

Cuba and U.S. Conclude Round of Talks on Diplomatic Ties



Havana, January 23 (RHC) -- The United States and Cuba on Thursday ended the historic, first round of talks on restoring diplomatic relations, but both sides admitted "profound differences" still remain and much needs to be done before normalization of bilateral relations.

It was the second day of the first high-level meeting held between Cuba and the United States since the surprising announcement on December 17th by the Cuban and U.S. presidents about restoring the bilateral diplomatic ties broken off in January 1961.

Thursday's meeting was held at the Havana Convention Palace, with the Cuban delegation headed by Josefina Vidal, director general of the U.S. Affairs Department at the Foreign Relations Ministry (Minrex), and the U.S. delegation led by Roberta Jacobson, assistant secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs. Jacobson is the highest-level U.S. official visiting Cuba in nearly four decades.

"We talked in real and concrete terms of the necessary steps for the restoration of diplomatic relations between our countries," said Jacobson. "We talked about the opening of embassies in our respective countries and how we expect to operate the U.S. Embassy in Havana."

According to Jacobson, both sides discussed the measures to be taken for restoring relations as quickly as possible, but recognized that retaking the formal ties will be a "lengthy" process, because of the

conflicting point of views and “profound differences” on many issues.

Cuban officials, meanwhile, praised the openness of Thursday's meeting, stressing that issues including "respect for the independence of our people," and the lifting of the U.S. economic blockade on the island are important on the road of normalization of bilateral relations. Officials also reiterated Cuba's willingness to continue a respectful dialogue with the U.S. government.

"No one can expect that Cuba, in exchange for improving the relations with the United States, will give up its principles," stressed Josefina Vidal, the Minrex official.

Bilateral diplomatic relations must be based on the principles of international law and the United Nations Charter, Vidal said. She also insisted that Cuba should be removed from the U.S. list of "countries sponsoring terrorism."

Thursday's talks between Cuba and the U.S. were divided into two sessions: the re-establishing of diplomatic relations in the morning and, in the afternoon, discussions focusing on "issues of bilateral interest," such as cooperation in fighting against terrorism, drug dealing and human trafficking.

Both sides held talks Wednesday on migratory policies at the first session of the two-day high-level meeting. At Wednesday's meeting, the Cuban side expressed its disagreement about the U.S. Cuban Adjustment Act and the “wet foot/dry foot” policy, saying those policies of the United States "contradict the spirit of the migration accords, and continue to be the main stimulus to illegal migration, human trafficking, and illegal entries into the United States of Cuban citizens."

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