



One Hundred Fourteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
www.foreignaffairs.house.gov

March 11, 2016

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am deeply concerned your upcoming visit to Cuba will send the wrong message to Cubans fighting for democracy and human rights.

Just a few months ago, you declared you would not visit Cuba unless you could confidently determine that “we’re seeing some progress in the liberty and freedom and possibilities of ordinary Cubans.” Respectfully, what changed?

Since your Administration announced normalized relations with Havana, the regime’s repression of basic human rights has gone from bad to worse. In the first two months of 2016 alone, the Cuban Commission for Human Rights has documented a staggering 2,588 political arrests. In spite of this, reports suggest that you will soon announce further measures to ease travel and trade restrictions on Cuba – seemingly yet more one-sided concessions that will serve to shore up the communist Castro regime.

Mr. President, if you nevertheless do travel to Cuba, I implore you to meaningfully engage with the country’s leading human rights activists. I urge you to meet with U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet, along with journalist Guillermo Farinas, activist Rosa Maria Payá, and the current leadership and members of “The Ladies in White.” All of these individuals are internationally recognized dissidents or recipients of the European Union’s Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.

Meeting with these high-level, internationally acclaimed dissidents –and not government-picked “activists”-- will assure the Cuban people that America has not forgotten them. Frankly, these meetings should have been solidified well *before* the White House announced your upcoming visit. Fortunately, you still hold leverage – and could postpone your trip to the island until such arrangements have been confirmed and real progress for the Cuban people has been achieved.

Thank you for considering my views on the best way to advance the fundamental human rights of the Cuban people. I think you will agree that the U.S.-Cuba relationship cannot attain its considerable potential until these rights are respected by their government.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "E. Royce", written in a cursive style.

EDWARD R. ROYCE
Chairman