

# *Secretary General of UNASUR Urges Resolution of Redoubts of Colonialism in U.S.-Cuba Relations*

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Havana, January 23 (RHC)-- Ernesto Samper, Secretary General of the Union of South American Countries (UNASUR), reiterated in Havana the bloc's solidarity with Cuba amidst the ongoing process towards the normalization of relations with the United States.

The UNASUR secretary general arrived in Havana Thursday to, among other activities, participate in an international conference on the legacy of Cuban National Hero José Martí.

The 2nd International Symposium 'With All and for the Good of All' or (Con todos y para el bien de todos) will hold sessions January 25th through the 28th at Havana's Convention Center, coinciding with Martí's 163rd birthday anniversary, celebrated on January 28th.

Prior to his participation in the international conference, the UNASUR leader and former Colombian president, paid a courtesy visit to the headquarters of the National Assembly of People's Power, where he was received by Parliament President Esteban Lazo.

Samper said lifting Washington's blockade policy towards Havana and the return to Cuba of the illegally occupied territory in Guantánamo are essential to achieve fully-normalized ties.

In statements to reporters, Ernesto Samper reiterated that the regional bloc welcomes and supports the relaunching of US-Cuba relations, but insisted on the resolution of what he described as two of the last redoubts of colonialism in our region.

"We hope this process leads to favorable solutions to these two main problems, the U.S. blockade and the Cuban territory illegally occupied by the U.S. naval base, which along with the Malvinas Islands in Argentina, constitute the last redoubts of colonialism in our region. We are happy with the latest developments in U.S.-Cuba relations, but Washington must lift its economic blockade on Cuba. We know it won't happen overnight, but we shall never give up until these two symbols of U.S. interference in Cuban affairs are finally eliminated."

The UNASUR secretary general and former Colombian president said he has plans to meet here in Havana with peace negotiators, representing the government of President Juan Manuel Santos and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP).

"I'm very optimistic about what is happening. Previous efforts to reach peace in Colombia had never gone this far. I can see a light at the end of the tunnel. These accords could actually put an end to violence in Colombia. UNASUR is ready and willing to contribute to building peace, if the sides believe that we could be of any help at all."

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