

Kenia Serrano speaks on diplomatic normalization with the US

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17/12/2015



Recently there has been a warming of international relations between the imperial giant in the Western Hemisphere, the United States, and the revolutionary island that has been opposing U.S. world dominance for the last 50-plus years, Cuba.

Many believe that it started at Mandela's funeral with a handshake between Raul Castro and Barack Obama, but in reality, the Cuban people and their supporters around the world have been fighting the blockade for over half a century.

Kenia Serrano is a member of the Cuban National Assembly, which can be equated with Congress in the U.S., as well as the president of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the People. We sat down with her to discuss the normalization of diplomatic relations, Cuban-developed medical technologies that the U.S. has been denying its residents because of the blockade, the release of the Cuban 5 and the security of our beloved Black Liberation Army political exile Assata Shakur.

Check out this official of the Cuban government, as she speaks on these very important issues.

**M.O.I. JR:** What does it mean for diplomatic relations to be opened with Cuba? What does it materially mean for the Cuban people and for people in the United States?

**Kenia Serrano:** First of all, it means that we have direct communication – government to government direct communication.

We believe that it has been the result of the resistance of the Cuban people during more than 50 years now that the U.S. and Cuba broke diplomatic relations because of the Cuban revolution in the beginning.

And now we see that the revolution continues, but the U.S. government has realized the failure of their policy on Cuba, and it means that they have to establish new codes of understanding Cuba. It is the thing that we

understand.

Also it is a good opportunity for us to come to the United States like we are doing now. We received a visa to come.

More Cubans are receiving a visa to come to Cuba legally. In the past we have a lot of Cubans coming to the U.S. illegally, but now it is a better situation.

Another thing has to do with people to people exchange. More U.S. citizens are going to Cuba with licenses. Not openly, because the travel restrictions are still in place.

The U.S. Congress should lift the travel ban and also should lift the blockade as a policy. There is the positive decision made by Obama to establish diplomatic relations.

And we hope that in the future, we have normal relations, but we don't have normal relations yet, because the blockade is in place and because Guantanamo is occupied and the prison in Guantanamo is still open. And yesterday the U.S. Congress didn't approve the process of placing the prisoners of Guantanamo in other places.

So it means that Obama does not have the opportunity to close the prison either. So there are many obstacles, still, for our normal relations.

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That's why we talk about a process towards the establishing of normal relations, and what we have achieved so far is the rejoining of the diplomatic relations. And that is a real achievement

We are glad to have our embassy open here in Washington, and the U.S. people have their embassy open in Havana.

**M.O.I. JR:** Is that the first step?

**Kenia Serrano:** Yes, that was the first step. It was achieved.

**M.O.I. JR:** Can you talk about the relationship between the Cuban people and the police? You talked a little bit in your presentation about it. There are rampant killings of Black people in particular in the United States by the police – they say every 28 hours, but I believe it's even more often than that that Black people are being killed by the police. What is the relationship between the Cuban people and the police?

**Kenia Serrano:** What we support is a relation of respect for human beings. In our revolution, one of the things we achieved is a respect for the people, is to preserve human rights, all kinds of human rights. For us, it is very important that the police play the role of preserving people's safety, preserving the citizens' good behavior.

Also in Cuba the police are very preventive. For instance, when they are in the traffic and they see that a driver is in the process of violating the law, it is better to make some actions in the educational aspect. Then probably next time they will receive a fine, but is a preventive way to do things for our police.

Of course, like many police bodies in the world, our police have a repressive function, but repression doesn't mean that you have to have a lack the respect for human beings. It doesn't mean that you have to brutalize the people.

It doesn't mean that you ever murder a person, because in Cuba it doesn't happen. In Cuba, in 57 years of the Cuban Revolution, we have not even one case of people killed by the police.

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It is something that is very important for us, because in Cuba, the members of the police are representative of the

Cuban people, normal people. It is not a rich class that are the police.

Another thing that I believe is very important is the control that we have that the people do not have weapons with them in their hands. There is a very strict control on that.

Of course there are a few people authorized. For instance, if they do sports, regarding this aspect, OK, they are allowed to go to the competitions, but it is very restricted. And also some historical combatants, that for something special, they have a weapon, it is something very punctual in Cuba, and it is very well controlled .

In fact we don't have those kinds of criminal cases, nothing like that. And when, because you know, they are human beings, when if it happens, and it is very, very strange for that to happen, and it is very rare for that kind of thing to happen in Cuba.

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If it does happen, in any case, immediately, the people, the population, is protected. That police man or woman has to go to court, and they have to answer because of the responsibility with affecting the family, the community, and whatever, and it is a very, very strong punishment for those violations of the ethical code of the police.

