

Stage Set for Raul Castro and Barack Obama Meeting at Summit



Panama City, April 11 (teleSUR-RHC) U.S. President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro are expected to meet on Saturday at the Summit of the Americas meeting, the White House confirmed on Friday.

"We certainly do anticipate that they will have an opportunity to see each other at the summit tomorrow, to have a discussion," Ben Rhodes, Obama's deputy national security adviser, said at a news conference on Friday.

The two leaders, who announced in December 2014 that their countries would work toward normalizing relations, met briefly on Friday where they were photographed shaking hands. A U.S. official commented that the exchange was friendly but informal and that "there was not a substantive conversation between the two leaders."

A source inside the U.S. Senate confirmed this week that the U.S. State Department has recommended that President Obama remove Cuba from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism. However Obama said he was waiting for a recommendation from his advisers before making an announcement.

Obama seems to be working to soften his tone in the face of a region that has undergone massive political and social changes over the last two decades. The presence of Cuba at summit is itself a product of the region's unanimous disagreement with their exclusion from past gatherings.

"The fact that Cuba is here is the greatest achievement of Latin America and the Caribbean," said Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. "When Raul sat in that chair, which belongs to Cuba, 60 years of revolution sat down. Fidel sat down," he added.

Obama is hoping the new approach on Cuba will improve his image in Latin America. The U.S. president made a statement ahead of the summit that was similar to those he made at the fifth Summit of the Americas in 2009, soon after he was elected president. "The days in which our agenda in this hemisphere so often presumed that the United States could meddle with impunity, those days are past," Obama said on Friday.

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