

# *Cuban President Returns to Havana After World Tour and Meeting with Pope Francis at the Vatican*

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Rome, May 11 (RHC) -- Cuban President Raul Castro has arrived back in Cuba from a world tour that took him to Algeria, Russia and Italy. Upon his arrival in Havana early Monday morning, Raul was welcomed by Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura.

On Sunday, Raul Castro met with Pope Francis and the Prime Minister of Italy, Matteo Renzi, during a brief visit to Rome and The Vatican.

At a joint press conference following their meeting, the Italian leader praised his country's relationship with Cuba and vowed to strengthen bilateral ties, particularly in the economic sphere.

For his part, Raul Castro thanked the warm welcome by authorities in Rome and referred to the ongoing talks between Cuba and the European Union to reset political relations.

Earlier on Sunday, Raul Castro was received by Pope Francis in Vatican City. About the meeting, Vatican spokesman, Federico Lombardi, said it was very friendly and lasted for 55 minutes.

Raul Castro reportedly thanked the Pope for his mediation in the talks between the United States and Cuba that led to the announcement of December 17, 2014, that both nations would work to re-establish diplomatic relations.

Raul and the Pope also exchanged gifts and best wishes at the end of their meeting, recalling their next encounter would be in Cuba in September.

Raul Castro traveled to Italy from Russia, where he took part Saturday in the celebrations for Victory Day.

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