

Administration of Barack Obama, 2016

The President's News Conference With President Raúl Castro Ruz of Cuba in Havana, Cuba

March 21, 2016

President Castro. Mr. President Barack Obama, we are pleased to welcome you on this, the first visit of a President of the United States of America to our country in 88 years. We have observed that in the 15 months that have passed since the decision was made to establish our diplomatic relations, we have obtained concrete results. We were able to resume direct postal exchanges, and we signed an agreement to resume commercial flights.

We have signed two memorandums of understanding on the protection of the environment and maritime areas and another one to secure the safety of sea navigation. Today another one will be signed on cooperation in the area of agriculture. At the moment, another set of bilateral instruments are being negotiated to cooperate in such areas as counternarcotics, the safety of commerce and travelers, and health. About this last issue, we have agreed to deepen our cooperation in the prevention and treatment of transmissible diseases such as Zika and nontransmissible chronic diseases, cancer included.

This cooperation is beneficial not only for Cuba and the United States, but also for our hemisphere at large. Following the decisions made by President Obama to modify the application of some aspects of the blockade, Cuban enterprises and their American counterparts are working to identify possible commercial operations that could materialize in the still restrictive framework of existing regulations.

The fact is that some have already materialized, especially in the area of telecommunications, an area in which our country already has a program designed on the basis of its priorities and the necessary technological sovereignty, one that can secure the appropriate use and the service of national interests.

Progress has also been made toward the acquisition of medicines, medical material, and equipment for power generation and environmental protection, these among others. Much more could be done if the U.S. blockade were lifted.

We recognize the position of President Obama and his administration against the blockade and his repeated appeals to Congress to have it removed. The most recent measures adopted by his administration are positive, but insufficient. I have the opportunity to discuss with the President other steps that we think could be taken in order to remove restrictions that remain in force and make a significant contribution to the debunking of the blockade. This is essential because the blockade remains in force and because it contains discouraging elements and intimidating effects and extraterritorial outreach. I put forward to the President some examples on this, showing their negative consequences for both Cuba and other countries.

The blockade stands as the most important obstacle to our economic development and the well-being of the Cuban people. That's why its removal will be of the essence to normalize bilateral relations. And actually, it will also bring benefits to the Cuban émigrés who wish the best for their families and their country. In order to move forward towards normalization, it will also be necessary to return the territory illegally occupied by Guantanamo naval base.

Since they stand as the two main obstacles, these issues were again dealt with in the editorial ran on March 9 by the official newspaper of the Communist Party of Cuba and again

only 4 days ago in the press conference offered by our Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez, both pieces extensively reported by the media.

Other policies should also be abolished for normal relations to develop between the United States and Cuba. No one should intend to have the Cuban people renounce the destiny it chose in freedom and sovereignty, the same for which it has made enormous sacrifices.

We also discussed international issues, particularly those that could have an impact on regional peace and stability. We had thought to discuss other issues, but we did not have enough time. I had planned to raise our concern over the destabilization some are trying to promote in Venezuela, something which we consider to be counterproductive to the overall situation in the continent. I did not have the chance to raise it with him; I'm raising it here.

Likewise, we talked about the ongoing peace process in Colombia and the efforts to put an end to that conflict. There are profound differences between our countries that will not go away. Since we hold different concepts on many subjects such as political systems, democracy, the exercise of human rights, social justice, international relations, and world peace and stability.

We defend human rights. In our view, civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights are indivisible, interdependent, and universal. Actually, we find it inconceivable that a government does not defend and ensure the right to health care, education, social security, food provision and development, equal pay, and the rights of children. We oppose political manipulation and double standards in the approach to human rights.

Cuba has much to say and show on this issue. That is why I have reiterated to the President our willingness to continue moving forward with the dialogue on this matter that was already initiated.

On December 17, 2014, as we announced the decision to reestablish diplomatic relations, I said that we should learn the art of coexisting with our differences in a civilized manner. In my remarks to Parliament on July 15, 2015, I said changing everything that needs to be changed is the sovereign and exclusive concern of Cubans. The revolutionary Government is willing to advance toward normalization of relations, for it is convinced that both countries can coexist and cooperate in a civilized manner and for the mutual benefit regardless of existing and future differences and thus contribute to peace, security, stability, development, and equity in our continent and around the world.

Today I reaffirmed that we should exercise the art of civilized coexistence, which involves accepting and respecting differences and preventing these from becoming the center of our relationship. We should instead promote links that can benefit both our countries and peoples while focusing on those things that bring us closer and not on those that pull us apart. We agree that a long and complex path still lies ahead. But what is most important is that we have started taking the first steps to build a new type of relationship, one that has never existed between Cuba and the United States.

