

US President Barack Obama Asks Congress to Lift Blockade on Cuba



US President Barack Obama on Monday walked up to the podium at the United Nations General Assembly and asked Congress to lift the 55-year economic blockade of Cuba as the neighboring countries continue to thaw their diplomatic relations.

“I am confident that our Congress will inevitably lift an embargo that should not be in place anymore,” said the president, who was applauded by many delegates at the UN General Assembly.

The historic gesture came one day before the US leader met with Cuban President Raúl Castro in New York to discuss bilateral relations. It was their second encounter in six months.

It wasn't the first time that Obama had asked US lawmakers to lift the blockade since the US and Cuba began to work on normalizing diplomatic relations. But it was the first time that a US president had called for the end of the blockade and spoke about US policy toward Cuba at a General Assembly meeting.

It was also the first time that President Raul Castro had addressed the General Assembly since he assumed the Cuban presidency.

“We continue to have differences with the Cuban government,” Obama said. “but we will address these issues through diplomatic relations and increased commerce and people-to-people ties.”

President Castro, who spoke later in the day, listed Cuba's grievances against the US government clearly, including demands that the United States return the Guantánamo naval base to Cuba; stop transmitting radio and television broadcasts sponsored by the US government and radical Cuban exile groups; and make reparations for the “human suffering” the blockade has had on the Cuban people.

The Cuban leader said that the only way to have normal relations with the United States is by lifting the blockade, which was introduced by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1960.

“It is unacceptable to distort the promotion and protection of human rights, using it in a selective and discriminatory way to impose political decisions,” said President Castro.

President Castro also took the opportunity to show support for his regional allies.

Venezuela, President Castro said, “can always count on Cuba’s solidarity as it faces attempts to destabilize and undermine the Constitutional order and destroy the work begun by our colleague Hugo Chávez Frías, which continues under President Nicolás Maduro Moros, in favor of the Venezuelan people.

The Cuban leader also pledged his “firm and unyielding solidarity” with Ecuador’s Rafael Correa, whom he said was also “a target of the same destabilization policy that is being applied against other progressive governments in the region.”

President Castro also said that Cuba supports Argentina in its plight to win control over the disputed Falkland Islands, and pledged support for Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff “in her defense of important social achievements and stability in her country.”

Cuban President Raul Castro then met with President Barack Obama on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Tuesday — the first such sit-down between leaders of the two countries on American soil since the Cuban revolution.

So far so good. The proof of the pudding will now be in the eating!

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