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Cuba-US Commission to Meet for the First Time in Havana

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The bilateral commission was created Aug. 14. It will meet Friday to define the agenda of talks aiming to normalize relations.

The Cuba-United States Bilateral Commission will meet for the first time this Friday in Cuban capital Havana. According to a statement Tuesday by the Cuban Foreign Ministry, the talks will aim to “define” the issues up for discussion during the process of normalization of diplomatic relations between the countries.

The bilateral commission was created Aug. 14, during a visit to Havana by the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry.

“During the meeting this Friday, delegations from both countries will define the agenda of topics that will be discussed during this phase which was initiated after the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States last July 20,” the Cuban Foreign Ministry said in a press released on their website.

The ministry went on to explain that the “Bilateral Commission will discuss new areas of cooperation for the benefit of both countries, also the dialogue regarding bilateral and multilateral issues, including those in which differences exist and other subjects with pending solutions between Cuba and the United States.”

The U.S. delegation will be chaired by the deputy assistant secretary for South America and Cuba with the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, Edward Alex Lee, while the Cuban delegation will be presided over by Josefina Vidal, the Cuban Foreign Ministry’s director-general for the United States.

Cuba and the United States announced the re-establishment of relations Dec. 17 after 54 years, and both countries re-opened embassies in each others’ capitals recently.

However, Cuba has insisted that for relations with the United States to be fully normalized Washington first needs to lift the unilateral blockade it imposed on the island nation more than five decades ago, which violates

international law.

The government of President Raul Castro has also insisted that Washington return the territory in Cuba that the U.S. illegally occupies: Guantanamo Bay. The U.S. naval base and prison there holds captive dozens of people accused of terrorism.

Cuba is also asking Washington to end the illegal broadcast of radio and television to the island.

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