Actually, destroying a bridge can be an easy and quick undertaking. However, its solid reconstruction can prove a lengthy and challenging endeavor. After four failed attempts and giving proof of her will and perseverance, on September 2, 2013, American swimmer Diane Nyad managed to cross the Florida Straits, swimming without an antishark cage to protect her.

For that exploit of conquering the geographical distance between our two countries—it was for that exploit that on August 30, 2014, as the national anthems of Cuba and the United

States were played, she was presented with the Order of Sport Merits, a decoration awarded by the State Council. Such feat carries a powerful message, one that should serve as an example to our bilateral relations. For it confirms that if she could do it, then we can do it too.

To President Obama, I reiterate our appreciation for his visit and the willingness of the Government of Cuba to continue moving forward in the forthcoming months, for the well-being of our peoples and countries. Thank you very much.

President Obama. Buenas tardes. President Castro, to you, the Cuban Government, and the Cuban people, thank you for the welcome that you have extended to me, to my family, and to my delegation. For more than half a century, the sight of a U.S. President here in Havana would have been unimaginable. But this is a new day—*es un nuevo día*—between our two countries.

Death of Staff Sergeant Louis F. Cardin, USMC

With your indulgence, Mr. President, I want to go just briefly off topic because during this weekend, I received news that one of our outstanding United States Armed Servicemembers, Marine Staff Sergeant Louis F. Cardin of Temecula, California, was killed in northern Iraq as we assisted the Iraqi Government in dealing with ISIL, the terrorist organization there. And I just wanted to give my thoughts and prayers to the family there and those who have been injured. It's a reminder that even as we embark on this historic visit, there are U.S. Armed Servicemembers who are sacrificing each and every day on behalf of our freedom and our safety. So I'm grateful to them.

Cuba-U.S. Relations

My wife Michelle and I brought our daughters—and by the way, they don't always want to go with us; they're teenagers now. They have friends at home, and they have things to do, but they wanted to come to Cuba because they understood, and we wanted to show them, the beauty of Cuba and its people. We were moved by the Cubans who received us yesterday, smiling and waving, as we drove in from the airport. We were grateful for the opportunity to experience Old Havana and some excellent Cuban food. Our visit to the Cathedral was a reminder of the values that we share, of the deep faith that sustains so many Cubans and Americans. And it also gave me an opportunity to express my gratitude to Cardinal Ortega, who, along with His Holiness Pope Francis, did so much to support the improved relations between our governments. This morning I was honored to pay tribute to José Martí, not only his role in Cuban independence, but the profound words that he wrote and spoke in support of liberty and freedom everywhere.

I bring with me the greetings and the friendship of the American people. In fact, I'm joined on this trip by nearly 40 Members of Congress, Democrats and Republicans. This is the largest such delegation of my Presidency, and it indicates the excitement and interest in America about the process that we've undertaken. These Members of Congress recognize that our new relationship with the Cuban people is in the interest of both nations. I'm also joined by some of America's top business leaders and entrepreneurs because we're ready to pursue more commercial ties, which create jobs and opportunity for Cubans and Americans alike.

And I'm especially pleased that I'm joined on this trip by so many Cuban Americans. For them and for the more than 2 million proud Cuban Americans across the United States, this is a moment filled with great emotion. Ever since we made it easier to travel between our countries, more Cuban Americans are coming home. And for many, this is a time of new hope for the future.

So, President Castro, I want to thank you for the courtesy and the spirit of openness that you've shown during our talks. At our meeting in Panama last year, you said that we're willing to discuss every issue, and everything is on the table. So, with your understanding, my statement will be a little longer than usual.

President Castro always jokes with me about how long Castro brothers' speeches can be. But I'm going to actually go a little longer than you probably today, with your indulgence. We have a half a century of work to catch up on.

Our growing engagement with Cuba is guided by one overarching goal: advancing the mutual interests of our two countries, including improving the lives of our people, both Cubans and Americans. That's why I'm here. I've said consistently, after more than five very difficult decades, the relationship between our governments will not be transformed overnight. We continue, as President Castro indicated, to have some very serious differences, including on democracy and human rights. And President Castro and I have had very frank and candid conversations on these subjects.

