

Time to End the Cold War on Cuba

by Janet Jagan

Usually high on topics for discussion, people talk about President Obama and what he will be doing to fulfill his election promises.

Topic one usually dwells on methods to revive the US economy, which like the domino theory, has led to fall-outs worldwide. No doubt this is the highest priority of the Obama administration at this stage.

However, President Obama, during his first week in office had dealt with issues of utmost importance, like the closure of Guantanamo Bay prison and the complete halt to the use of torture in any form during questioning of prisoners. These two decisions had the effect of reducing strong anti-American feelings abroad.

There are so many attitudes and positions taken in the past by the USA which created animosity, that the USA now has a lot to do to try to create a new and clean slate. Closer to the USA and part of our hemispheric interests, is the USA boycott of Cuba that has continued for some 50 years. The effects of the boycott are numerous – the ban on trade between the USA and Cuba, the restrictions on travel and the movement of funds and a host of other restrictions that smell of the Cuban lobby in the US, mainly from the US Cubans in Florida who had left the island and took up permanent residence in the US. This hostility created and kept alive the hatred that has strengthened the ban on Cuba from being lifted. A new generation of US Cubans no longer have the deep hatred of the older generation and want to travel to Cuba, meet their families and create a friendlier attitude between the two countries.

Many are looking to President Obama to initiate a changed position on the US attitude to Cuba. The London “Observer” for example, recently carried a “Comment” on this subject. The writer, Richard Gott, reflected on what had happened in Latin America during the 50 years of Cuba’s existence. There were many ‘vicious’ military dictatorships, people were imprisoned, tortured and “disappeared”, as in Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Honduras and other Latin American Republics. “Nothing comparable happened in Cuba,” wrote Mr Gott.

The author noted that eventually, civilian regimes reemerged in Latin America and they “once again made friends with Cuba. Fidel became recognized as the greatest Latin American figure of the 20th century, an emblematic leader comparable with the heroes of the 19th century struggles for independence” in Latin America.

“It now falls on Barack Obama,” writes Gott in the Observer of January 9, 2009, to follow where the Latin Americans have led, and to “abandon the mistaken US policies of the past half century. The Cuban lobby in the US has lost its political clout, and there is now no domestic reason why an American President should not re-establish diplomatic and commercial relations with Cuba.”

This is a reasonable position which makes a strong case for the establishment of normal relations between Cuba and the USA.

For the first time in decades, the USA has voted into office a President who has the vision and the guts to take decisions which those before him feared. It is true that the pressure and the brainwashing to depict Cuba as “evil” has worked for a long time. The Cold War is over and it is time that the American people under a new and progressive leadership, take the steps necessary to correct many of the ills of the past. This is one that needs the closest attention and the courage to do the right thing.

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