

# *Panamanian President Pursues Closer Relations with Cuba*

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Havana, September 10 (RHC)-- Panamanian President Juan Carlos Varela, who is on a four-day official visit to Cuba, said that his country looks forward to strengthening bilateral relations with the people and government of Cuba.

Varela made his statement upon his arrival at Havana's Jose Marti International Airport Wednesday evening, where he was welcomed by Deputy Foreign Minister Ana Teresita Gonzalez and other government officials.

The Panamanian head of state expressed his determination to continue with the political dialog for mutual benefit and in a favorable environment for Panama and Cuba, following the island's participation in the most recent Summit of the Americas, held in Panama City.

President Varela is being accompanied by a group of business people who, along with Cuban entrepreneurs, will meet on Friday to explore bilateral trade opportunities and mutual economic back-up in key areas, such as the attraction of foreign capital.

According to the Cuban Chamber of Commerce, the business forum will be attended by the ministers of foreign trade of both nations, Rodrigo Malmierca and Meliton Arocha. President Varela is expected to address the forum tomorrow.

The Panamanian visitors will be briefed about the advantages and guarantees being offered by the Special Development Zone at the Cuban western port of Mariel and about the Cuban business portfolio for foreign investment, which includes 246 projects in 11 prioritized economic sectors and valued at over 7.8 billion dollars.

The Panamanian delegation will update their Cuban counterparts about the expansion of the Panama Canal and the opportunities for trade.

President Varela's official agenda in Cuba includes talks with President Raul Castro and visits to schools and other activities.

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