So I believe that we have many things to be proud of in Cuba, and that is one of them.

**M.O.I. JR:** Can you talk a little bit about Cuba's position on genetically modified foods or going organic? What is Cuba's position on that?

**Kenia Serrano:** Of course, organic, because we are a poor country and also because we believe that nature should be respected. We believe that human beings are the main component of nature, but we have to live in peace with nature. And we have to protect nature; we have to protect the natural resources, not only for ourselves, but for the future of our children.

And also, Cuba is very committed to all the international legislation protecting the climate, protecting many other things regarding the best living standards of the people in the world. For instance, we are looking to have more organic agriculture in Cuba.

**Cuba is very committed to all the international legislation protecting the climate, protecting many other things regarding the best living standards of the people in the world. For instance, we are looking to have more organic agriculture in Cuba.**

On one hand, we have been obliged to have an organic agriculture because of the impact of the U.S. blockade. We don't have access to many technologies and machines and many other things. But also in the past, because we had very good relations with the Soviet Union, we were used to have some machines, and some things, and now we have achieved the experience that those machines and non-organic chemistry and so on are very bad for our health.

So thanks to the different experiences we have had in the recent past, Cuba has decided to preserve food production to achieve food security in the future, and of course to innovate in many ways and not to accept genetically modified products because it is against the people's health, and it is against the rights of the farmers, and it is against many other codes we have in environmental law.



Affirming the tradition of solidarity between the Cuban people and the Black community in the U.S. are Kali O'Ray, director of the San Francisco Black Film Festival, Cuban National Assembly member Kenia Serrano, People's Minister of Information JR Valrey and Leima Martinez of ICAP's North American Division.

**M.O.I. JR:** You spoke a little bit about how Cuba has been limited from technologies because of the embargo. But can you speak to how America has limited itself from Cuban technologies that Cubans have developed, specifically medically. What is it that the American people do not have access to that has been developed in Cuba?

**Kenia Serrano:** Yeah, That's true. Since 1982, a long time ago, even before the collapse of the Soviet Union – you know we are very independent, no matter the foreign affairs that we have had – and in 1982, we decided to start developing ourselves in biotech industry. We have achieved a very important medicine for diabetes; it is called Heberprot-P. That is the name of the medicine, and it is to deal with the diabetic fit which diabetic patients suffer very often, and it is very effective.

We have been able to see the results for instance in Haiti, when the earthquake and the hurricane happened, many of the other foreign teams helping the Haitian people, they just got in Haiti and immediately, in order to save people's lives, they started to amputate some of the legs. Because, you remember, it was a total disaster.

In the case of the Cuban doctors, they opposed that protocol. They said no. We have to save people. We have to save the mental health of the people and the psychological health of the people, and if you don't have your legs, you are not going to be the same person. Let us really try to apply a preventative policy in our health care here and also to apply those kinds of biotech products and medicines.

**We have achieved a very important medicine for diabetes; it is called Heberprot-P.**

And it was very effective. We were able to see that for only a very few patients, it was necessary to amputate them.

And here in the U.S. we know how many millions of people just needing that, not only belonging to the Afro-American population, but also in other communities here, because the question of the disease of diabetes is affecting everywhere and all kinds of people. No matter if you are rich or poor, diabetes is there. It is increasingly

overwhelming in the world because of the very bad patterns of consumption of food and so on. So it is necessary.

Another thing, for instance, is that we have achieved a lung cancer vaccine. It is another very important vaccine that we have achieved. And we hope there is a day that the blockade is lifted, and we have a very good agreement on that because many people in this country and other countries in all parts of the world are suffering from many kinds of cancer.

So that's another example. We have many others. I won't mention them all, but we have many others, for diabetes, for cancer, and many other things.

### **We have achieved a lung cancer vaccine.**

The main thing is not a concrete medicine; it is the different way we deal with human beings. Our doctors are not businessmen or women. Our doctors are doctors. They are the doctors of the soul of the people. They are people who are really committed to save lives. People in front of our doctors' eyes are not commodities, they are people; so that is the thing we learned from the very beginning in the medical teaching in the medical career and all careers in Cuba.

We understand in the university and in life that first of all we have to protect the people, and it is why we consider that the people of the U.S. are not only forbidden to have access to those medicines. I believe that the people of the U.S. have been forbidden to understand the Cuban reality and to exchange views with our people and to learn from us and us, the Cuban people to learn from you and your struggles during the history of the United States.

**M.O.I. JR:** I want to salute the Cuban people in helping to free the Cuban 5 political prisoners who were fighting for the Cuban people against the mercenaries of the United States.