The United States recognizes progress that Cuba has made as a nation, its enormous achievements in education and in health care. And perhaps most importantly, I affirmed that Cuba's destiny will not be decided by the United States or any other nation. Cuba is sovereign and rightly has great pride. And the future of Cuba will be decided by Cubans, not by anybody else.

At the same time, as we do wherever we go around the world, I made it clear that the United States will continue to speak up on behalf of democracy, including the right of the Cuban people to decide their own future. We'll speak out on behalf of universal human rights, including freedom of speech and assembly and religion. Indeed, I look forward to meeting with and hearing from Cuban civil society leaders tomorrow.

But as you heard, President Castro has also addressed what he views as shortcomings in the United States around basic needs for people and poverty and inequality and race relations. And we welcome that constructive dialogue as well, because we believe that when we share our deepest beliefs and ideas with an attitude of mutual respect, that we can both learn and make the lives of our people better.

Now, part of normalizing relations means that we discuss these differences directly. So I'm very pleased that we've agreed to hold our next U.S.-Cuba human rights dialogue here in Havana this year. And both of our countries will welcome visits by independent United Nations experts as we combat human trafficking, which we agree is a profound violation of human rights.

Even as we discuss these differences, we share a belief that we can continue to make progress in those areas that we have in common. President Castro, you said in Panama that "we might disagree on something today on which we would agree tomorrow." And that's certainly been the case over the past 15 months and the days leading up to this visit. And today I can report that we continue to move forward on many fronts when it comes to normalizing relations.

We're moving ahead with more opportunities for Americans to travel to Cuba and interact with the Cuban people. Over the past year, the number of Americans coming here has surged. Last week, we gave approval for individual Americans to come here for educational travel. U.S. airlines will begin direct commercial flights this year. With last week's port security announcement, we've removed the last major hurdle to resuming cruises and ferry service. All

of which will mean even more Americans visiting Cuba in the years ahead and appreciating the incredible history and culture of the Cuban people.

We're moving ahead with more trade. With only 90 miles between us, we're natural trading partners. Other steps we took last week—allowing the U.S. dollar to be used more widely with Cuba, giving Cubans more access to the dollar in international transactions, and allowing Cubans in the U.S. to earn salaries—these things will do more to create opportunities for trade and joint ventures. We welcome Cuba's important announcement that it plans to end the 10-percent penalty on dollar conversions here, which will open the door to more travel and more commerce. And these steps show that we're opening up to one another.

With this visit, we've agreed to deepen our cooperation on agriculture to support our farmers and our ranchers. This afternoon I'll highlight some of the new commercial deals being announced by major U.S. companies. And just as I continue to call on Congress to lift the trade embargo, I discussed with President Castro the steps we urge Cuba to take to show that it's ready to do more business, which includes allowing more joint ventures and allowing foreign companies to hire Cubans directly.

We're moving ahead with our efforts to help connect more Cubans to the Internet and the global economy. Under President Castro, Cuba has set a goal of bringing Cubans online. And we want to help. At this afternoon's entrepreneurship event, I'll discuss additional steps we're taking to help more Cubans learn, innovate, and do business online. Because in the 21st century, countries cannot be successful unless their citizens have access to the Internet.

We're moving ahead with more educational exchanges. Thanks to the generous support of the Cuban American community, I can announce that my 100,000 Strong in the Americas initiative will offer new opportunities for university students to study abroad: more Americans at Cuban schools and more Cubans at U.S. schools. And going forward, educational grants and scholarships will be available to Cuban students. And in partnership with the Cuban Government, we'll offer more English language training for Cuban teachers, both in Cuba and online.

Now, even as Cubans prepare for the arrival of the Rolling Stones—[laughter]—we're moving ahead with more events and exchanges that bring Cubans and Americans together as well. We all look forward to tomorrow's matchup between the Tampa Bay Rays and the Cuban National Team.

And more broadly, we're moving ahead with partnerships in health, science, and the environment. Just as Cubans and American medical teams have worked together in Haiti against cholera and in West Africa against Ebola—and I want to give a special commendation to Cuban doctors who volunteered and took on some very tough assignments to save lives in West Africa in partnership with us and other nations; we very much appreciate the work that they did—our medical professionals will now collaborate in new areas, preventing the spread of viruses like Zika and leading new research into cancer vaccines. Our governments will also work together to protect the beautiful waters of this region that we share.

And as two countries threatened by climate change, I believe we can work together to protect communities at our low-lying coasts. And we're inviting Cuba to join us and our Caribbean and Central American partners at this spring's regional energy summit in Washington.

