

Senator Cardin Must Help End The Blockade Of Cuba



04-22-2024 ~ Cuba is going hungry. The costs of food and other basic necessities are [skyrocketing](#). Rolling [blackouts](#) periodically plunge the island into darkness. Parents struggle to find [milk](#) for their children.

For the first time in history, the government has [asked](#) the UN for food aid.

The people of Cuba are facing their [worst humanitarian crisis](#) in decades. But Maryland Senator Ben Cardin has the power to help. We, as faith leaders concerned for our siblings in Cuba, urge him to act.

When President Obama took office, he recognized that U.S.-Cuba policy needed a change. For over half a century, the powerful United States has imposed a strict embargo (considered by many to be a [blockade](#)) on the small island nation. The main consequence of this policy has been the suffering of everyday Cubans. A [fettered economy](#), [deteriorating infrastructure](#), lack of access to [food](#) and [medicine](#)—the costs of the blockade are borne by the entire Cuban people.

President Obama began a process of easing these harsh restrictions and thawing relations between our two nations. The people of Cuba were [overjoyed](#); for once, their future looked bright.

Then came President Trump. In short order, Trump undid virtually all of the progress that Obama had made. In his last week in office, Trump even [added](#) Cuba to the State Sponsors of Terrorism list, a designation that top Democrat and Republican officials [have called](#) “bogus” and “a fiction,” and that effectively cuts investment-starved Cuba off from the international financial system.

When Biden became president, hopes of a return to the Obama approach were rekindled. After all, Biden had been Vice President at a time when easing restrictions yielded immediate benefits for Cuban civilians while [winning](#) the [support](#) of U.S. voters. But instead, Biden has kept almost all of the Trump policies in place, and the Cuban people are now paying the price.

The combination of the COVID-19 pandemic and Trump's sanctions has ignited such a crisis that [over 4 percent](#) of the Cuban population has left the country in search of a better life in the United States in the past two years alone.

U.S.-Cuba policy is stuck in the Trump era. But as Senator Cardin prepares to retire, he has a chance to chart a new path.

Last year, Cardin assumed the powerful position of Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, taking over from the hardline pro-blockade New Jersey Senator Bob Menendez, who had to [step down](#) after being indicted on bribery-related charges.

That's why we recently joined over thirty Maryland-based organizations, and dozens of community leaders, in sending a letter urging Senator Cardin to help end the blockade. As Senator Menendez used his position to block any measure of relief for the Cuban people, Senator Cardin can promote reform, supporting and advancing legislative efforts such as those that would repeal the [Torricelli](#) and [Helms-Burton](#) acts, and could wield his role to pressure Biden to take unilateral action, such as [removing](#) Cuba from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list.

Uniting churches, immigrant rights organizations, University of Maryland academics, Young Democrat clubs, and over a dozen ordained ministers and rabbis, we wrote: "As you are soon to depart from Congress, your actions in the coming year may define how you are remembered. It is our hope that your legacy will be as someone who is willing to transcend the inertia of the status quo and do what is right; for the people of Cuba, the United States, and the world."

This is not a fringe demand. As our letter notes, [poll](#) after [poll](#) after [poll](#) show that most Democrats and Republicans alike support an end to the blockade. That's to say nothing of the rest of the world; last year, the United Nations General Assembly [voted](#) to condemn the blockade by a vote 187 to 2. It was the 31st time the resolution has passed nearly unanimously.

Whatever we may make of the Cuban government, and whatever share of the responsibility it holds for the state of the Cuban economy, nothing justifies the United States intentionally starving the Cuban people. Our faiths demand that we stand up to such injustice, and build a world that respects the inherent dignity of all people.

Senator Cardin has a window of opportunity to help right a historic wrong, ease the suffering of millions, and define his legacy as a true forward-thinking leader. But that window is closing fast. It's time for him to act.

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