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BUREAU OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

U.S.-CUBAN RELATIONS

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1. Background: From the early days of our Republic, the U.S. has had a close and sometimes difficult association with Cuba. U.S. relations with Cuba deteriorated sharply following the rise to power in 1959 of Fidel Castro and his subsequent turn to the Soviet Union. Diplomatic ties were severed in January 1961. The Carter Administration has begun an effort to improve relations with Cuba, but normalization will take a long time and will depend on many factors, including Cuba's international behavior. Cuban military activities in Africa have emerged as one of the major impediments to progress toward normalization.
2. U.S. policy: The U.S. is convinced that its best interests are served by maintaining communications with all countries, whether it approves of their governments or not. Steps toward normal relations with Cuba, however, must be measured and reciprocal. Only through dialogue can we begin to resolve the difficult problems that now stand between the Cuban Government and our own. U.S. objectives include:
 - release of U.S. political prisoners and repatriation of other American citizens;
 - release of Cuban political prisoners, thousands of whom have been jailed for years;
 - reunification of divided Cuban families;
 - the withdrawal of Cuban military forces from Africa, as we believe African problems should be solved by Africans; and
 - compensation to U.S. citizens and businesses whose property was taken over by the Cuban Government.
3. Steps toward normalization: Beginning in January of 1977, the Carter Administration took several steps to improve relations with Cuba. It:
 - granted visas to selected Cuban citizens to visit the U.S.;
 - lifted the ban on U.S. travel to Cuba; and
 - negotiated the establishment of diplomatic interests sections.

In mid-January of 1978, talks were held in Havana between our two Coast Guards on such issues as improving communications, cooperating on search and rescue in international waters, and curbing drug traffic and terrorism.

4. Fisheries and maritime boundary: Only 90 miles of water separate the U.S. and Cuba, and both countries have established 200-mile offshore fishery zones. Negotiations with Cuba to define the maritime boundary began in March 1977 and resulted in the signing a month later of provisional maritime boundary and fishing rights agreements.
5. Interests sections: The U.S. opened an interests section in the Swiss Embassy in Havana on September 1, 1977, while the Cubans established one in Washington in the Czech Embassy. The main purposes of our interests section are to facilitate communications between the two governments and to provide a broader range of consular services.
6. Repatriation program: In September of 1977, some 55 American citizens and their Cuban families were permitted to come to the U.S. Another group of 125 citizens and their families was allowed in February 1978 to leave for the U.S. under this repatriation program. In June of 1978, moreover, Castro announced that he would permit dual nationals (U.S.-Cuban citizenship) and their families to leave for the U.S. if they wished. There are some 500 of these dual nationals.
7. Trade embargo: In 1962, the U.S. banned all U.S. trade with Cuba. We also prohibited foreign ships that traded with Cuba from landing at U.S. ports. These restrictions were modified in 1975 to permit business transactions between Cuba and U.S. subsidiaries in third countries if those countries agreed. The U.S. ban on foreign shipping calling at Cuban ports was rescinded in June 1977, but U.S. ships still cannot call at Cuban ports.

Before the trade embargo, two-way U.S.-Cuban trade totaled over \$1 billion annually, and it has been estimated that we could sell \$300 million worth of agricultural commodities, farm machinery, industrial equipment, and computer hardware to Cuba each year. The embargo will not be ended, however, until the claims of U.S. citizens and corporations for losses suffered through expropriation are resolved. About 5,900 of these claims, amounting to \$1.8 billion, have been certified by the U.S. Foreign Claims Settlement Commission. We regard their settlement as essential to normalizing relations.

8. African involvement: Cuba's involvement in Angola, Ethiopia, and other parts of Africa has continued to grow. The presence in Ethiopia of 17,000 Cuban troops, and in Angola of some 19,000, is an obstacle to the peaceful settlement of the disputes there. There cannot be any significant improvement in U.S.-Cuban relations until the level of these military adventures is sharply reduced.