October 24, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken                                         The Honorable Alejandro N. Mayorkas
Secretary of State                                                                Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of State                                                    U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2201 C Street NW                                                              2801 Nebraska Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20520                                                        Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretaries Blinken and Mayorkas,

We write to express our concerns regarding recent decisions that indicate marked shifts in U.S.-Cuba policy, and to respectfully request, within all applicable rules and regulations, information to specific questions pertaining to these decisions.

On October 18, 2022, the State Department and USAID announced “$2 million in humanitarian assistance to support shelter needs for the most vulnerable communities who have been affected by the devastating impacts of Hurricane Ian in Cuba,” to be funded from the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account. According to the announcement, the “humanitarian assistance will be delivered directly to the Cuban people – not through the Cuban government – through trusted, independent organizations operating in the country with a long presence in hurricane-affected communities.” The justification cited for providing this aid was attributed to Hurricane Ian damaging “an estimated 68,370 homes, of which 15,705 have completely or partially collapsed, and another 17,866 have completely lost their roofs. Additionally, the hurricane damaged or destroyed an estimated 9,000 hectares of crops in Artemisa, decreasing already limited food supplies.” Additionally, USAID stated that 43 sets of “firefighting equipment” were provided to a training station in Havana, and an additional 57 sets will be delivered at an unspecified date. According to reports, the Matanzas fire, the disaster for which IDA-funded firefighting equipment was provided, was extinguished by August 9, 2022. USAID explained that the IDA-funded firefighting equipment would replenish supplies that were damaged in combating the Matanzas fire, as none of it would be delivered in time to address that disaster.

In the meantime, we are deeply troubled that the Biden Administration has informed us that it will begin immediately returning Cuban nationals who escaped totalitarian Cuba, and that it is initiating monthly flights for the purpose. This decision seems to be a reversal from President Biden’s statement a month ago, that “there are fewer and fewer immigrants coming from Central America than from Mexico. It’s a totally different circumstance… What's on my watch now is Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua, and the ability to send them back to those states is not rational.” The Cuban people endure severe oppression and egregious human rights abuses. Hundreds of activists, including children, remain imprisoned for daring to speak out against the regime. Certainly the situation in Cuba has not improved in the intervening month since the President’s comment, especially in the wake of the devastation from Hurricane Ian that prompted the
announcement of $2 million in humanitarian aid. In fact, returning Cuban nationals to Cuba at this time would seem to be even less “rational” today.

The malignant nature of the Cuban dictatorship has not changed in sixty years. Accordingly, we are concerned that the announced aid will benefit the Cuban dictatorship, which for decades has stolen from the Cuban people and deprived them of their most basic needs. As President Biden said last year in regard to money sent to Cubans from abroad, "It is highly likely that the regime would confiscate those remittances or a big chunk of it." We are concerned that this assistance, even if well intentioned, will serve to prop up a brutal dictatorship that will use U.S. taxpayer dollars to further imprison, censor, and oppress the Cuban people. We have no doubt that the regime will attempt to use these resources to tighten its grip on power, and we hope that you have significant and thorough safeguards in place to ensure that does not happen.

Given our concerns, and these shifts in U.S. policy toward the regime in Cuba and the Cuban people, we respectfully request answers to the following questions:

- How will the U.S. government ensure that taxpayer dollars, used for the donated firefighting equipment and the $2 million in humanitarian aid, will benefit the Cuban people and not the regime?
- What was the cost to the U.S. taxpayer of the 100 sets of firefighting equipment to be given to the Cuban regime?
- Does the Biden Administration have plans to further replenish the regime’s supplies for future emergencies?
- What measures were taken to ensure that the firefighter assistance will not benefit the Cuban military, as firefighting stations often are under the direction and supervision of the Cuban military?
- Given that the firefighting equipment was delivered after the Matanzas fire was extinguished, and to a different region, to replenish the Cuban regime’s firefighting supplies, was it appropriately provided as “disaster” assistance pursuant to the rules governing IDA?
- What are the terms of the agreement with the Cuban regime to provide firefighting equipment? Under what conditions will the remaining 57 equipment sets be delivered?
- USAID informed us that IDA assistance was used in response to Hurricane Gustav in 2008. How was the $1.6 million in humanitarian aid used? What NGOs implemented the funding?
- What NGOs will implement the $2 million in humanitarian assistance in 2022? Do they have experience in Cuba? Do they have experience in totalitarian dictatorships with closed economies? Do they have experience adhering to U.S. law pertaining to sanctions on Cuba, in addition to working in a designated state sponsor of terrorism?
- What are the terms of the agreement with the Cuban regime in providing the $2 million in humanitarian assistance?
- How will the U.S. government monitor the delivery of aid to ensure that it helps the Cuban people, and does not end up benefitting the regime or sold in military-run stores as has happened in the past? (*For a recent example, see They denounce sale in MLC stores of alleged products donated by Mexico | Cuba DNA (adncuba.com).* )
• How is the U.S. government determining the most urgent needs on the island? Is it relying on independent sources, press reports, or direct observation? Or is it determining needs on the island based on the regime’s requests and data that it provides to the U.S.?
• What factors will be considered in determining whether to provide further assistance?
• Has the Cuban dictatorship requested additional assistance?
• Has the United States received anything in exchange for providing this assistance?
• Will the vessels carrying humanitarian donations be subject to the regime’s landing fees, or port taxes?
• In migration talks earlier this year, which party(s) requested the repatriation of Cuban nationals to totalitarian Cuba?
• How will the U.S. government monitor repatriated Cubans who might face retribution, as required under the Migration Accords?
• How is it more “rational” today to return Cubans to oppression and human rights abuses of totalitarian Cuba, in the wake of Hurricane Ian’s devastation, than it was one month ago?
• Why are Cuban nationals who are attempting to enter the U.S. being provided with I-220a forms, potentially depriving them of a status that would allow them to adjust under the Cuban Adjustment Act?

Thank you for your attention to this matter of utmost importance, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Mario Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress

María Elvira Salazar
Member of Congress

Carlos A. Gimenez
Member of Congress