
Head of US Council of Churches Calls for End of Cuba Blockade

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The left-leaning National Council of Churches welcomed the December announcement that Cuba and the U.S. would work to restore relations.

The U.S. National Council of Churches says it is committed to working with allies in the U.S. Congress to lift the five-decade-long blockade on Cuba.

The NCC's president, Rev. James Winkler, told CubaDebate, "It will take time and a lot of work, but we will make our voice heard," said Winkler. The head of the left-leaning religious organization spoke with CubaDebate in Washington in May during the last round of high-level negotiations between Cuban and U.S. officials.

Winkler praised the efforts of the U.S. government to change its relationship with Cuba.

The announcement that Cuba and the U.S. would work to restore diplomatic relations caught Winkler by surprise, despite the fact that the NCC has long advocated for this end.

The NCC head even shared a document from 1973 that calls on the U.S. government to normalize relations with Cuba since it had recently done so with the Soviet Union.

Winkler expressed doubt that hard-line Republicans in Congress, opposed to the new relationship with Cuba, would be able to impede the restoration of relations between the two countries. He suggested that even if bill negatively affecting the process should pass, that U.S. President Obama would likely veto it.

The reverend said that the closer the peoples of the U.S. and Cuba become, the better the prospects for a positive working relationship between their respective governments. Winkler also said that his organization would continue working with churches in Cuba to facilitate exchanges.

The announcement in December of last year was made possible in part thanks to the aid of another religious leader, Pope Francis, who will visit Cuba in September. Progress in negotiations between the two countries has been slow but steady, with the U.S. removing Cuba from its list of countries that sponsor terrorism last month.
