

Economic Update September 24



U.S. Business Persons Promote Coalition Against Blockade of Cuba

Members of the agriculture and food business community have agreed on to form a coalition to overcome commercial obstacles between the United States and Cuba, an expression of today's increasing rejection of the blockade against the Caribbean island.

According to the Prensa Latina news agency, the group of business persons, which includes the *American Soybean Association (ASA)* pointed out that their members believe that this is the moment to put an end to that hostile policy of Washington, which has survived 11 U.S. administrations, including that of President Barack Obama, which has intensified it.

The farmers are in favor of allowing the opening of trade and investment, operations that were forbidden with the implementation of that economic, financial and commercial blockade.

The information was published by the *Ohio Country Journal*, designed for farmers of that state, located in the region of the Great Lakes and one of the main agricultural centers of the United States.

According to the publication, the U.S. agricultural companies sell their products to Cuba since 2000, when Washington authorized that commercial exchange under previous license, but subjected to arbitrary regulations like cash payment in advance on the part of Havana.

The *Ohio Country Journal* adds that the AAS has the intention of getting actively involved in the struggle against the blockade and for the normalization of commercial relations between the two nations.

In this regard, it plans to carry out lobbying, communication strategies and other efforts that can lead to the end of the U.S. restrictions.

Employees of Cuban Emerging Enterprises Increase

The number of workers hired by emerging private enterprises in Cuba increased by 7,417 to 99,395 people from March to July 2014, the country's Ministry of Labor and Social Security reports.

The ministry added that the number of people employed in the private sector reached 471,085 at the end of July.

Most of these small enterprises are involved in the production and sales of foods, as well as cargo or passenger transportation, said the ministry.

Job opportunities from private sector are attractive, especially to young people whose working life has just begun, because they could earn more than in state-run businesses and are usually paid in convertible pesos (CUC), a currency circulating in the country equivalent to nearly 1 U.S. dollar or 25 Cuban pesos (CUP).

For instance, Rolando Rodriguez, an engineer working as a doorman for *Razones*, a popular private restaurant opened 2 years ago, told *Xinhua* in Havana that now his wages for 2 days are as much as what he earned in a month in a state-owned company.

Cuban president Raul Castro launched the reform of private sector in October 2010, which includes the gradual dismissing of about half million workers from the bloated public sector and reorganizing the workforce for better use.

Castro has called on government officials to "change mentality" on private workers saying that "self-employed" force is helpful to provide goods and services for the people and is a source of tax revenue to fund the national budget.

UN Environment Agency Praises Cuban Sustainable Development Efforts

The executive director of the *UN Environment Program*, Ibrahim Thiaw, described as "impressive" the Cuban sustainable development and disaster mitigation plans.

In statements to *Granma* newspaper, Thiaw said that it would be of great interest for the rest of the world to learn about the Cuban experience in disaster mitigation actions. The UN official said that his agency is willing to contribute in order to spread the Cuban experience.

The UN expert visited Cuba last week to take a first-hand look at Cuban environmental efforts and consider future cooperation with Cuban authorities, bearing in mind the significance of the island in the Caribbean area.

"Unfortunately, this is a country that undergoes the effects of natural phenomena, but the system set up here, from the local to the national level, is really impressive," said the UN official.

As to sustainable development efforts, Thiaw referred to what he called concrete examples about sustainable food production and consumption, and that they have met local farmers who have developed chemical-free crops. The UN official also visited a biosphere reserve in which they praised the results of environmental preservation efforts over the past 40 years.

Cuba Stands Out for Achievement of Population and Development Goals, Says UNPF

Marcela Suanzo, regional director for *Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF)*, recently said in Havana that Cuba began to meet the agreements adopted at the *International Population and Development Conference* over half a century ago.

While summing up at Havana's Hotel Nacional the presentation of the report of the Caribbean nation on the execution of the program approved 20 years ago in Cairo, the official said that its achievements in education, health, social security and employment, show that the State has centered efforts in the attention of human beings.

In the presence of representatives of the diplomatic corps accredited to Havana and of national organizations and institutions, Suanzo pointed out, as new phenomena in the region, the high rates of pregnancy and of early sex life of adolescents, and the aging, four times faster, of its inhabitants with respect to those of Europe, motivated by the many social and health problems affecting Latin America and the Caribbean.

In her words, the speaker praised Cuba's solidarity in the support of the struggle against the Ebola fever virus epidemic in Africa, and particularly thanked the island for the voluntary support of its 165 health professionals ready to assume the task, as well as for the support of their relatives.

A panel of Cuban experts explained the goals achieved by the Caribbean country in correspondence with the agreements of the Cairo Conference, and of one of its regional meetings held in 2013 in Uruguay, where the document entitled the *Montevideo Consensus* was approved.

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