Can you speak to how they are doing? And what is your position on political prisoners in the United States?

**Kenia Serrano:** First of all the Cuban 5 are very good; they are healthy. They could resist 16 years in prison but their dignity is very high. They are now with their families. They are now with the Cuban people.

Gerardo Hernandez, the one that had the worst prison time – we remember that he had two life sentences plus 15 years – now, he and his wife Adriana have a baby. Gemma is her name.

So we are living momentum in the case of the Cuban 5 because they are the confirmation of how important is our strength in front of the U.S. intervention, how important is our unity in front of this constant aggression. How important it is to have leaders like Fidel.

To really believe that you have something to defend, because if they resisted, it was because they know it was millions of Cubans and millions of people around the world, including here in the United States, that were really doing everything that was in our hands pushing and pushing in many different ways, in order to free them, and they didn't give up. They were very firm, and they were really confident about the Revolution, that it was behind them and standing by them.

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And of course, the Cuban 5 were very much in solidarity with political prisoners. First of all, I have heard them telling us in many various occasions that we have meetings with the people of Cuba or in other countries, that they remember many of their comrades, many of the other inmates with whom they were sharing their cells.

For instance, Fernando Gonzales, one of the Cuban 5 that is now the deputy president of our institute, the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the People, Fernando used to share his prison time during four years with Oscar Lopez Rivera, the Puerto Rican political prisoner, the longest held person in prison, the Puerto Rican Independentista.

But also, they are always remembering the messages they sent to Mumia Abu Jamal, to Leonard Peltier. They also

remember when Fidel himself expressed on television our solidarity with Shaka Sankofa, that Afro American prisoner who was finally killed here.

Every time there is in the United States police brutality, for instance, in Ferguson and many other areas of the States. We have heard about the burning of Black churches here in the United States. We heard about, and we have received people representing the Black Lives Matter movement, the “Hands Up” movement and many other movements here in the different communities. And a few years ago, representing Occupy Wall Street and many other movements here.

### **The Cuban 5 were very much in solidarity with political prisoners.**

Our position is very clear. We are in solidarity with all those peoples in the world who are mobilized to change the U.S. hegemony and the police brutality, all those things that are just trying to break people’s lives. We believe that those movements, in the way that they continue to be organized as they achieve better coordination among themselves, we believe it is going to be a very successful movement.

And of course, from the ethical point of view, we cannot believe that police are behaving in that way. Because not only in Cuba – we are a socialist country – I have visited capitalist countries, very imperialist countries in this world, and the police behave differently. So it is necessary to really have a civic debate here in the States and then to think about how to really deal with human beings, because it is necessary.

The United States is a very hegemonic power in this world, and I think the moral authority of the United States is very damaged because of that.

**M.O.I. JR:** The last question I have: Can we be assured by the Cuban government that they will not negotiate our sister, Assata Shakur, away and give her back to the United States. Can we be assured of that?

We salute Cuba for protecting her for so many years. She’s been in Cuba for decades. She’s a hero to our movement. There has been and remains a \$2 million bounty on her head. Obama’s administration put a \$2 million bounty, dead or alive, on her.

One of the biggest things I came across in talking to my comrades about interviewing you. They were like, “Ask her directly the Assata Shakur question.”

**Kenia Serrano:** Cuba is guided by principals. When we make a decision, we make a decision.

In that case, we made a decision. Cuba is an independent and sovereign country. In that case, we consider that she is a political refugee, and that’s all. I think it is very clear for us. So don’t worry. The internal affairs of Cuba are not on the table.

So we are very, very firm. We have been resisting the U.S. blockade for more than 56 years now, and we hope that no conditions are placed for Cuba to have normal relations with the United States, but if it happens, Cuba knows very well how to handle it and we are not going to accept any preconditions.

### **Cuba is guided by principals. When we make a decision, we make a decision.**

Because our independence and our sovereignty is untouched. We are not negotiating any internal decision, and we are not rescinding any of the decisions we have made in the past.

**M.O.I. JR:** From the Black movement around the world, we salute you for Cuba’s solidarity in Haiti. In Angola, Namibia, Congo, Ethiopia and so many other places militarily as well as medically, Cuba has been on the front line in helping Black people in particular to achieve their sovereignty from enslavement – European enslavement primarily, capitalist, imperialist enslavement in the world.

We salute and we will continue to support the end of the blockade. We appreciate your time. Thank you.

**Kenia Serrano:** It is beautiful to be internationalist with the people of Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia Pacific, all the peoples of the world. We have even gone to Australia to apply the literacy campaign to work with the

Aboriginal people there; so it doesn't matter: What we have, we share in the world. Thank you.

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