

# *Statements by Panamanian President at Cuba-Panama Business Forum*

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Panamanian President Juan Carlos Varela participated Friday in the Cuba-Panama Business Forum. Varela was accompanied by Panamanian Commerce Minister Militón Arrochajunto and some 40 business executives from different economic sectors.

In statements to reporters at Havana's iconic Hotel Nacional de Cuba, venue of the business forum, the Panamanian dignitary expressed his satisfaction with this visit.

He referred to highlights of his packed agenda.

*"The Panamanian minister of commerce is accompanying me on this visit. Together with senior officials of different Cuban companies, we toured the special development zone at Mariel. I was very impressed by the development and the excellent connectivity between the port of Mariel and other ports across the Caribbean region, including Panamanian ports. This is very positive for both our countries, because it contributes to significantly lowering the prices of merchandise. We should work jointly toward further strengthening the connectivity between the port of Mariel and the Panamanian ports. I'm very happy I had the opportunity to visit Mariel. The Panamanian business executives who accompanied me on this visit*

also showed great interest in it. I think this visit has been very fruitful, and also very enlightening for all of us.

"I also met with Havana's Historian Eusebio Leal and with President Raúl Castro, with whom I discussed several bilateral, regional and international issues of common interest. Senior officials from different Cuban sectors offered Panamanian executives detailed information about Cuba's new foreign investment law, Mariel and the new opportunities being offered in several sectors. We are determined to accompany the Cuban government and people along this new path toward sustainable development.

"I was also impressed by ongoing preparations for the upcoming visit here of Pope Francis. I think it will be an historic visit, especially because after visiting Cuba, the Pope will travel to the United States, where he will address the U.S. Congress. I'm sure he will deliver a message of love in support of justice for the Cuban people and regional integration"

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