

Cuba, Cayman Talks Set to Resume on Migrant Status



Georgetown, March 4 (RHC) -- Representatives from Cuba and the Cayman Islands will meet soon for further negotiations on an agreement regarding treatment and repatriation of Cuban migrants, with Georgetown seeking to stem costs likely to exceed the US\$1 million from the last government budget year, officials said.

Wesley Howell, deputy chief officer in the Ministry of Home Affairs and a member of Cayman's delegation to the talks, said 88 Cubans passed through Cayman in January, eclipsing the 24-per-month average in 2014 and only four per month in 2013. Since late January, more than 75 Cuban migrants have passed through or landed in Cayman Brac.

The Turks and Caicos Islands and the Bahamas also spent more than US\$1 million last year on Cuban migrants. In 2012 and 2013, Cayman spent more than \$800,000 to house, feed and repatriate Cuban migrants.

Meanwhile, according to Cuba's ambassador to Jamaica Bernardo Guanche Hernandez, the U.S. refugee policy known informally as "wet foot/dry foot" remains in place, affecting migration from Cuba.

Under that policy -- a consequence of the 1995 revision of the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 -- a Cuban detained on the waters between the two nations (with "wet feet") is sent home or to a third country. Those

who make it to shore (“dry feet”) get a chance to remain in the United States and later qualify for expedited legal permanent resident status, and eventually U.S. citizenship.

“The Cuban Adjustment Act and the “wet foot/dry foot” policy are still strong incentives for irregular migration from Cuba,” Ambassador Guanche said, “and they have an impact also on the Cayman Islands.”

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