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela through the PetroCaribe initiative over the past 10 years. PetroCaribe also provided us with economic space to focus on the social and economic development of our respective countries,” he said.

The U.S. president spoke with CARICOM leaders about issues that have been dealt with to a significant degree already, including shared efforts to promote a more diverse, cleaner and more sustainable energy future for the Caribbean.

The meeting follows recent backpedaling by the United States on Venezuela. The U.S. has expressed "disappointment" that almost the entire Latin American and Caribbean region has stood behind Venezuela after Obama declared the country a “threat to U.S. security” and the White House is now stating that it does not believe Venezuela poses a threat.

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