And finally, we're moving ahead with our closer cooperation on regional security. We're working to deepen our law enforcement coordination, especially against narcotraffickers that

threaten both of our peoples. I want to thank President Castro and the Cuban Government for hosting peace talks between the Colombian Government and the FARC. And we remain optimistic that Colombians can achieve a lasting and just peace. And although we did not have an extensive discussion of Venezuela, we did touch on the subject. And I believe that the whole region has an interest in a country that is addressing its economic challenges, is responsive to the aspirations of its people, and is a source of stability in the region. That is, I believe, an interest that we should all share.

So again, President Castro, I want to thank you for welcoming me. I think it's fair to say that the United States and Cuba are now engaged across more areas than any time during my lifetime. And with every passing day, more Americans are coming to Cuba, more U.S. businesses and schools and faith groups are working to forge new partnerships with the Cuban people. More Cubans are benefiting from the opportunities that this travel and trade bring.

As you indicated, the road ahead will not be easy. Fortunately, we don't have to swim with sharks in order to achieve the goals that you and I have set forth. As you say here in Cuba, *echar para adelante*. Despite the difficulties, we will continue to move forward. We're focused on the future.

And I'm absolutely confident that if we stay on this course, we can deliver a better and brighter future for both the Cuban people and the American people.

So muchas gracias. Thank you very much.

Moderator. We now will have a short Q&A session, so I kindly ask the journalists to identify themselves and use the mikes that are in the room. A first question for President Barack Obama.

Cuba-U.S. Relations/Human Rights

President Obama. First question, Jim Acosta [CNN].

[*At this point, the reporter spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Q. Thank you, President Castro, for your hospitality here in Havana.

[*The reporter spoke in English as follows.*]

Q. And thank you, Mr. President. In your meeting with President Castro, what words did you use to urge him to pursue democratic reforms and expand human rights here in Cuba? Will you invite President Castro to the White House? We know he's been to New York. And why did you not meet with Fidel Castro? And President Castro——

[*The reporter spoke in Spanish and then translated his remarks into English as follows.*]

Q. My father is Cuban. He left for the United States when he was very young. This is a new and democratic direction for your country? And please, sir, why do you have Cuban political prisoners?

[*The reporter spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Q. And why don't you release them? And another last question: Who do you prefer, Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump? Thank you.

President Obama. The—well, as I think we both indicated, we had a very frank conversation around issues of democracy and human rights. Our starting point is that we have two different systems: two different systems of government, two different economies. And we have decades of profound differences, both bilaterally and internationally.

What I have said to President Castro is that we are moving forward and not looking backwards, that we don't view Cuba as a threat to the United States. I hope that my visit here indicates the degree to which we're setting a new chapter in Cuban-American relations.

But as is true with countries around the world where we have normalized relations, we will continue to stand up for basic principles that we believe in. America believes in democracy. We believe that freedom of speech and freedom of assembly and freedom of religion are not just American values, but are universal values. They may not express themselves exactly in the same way in every country, they may not be enshrined in the founding documents or constitutions of every country the same way or protected legally in exactly the same ways, but the impulse, the human impulse towards freedom, the freedom that José Martí talked about, we think is a universal longing.

President Castro, I think, has pointed out that, in his view, making sure that everybody is getting a decent education or health care, has basic security in old age—that those things are human rights as well. I personally would not disagree with him.

But it doesn't detract from some of these other concerns. And the goal of the human rights dialogue is not for the United States to dictate to Cuba how they should govern themselves, but to make sure that we are having a frank and candid conversation around this issue and, hopefully, that we can learn from each other.

It does not mean that it has to be the only issue we talk about. Economics, health, scientific exchanges, international cooperation on issues of regional as well as global import are also important. But this is something that we are going to stay on. And I actually welcome President Castro commenting on some of the areas where he feels that we're falling short, because I think we should not be immune or afraid of criticism or discussion as well.

Here's the one thing I do know is that when I talk to Cuban Americans—and, Jim, you're second generation, and so I think I speak not for you directly, but for many that I talk to around the United States—I think there is enormous hope that there can be reconciliation. And the bridge that President Castro discussed can be built between the Cuban American community and Cubans here. There are family ties and cultural ties that are so strong. And I think everyone would benefit from those ties being reestablished.

