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Cuba-U.S. talks go well at Cuban pace, says Raul Castro

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Cuban President Raul Castro said Tuesday that negotiations with the [United States](#) to restore formal relationship "are going well" and "at our own pace," noting that they do not want to take any measure that would hurt the interest of the Cuban people.

Speaking to reporters at Havana's international airport after seeing off visiting French President [Francois Hollande](#), who concluded a one-day visit to Cuba before heading to Haiti, Castro mentioned the progress of the talks between Havana and Washington that began in January after more than five decades of animosity.

"Many people are wondering and criticizing why we are going very slowly" with the negotiations, said Castro. "Why do we have to rush? To make mistakes?"

"We don't want to take any measures that would sacrifice our people. That's the most important thing," Havana-based news agency Prensa Latina quoted Castro as saying.

He called on Washington to lift its trade embargo against the island nation, and called for the return of Guantanamo, which Cuba maintains the U.S. illegally occupies. These are the two conditions set by Cuba to get to the normalization phase of the talks.

After the two countries announced in December the decision to restore ties, they have held three rounds of negotiations so far on a range of matters, including the opening of embassies in their respective capitals. In response of Cuba's demand, U.S. President [Barack Obama](#) last month ordered Cuba to be removed from Washington 's list of alleged sponsors of terrorism.

Once the decree goes into effect at the end of May, the two countries will be able to appoint ambassadors, Castro said.

Regarding the opening of embassies in Washington and Havana, Castro said the terms of restricted movements of U.S. diplomats around the island need further discussion as well as the same restrictions for Cuban diplomats in the United States.

Washington wants its diplomats to have the same freedom to travel freely on the island without seeking Cuban government permission beforehand as they do in [Russia](#), China, and Vietnam. However, Cuba said such restrictions are necessary.

"What concerns me most is that U.S. diplomats will continue to do here the illegal things they have been doing all along and that cannot be allowed," Castro said, adding they must adhere to international agreements on the subject adopted in the 1948 Vienna Convention.

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