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**Cuba Reaffirms Willingness to Continue Relations with USA**

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Cuba has reaffirmed the desire to progress in relations with the United States and create beneficial ties, based on mutual respect and without abandoning principles that govern the actions of the Caribbean nation.

This was expressed by Josefina Vidal, director general of the United States Division at the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MINREX), also. She described as positive the development of the fifth meeting of the bilateral commission between both nations, which met here yesterday to assess the work carried out by the two sides in the last 15 months.

Vidal presided over the Cuban side in this meeting, while Mari Carmen Aponte, Assistant Secretary in the Department of State's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, led the U.S. delegation.

The meeting once again proved that the reestablishment of diplomatic ties, the reopening of embassies and the development of cooperation have benefited both nations and have responded to their respective interests, the MINREX official said.

Cuba hopes that the upcoming administration headed by President-Elect, Donald Trump, will take into account as of its inauguration in January the results achieved in general since December 17, 2014, when President Raul Castro and his U.S. peer, Barack Obama, announced the beginning of a new era in the bilateral ties, she added.

The vast majority of the Cuban people, U.S. citizens, and Cuban-Americans living in the United States support the continuity of this new interaction and the steps taken to strengthen this process, Josefina stated in a news conference at MINREX.

She highlighted the progress recorded since the working group that met today was established in August 2015, and mentioned the adoption of agreements on health, the resumption of regular commercial flights and the holding of human rights dialogues, disarmament and non-proliferation, among others.

Both sides defined yesterday the steps they should take in coming weeks, before the change of mandate in the White House, a period in which high-level visits, meetings on regulatory issues, energy, intellectual property and specific actions in other fields will take place.

Technical meetings are also scheduled between the Cuban Border Patrol Troops and the United States Coast Guard.

According to the official, the first steps have only been taken to date in the economic and commercial level, due to the restrictions imposed by the Washington economic, commercial and financial blockade on the Caribbean island for more than 50 years.

Vidal has reiterated that the two countries will move decisively towards the normalization of bilateral ties only when these unilateral sanctions are eliminated, the United States return the territory occupied by the naval base in Guantanamo against the will of the Cuban government and people and cease the policies aimed at subverting domestic order in Cuba.

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