One of the impediments to strengthening those ties is these disagreements around human rights and democracy. And if—to the extent that we can have a good conversation about that and to actually make progress, that, I think, will allow us to see the full flowering of a relationship that is possible. In the absence of that, I think it will continue to be a very powerful irritant. And this is not unique to U.S.-Cuban relations. It's one that, as you know, I have conversations with when we go to bilateral meetings with some of our very close allies, as well as countries that we don't have as close of a relationship to. But I think it is something that matters. And I've met with people who have been subject to arbitrary detention, and that's something that I generally have to speak out on because I hear from them directly and I know what it means for them. Go ahead.

[President Castro spoke in Spanish to an unidentified aide, and no translation was provided.]

President Obama. Excuse me. [*Laughter*]

President Castro. Yes?

President Obama. Yes, yes, what—[*laughter*].

President Castro. I was asking if he was—if his question was directed to me or to President Obama. You talked about—no——

President Obama. I think the second one was addressed to you.

President Castro. You talked about political prisoners.

President Obama. And Trump and Hillary. [*Laughter*]

President Castro. For him or for me?

[*The reporter spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Q. For you, President Castro.

President Castro. What did you say about political prisoners? Can you repeat that question about political prisoners? Did you ask if we had political prisoners? Did you ask if we had political prisoners?

[*The reporter spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Q. I wanted to know if you have Cuban political prisoners and why you don't release them.

President Castro. Well, give me the list of the political prisoners, and I will release them immediately. Just mention a list. What political prisoners? Give me a name or names. Or when—after this meeting is over, you can give me a list of political prisoners. And if we have those political prisoners, they will be released before tonight ends.

Q. *Y Donald Trump o Hillary Clinton, President Castro?*

Interpreter. What about your preference for——

[*The moderator called on a Cuban reporter, who began speaking in Spanish. His remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Q. My greetings for President Obama——

President Castro. Well, I cannot vote in the United States. [*Laughter*]

[*A reporter spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

U.S. Trade Embargo Against Cuba/Human Rights

Q. My question is for President Raúl Castro. My name is Boris Fuentes. I'm from the Cuban TV. President Raúl Castro, you have repeatedly stated, and today once again, that we must learn to coexist in a civilized manner with our differences. Could you broaden this concept at this historical moment that we are living in?

And then, I have a brief question for President Obama. President Obama, could U.S. Government give more space to eliminate U.S. blockade during your mandate so that another

generation of Cubans would not have to suffer this economic and commercial blockade against Cuba?

President Castro. The first question was for me. Please repeat your question, because I couldn't hear well.

[*The reporter spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Q. You have said repeatedly that we must learn to coexist in a civilized manner with our differences.

President Castro. Well, President Obama himself has referred to that. We have given the first steps—many for being the first steps. And we must continue giving these steps. And I'm sure that we will be able to coexist peacefully in an environment of mutual cooperation as we are doing already in many fields for the benefit of both countries and for the benefit of other countries as we have already done, in Haiti, when the cholera—and in Africa with the Ebola. That is the future of mankind if we want to save the human species. Though the water grows and—or the level of water grows and the island may become smaller.

That is all. You are making too much—too many questions to me. I think questions are—should be directed to President Obama.

President Obama. I've got—[*inaudible*]. So we have administratively already made a number of modifications on the embargo. I referred to a number of them in my opening statement. And we've actually been fairly aggressive in exercising as much flexibility as we can, given that the law putting the embargo in place has not been repealed by Congress. There may be some technical aspects of the embargo that we can still make adjustments on, depending on problems as they arise.

So, for example, the issue around the dollar and the need to make modifications in terms of how the embargo was implemented to encourage, rather than discourage reforms that the Cuban Government itself is willing to engage in and to facilitate greater trade and commerce, that is something that grew out of the dialogue between our governments, and we have made appropriate adjustments to it. It will take some time for commercial banks to understand the new rules, but we actually think that this is an area where we can improve current circumstances.

But I'll be honest with you that the list of things that we can do administratively is growing shorter and the bulk of changes that have to be made with respect to the embargo are now going to rely on Congress making changes.

I've been very clear about the interest in getting that done before I leave. Frankly, Congress is not as productive as I would like during a—Presidential election years. But the fact that we have such a large congressional delegation with Democrats and Republicans with us is an indication that there is growing interest inside of Congress for lifting the embargo.

As I just indicated in my earlier answer, how quickly that happens will, in part, depend on whether we can bridge some of our differences around human rights issues. And that's why the dialogue, I think, is so important. It sends a signal that at least there's engagement between the two countries on these matters. Okay?

I—now, I promised the President I would take one more question. Andrea Mitchell of NBC. Andrea, if you can get the mike.

