
Organizations Denounce U.S. Restrictions on Public Charter Airline Service to Cuba

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Washington, D.C.—The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), the Center for Democracy in the Americas (CDA), the Cuba Study Group (CSG), Engage Cuba, the Latin America Working Group (LAWG), and Oxfam denounce the announced halt to public charter airline service to cities outside of Havana and call on Congress to pass the Freedom for Americans to Travel to Cuba Act of 2019.

[Marguerite Jiménez](#), Director for Cuba at WOLA, says, **“The Trump administration’s decision to suspend the charter flights to all Cuban destinations except for Havana is petty and punitive. It will further complicate family travel, separate families on both sides of the Florida Straits, and impose more hardships on the Cuban people. Taken together, these measures will continue to harm relationships between our two peoples, cut off key resources for a burgeoning Cuban private sector, and fuel an already growing migration crisis from the island.”**

Emily Mendrala, Executive Director of the Center for Democracy in the Americas, says, **“Today’s State Department actions force Cuban families to travel further, pay more, and take convoluted routes to see their loved ones, while also bringing us one step closer to closing the door to Cuba altogether. These senseless and mean-spirited policies are unlikely to change the Cuban government’s behavior or force a new approach to Venezuela, and, if anything, create resentment among the Cuban people. But the policies will have a practical impact—an unfortunate one. The charter companies losing money are U.S. businesses. The passengers are largely Cuban families, U.S. church groups, and**

academics. The Cuban communities connected to U.S. travelers by these flights are remote and poorer than those in Havana. They are the losers of today's announcement. The strategy of sanctions and isolation didn't work 60 years ago and it's unlikely to work today."

Ricardo Herrero, Executive Director of Cuba Study Group, says, "This latest travel ban is another desperate move by an administration that is clearly frustrated with the impotency of its maximum pressure policy to usher regime change in Cuba or Venezuela. The Cuban government has been down this road before. Havana officials have trained their entire lives to counter U.S. aggression, and with the help of international allies will once again assume all necessary measures to adjust and survive. Cuban families, American travelers, and US-based charter businesses will be the parties most harmed by this travel ban. Strangely, the president's South Florida advisors seem to believe that they'll win the Cuban-American vote this November by punishing Cuban families. They have also been down this road before, but forget that family travel bans contributed to their loss in the 2008 election. So this strategy is as confounding as it is immoral."

James Williams, President of Engage Cuba, says, "Stopping Cuban Americans' ability to see their families is a violation of human rights. It is a cynical, cruel political act that is beneath the values and dignity of this great country. The vast majority of Cubans on the island are not the Cuban government. They should be supported and not attacked by the United States. Once again we see the Trump administration trying to score political points with their base, regardless of the cost and cruelty."

Linda Delgado, Director of Government Affairs of OXFAM America, says, "The Trump administration's action today to further restrict US air travel to Cuba is just a continuation down the road of destructive and counterproductive policy that hurts Cuban families. It is not only an assault on the Cuban people, particularly those outside the capital who will suffer from reduced business opportunities from US travelers, it is also a direct affront to the American people whose freedom to travel to Cuba and form their own opinions about the island will now be further curtailed. We urge Congress to quickly pass the Freedom for Americans to Travel to Cuba Act of 2019 and force the administration to reverse its harmful policy agenda toward Cuba that is opposed by a majority of US public opinion."

Mavis Anderson, Senior Associate at the Latin America Working Group, says, "In another attempt to damage Cuba, the Trump administration has again managed to damage Cubans. The most recent move, today banning charter flights into nine Cuban airports, is an embarrassment before the world. A cruel embarrassment. It makes family reunification of Cubans much more difficult; it further hurts Cuban citizens by removing a needed source of income and independence; it limits the freedom of travel by US citizens to Cuba. LAWG condemns this action in the strongest terms."

The Freedom for Americans to Travel to Cuba Act of 2019, introduced by Senator Leahy in the Senate (S.2303) and Representatives McGovern and Emmer in the House (H.R.3960), would allow United States citizens and legal residents to travel between the United States and Cuba.
