

The Freedom of Travel to Cuba Act of 2015

Despite increasingly open diplomatic relations with the international community, Cuban citizens continue to experience severe restrictions on their rights to freedom of expression, association, assembly, and movement. According to Amnesty International's 2015 Annual Report, thousands of cases of harassment of government critics, including journalists and human rights activists, and arbitrary arrests and detentions were reported last year. In November 2015 alone, there were over 1,400 politically motivated detentions in Cuba, the highest number in years.

This past year, significant changes were made to strengthen Cuba's diplomatic relations with the United States. In April, President Castro met U.S. President Barack Obama during Cuba's first attendance of the Summit of the Americas, marking the first meeting between leaders of the two countries in nearly 60 years. In May, Cuba was removed from the United States' list of countries designated as state sponsors of international terrorism. Cuba and the USA reopened their respective embassies and announced their intent to re-establish diplomatic relations. Despite this, in September President Obama renewed the Trading with the Enemy Act, which imposes financial and economic sanctions on Cuba. In October, the UN General Assembly adopted, for the 24th consecutive year, a resolution calling on the USA to lift the unilateral embargo.

The Freedom of Travel to Cuba Act of 2015 is a bipartisan bill if passed would allow any U.S. citizen to travel to Cuba. **H.R. 664** was introduced by Representatives Mark Sanford [R-SC-1] and James P. McGovern [D-MA-2] on February 2, 2015. The Senate bill **[S.299]** was introduced by Senator Jeff Flake [R-AZ] and Sen. Patrick J. Leahy [D-VT] on January 29, 2015. Both bills would make important strides towards lifting the embargo by facilitating people-to-people interactions.

Specifically, the Freedom of Travel to Cuba Act of 2015 would mandate the following:

- The President may not prohibit or regulate travel to or from Cuba by U.S. citizens or legal residents, or any of the transactions involving travel, including banking transactions; and
- Any regulation in effect on the date of enactment of the Act prohibiting or regulating such travel or transactions involving such travel will cease to have any force or be effective.
- For more details on the bills:
 - **[H.R.664]** <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/housebill/664/cosponsors?q=%7B%22party%22%3A%22Republican%22%7D>
 - **[S.299]** <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/299/all-info>

Removing the travel ban placed on U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba would further an agenda for human rights change in Cuba, and continue to normalize relations between the two countries. Amnesty International has for many years called to lift the embargo. If the U.S. embargo on Cuba, and its negative impact on the economic and social rights of Cubans, is lifted, it will mean Cuban authorities can no longer use the crippling sanctions as an excuse for failing to uphold Cuba's human rights obligations under international law. In March 2016, President Obama will be the first U.S. President to travel to Cuba in 90 years, and this historic moment offers a tremendous opportunity for Congress to move towards lifting restrictions on travel to Cuba.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA RECOMMENDATIONS:

- U.S. Representatives to cosponsor H.R.664 Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act of 2015
- U.S. Senators to cosponsor S.299 Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act of 2015