
Cuban envoy denied room at Hilton hotel in Fukuoka

14/11/2018



Cuba's ambassador to Japan was denied a room at a Hilton hotel in Fukuoka in October on grounds he represents a country slapped with U.S. economic sanctions.

A company official in Tokyo defended the Hilton Fukuoka Sea Hawk's refusal to provide accommodation, saying the hotel chain is obliged to comply with U.S. law as it is U.S.-based.

But Fukuoka city authorities did not agree and issued an administrative directive to the hotel not to treat prospective guests that way again, citing the Japanese hotel business law that forbids refusal of accommodation based on an individual's nationality.

The Cuban Embassy booked rooms for Ambassador Carlos Pereira and another embassy official through Tokyo-based Tonichi Travel Service Co.

The travel agency said it informed Hilton Fukuoka Sea Hawk via fax several days prior to the visit that one of the guests is the Cuban ambassador to Japan.

The travel agency said the hotel replied that it looked forward to welcoming them.

But when the ambassador and the embassy official arrived in Fukuoka on Oct. 2, the hotel refused to honor the reservations.

According to Tonichi Travel Service, the hotel called the travel company on Oct. 2 to say it could not allow the Cuban dignitaries to stay.

On Oct. 11, Hilton Fukuoka Sea Hawk sent a letter to the agency that said it “cannot accept guests who represent Cuba in an official capacity.”

The Cuban Embassy filed a complaint with the Foreign Ministry on Oct. 5, describing the hotel's treatment as shameful.

It also said applying U.S. law in Japan amounts to encroachment of this country's sovereignty.

The ministry referred the matter to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, which oversees the hotel business law.

Article 5 of the legislation dictates that hotel operators cannot refuse guests unless they are infected with a contagious disease or threaten to engage in illegal or other activity that will corrupt public morals.

The ministry concluded that Hilton Fukuoka Sea Hawk's treatment of the Cuban officials fell foul of the law.

A labor ministry official handling the matter said the “Fukuoka city government issued an administrative directive for the hotel” to comply with Japanese law as it is licensed to operate under Japanese law.

In an interview with The Asahi Shimbun, Emiko Ogami, senior manager in charge of communications at Hilton Japan, Korea and Micronesia, explained that it is hotel policy worldwide to refuse accommodation to government officials, state companies and certain individuals of countries that are under U.S. economic sanctions.

Among the targeted countries are Cuba, Iran, North Korea and Syria, she said.

However, the Cuban Embassy questioned whether the hotel chain maintains a consistent policy as the ambassador stayed at the Hilton Fukuoka Sea Hawk in April.

Other U.S. hotel chains such as Hyatt and Sheraton said they do not refuse guests for the reasons cited by the Hilton group.

Ogami said the group is still considering its response to the administrative directive issued by the Fukuoka municipal government.

Japan backed a U.N. resolution calling on Washington to lift its sanctions against Cuba, now in their 27th year.

In 2006, the Mexican government ordered the operator of a Sheraton-affiliated hotel in Mexico City to pay 1.2 million pesos (about 13 million yen, or \$114,000) as a fine for evicting 16 Cuban government delegates who were staying at the hotel.

The hotel operator cited the U.S. law on economic sanctions against Cuba, triggering a public outcry and accusations its approach violated Mexico's sovereignty.

The Mexican government decided the hotel's policy ran counter to the Mexican commerce law that forbids discriminating against guests based on their nationality.
