U.S.-Cuba thaw inspiring Israel to restore ties with Communist nation, official says

07/04/2016



A top Israeli official said Tuesday that the restoration of relations between the U.S. and Cuba could pave the way for Israel to rekindle ties with the island nation as well.

The Middle Eastern nation has not had diplomatic relations with Cuba since former leader Fidel Castro broke them in 1973. Since then, Cuban government officials typically have criticized Israel, backing the Palestinian independence movement.

But Modi Ephraim, who heads the Latin American and Caribbean division of Israel's Foreign Ministry, said that his country hopes to restore ties with Cuba "when it is possible," according to the Jerusalem Post.

Nicaragua, Venezuela and Bolivia have no diplomatic ties with Israel either, a country that hasn't sent a sitting prime minister to South America since its founding in 1948, the Post noted. Latin American leaders have visited Israel.

While the Cuban and Israeli governments have not had official ties, the countries have long participated in health, cultural and agricultural exchanges.

The Post also noted that Israelis also have vacationed on the Caribbean island.

Ephraim said that Cuba has an influential role with several Latin American countries, and that a change in the country – such as its relation with the United States after more than 50 years of no ties – can be expected to inspire other changes.

Some 1,500 Jews live in Cuba, which has three synagogues and Jewish cemeteries.

Cuban Jews generally have said they are treated respectfully by the Castro regime, its views of Israel's politics

notwithstanding.

“It is a very open relationship, very sincere and, above all, respectful,” said David Prinstein, vice president of the Jewish community in Cuba.

In 2010, former Cuban leader Fidel Castro raised eyebrows when he expressed sympathy for Israel in an interview with the Atlantic, saying the attacks on that country presented a constant challenge for its leadership.

He also criticized then-Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for suggesting that the Holocaust was a myth and fanning the flames of anti-Semitism in the Middle East.