

Presidents of Cuba and Brazil Inaugurate First Section of Mariel Container Port

Havana, January 27 (RHC)— Cuban President Raul Castro and his Brazilian counterpart, Dilma Rousseff, inaugurated on Monday Cuba's first 700-meter port and container terminal in the special development zone of Mariel, some 45 kilometer west of Havana, which was partially supported by Brazilian funds.

In his remarks during the inauguration ceremony, Raul Castro thanked Dilma Rousseff on behalf of all the Cuban people for her government's major contribution in the development of this project, vital to Cuba's future economic progress.

The Cuban head of state highlighted this will be the main hub for Cuba's foreign trade, noting that given its favored location, it is expected to consolidate itself as one of the major trade platforms in the region.

For her part, Rousseff stressed Brazil's desire to become a first-order economic ally of Cuba. In a brief address after helping her Cuban counterpart cut the inauguration ribbon, Rousseff thanked the Cuban people and government for their wide support of her country's More Doctors program, aimed at strengthening medical services in poor and isolated communities of that South American nation.

The event was also attended by Heads of State and Government, who are in Havana to participate in the CELAC summit, including Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro, Bolivia's Evo Morales and Haiti's Michel Martelly.

Brazil's Grupo Odebrecht is building the container port at the small town 30 miles West of Havana. The first phase of the deep-water port project, including 700 meters of pier, was completed in December.

Once fully operating, the Mariel container terminal will replace the Port of Havana as Cuba's main port of entry for goods, placing the island at the forefront of shipping hubs trying to benefit from the Panama Canal widening, which is slated for completion in 2015.

The port will be operated by Singapore-based PSA International.

The container hub is the heart of a 180-square mile "Special Development Zone" that seeks to attract manufacturers and service providers to use Mariel as a base for exports to the region.

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