

Cuba, U.S. to meet next week on normalizing ties

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Officials of Cuba and the [United States](#) are set to meet again next week on normalizing ties, Cuba's Foreign Affairs Ministry said Thursday.

The third session of the Cuba-U.S. Bilateral Commission will take place Monday in Havana, the capital of Cuba, with the focus on improving political and economic ties, Gustavo Machin, the ministry's deputy director for U.S. affairs told reporters.

"We will cover a number of issues we have been able to discuss in the last few months and we will set the agenda for the rest of the year," said Machin.

The two sides continue to have many differences on key matters, such as the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Guantanamo Bay and the lifting of the U.S.-led trade embargo, said the official.

However, less than a year since they formally reopened respective embassies, Havana and Washington have made significant progress in the areas of environmental protection and maritime security, and have resumed postal services and direct flights, he noted.

In the diplomatic and political field, there have been many achievements through the meetings presidents Raul Castro and [Barack Obama](#) have held, particularly the visit of Obama to Cuba last March, Machin said.

In the economic field, however, many unilateral sanctions imposed by Washington continue to hamper the normalization of ties, he said.

"Cuba hasn't been able to make financial transactions in U.S. dollars, which means that banks around the world fear dealing with Cuban institutions because of possible sanctions by Washington," said Machin.

One issue that has yet to be discussed is reparations, with Cuba claiming at least 121 billion U.S. dollars in compensation for economic and material losses inflicted by the embargo and acts of terrorism by U.S.-backed anti-government groups.

Washington, in turn, says it should be compensated for U.S.-owned property that was nationalized following Cuba's 1959 Revolution.

"We are not yet negotiating the subject of claims even if there is recognition on both sides that these exist," said Machin.

The third bilateral commission will be led by Josefina Vidal, the ministry's head of U.S. affairs, and Kristie Kenney, counselor for the U.S. State Department.

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