U.S. Trade Embargo Against Cuba/Human Rights

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Do you feel, after your meetings today, that you have made enough progress to even accelerate the pace and that the Cuban Government is able to move quickly enough so that the changes that you have made through these technical adjustments to the embargo will be permanent, cannot be reversed by the next President? And what advice have you given to President Castro about the ability of having the blockade, the embargo lifted? Because he has said again today, this is a continuous issue which is blocking progress—

President Obama. Right.

Q. —from their standpoint.

And you said the conversations about human rights were frank and candid and that you want to move forward. But even as you were arriving, there were dramatic arrests of peaceful protests, the Ladies in White. What signal does that send? Can you have civilized coexistence at the same time you have such profound disagreements about the very definitions of what human rights means, as President Castro expressed today?

And for President Castro, for many of us, it's remarkable to hear you speak about all these subjects. Could you tell us what you see in the future? You—President Obama has 9 months remaining. You have said you would be stepping down in 2018. What is the future of our two countries, given the different definitions and the different interpretations of profound issues like democracy and human rights? Thank you.

President Obama. Good. Well, Andrea, I—the embargo is going to end. When, I can't be entirely sure, but I believe it will end. And the path that we're on will continue beyond my administration. The reason is logic. The reason is that what we did for 50 years did not serve our interests or the interests of the Cuban people. And as I said when we made the announcement about normalization of relations, if you keep on doing something over and over again for 50 years and it doesn't work, it might make sense to try something new.

And that's what we've done. And the fact that there has been strong support not just inside of Congress, not just among the American people, but also among the Cuban people indicates that this is a process that should and will continue.

Having said that, lifting the embargo requires the votes of a majority in Congress, and maybe even more than a majority in the Senate. And as I indicated to President Castro, two things, I think, will help accelerate the pace of bringing the embargo to an end. The first is, to the degree that we can take advantage of the existing changes that we've already made and we see progress, that will help to validate this change in policy.

So, for example, we have said that it is no longer a restriction on U.S. companies to invest in helping to build Internet and broadband infrastructure inside of Cuba. It is not against U.S. law, as it's been interpreted by the administration. If we start seeing those kinds of commercial deals taking place and Cubans are benefiting from greater access to the Internet—and when I go to the entrepreneurship meeting later this afternoon, I understand that we're going to meet some young Cubans who are already getting trained and are facile in using the Internet and interested in startups—that builds a constituency for ending the embargo. If we build on the work that we're doing in agriculture and you start seeing more U.S. farmers interacting with Cuban farmers and there's more exports and imports, that builds a constituency, and the

possibility of ending the embargo increases. So, hopefully, taking advantage of what we've already done will help.

And the second area, which we've already discussed extensively, is the issue of human rights. People are still concerned about that inside of Cuba. Now, keep in mind, I've got fierce disagreements with the Chinese around human rights. I'll be going to Vietnam later this year; I have deep disagreements with them as well. When we first visited Burma, people questioned whether we should be traveling there because of longstanding human rights violations in our view. And the approach that I've taken has been that if I engage frankly, clearly, stating what our beliefs are, but also being clear that we can't force change on any particular country—ultimately, it has to come from within—then that is going to be a more useful strategy than the same kinds of rigid disengagement that for 50 years did nothing.

I guess, ultimately, what this comes down to, Andrea, is I have faith in people. I think that if you meet Cubans here and Cubans meet Americans and they're meeting and talking and interacting and doing business together and going to school together and learning from each other, then they'll recognize people are people. And in that context, I believe that change will occur.

Q. President Castro——

President Obama. Okay, now I'm done, but *Señor Presidente*, I think Andrea had a question for you just about your vision. It's up to you. He did say he was only going to take one question and I was going to take two. But I leave it up to you if you want to address that question.

Q. *Por favor.*

President Obama. Andrea's—[laughter]—she's one of our most esteemed journalists in America, and I'm sure she'd appreciate just a short, brief answer.

President Castro. Andrea——

Q. Mr. President.

President Castro. The other day, I asked a question to our Foreign Minister, Andrea. But there is a program here to be fulfilled. I know that if I stay here, you will make 500 questions. I said that I was going to answer one. Well, I answered one and a half. President Obama has already helped me out with the answer here, Andrea.

Well, Andrea, I was reading here something, I think, about human rights, but I'm going to make the question to you now. In—there are 40—there are 61 international instruments recognized. How many countries in the world comply with all the human rights and civil rights that have been included in these 61 instruments? What country complies with them all? Do you know how many? I do. None.

None, whatsoever. Some countries comply some rights; others comply others. And we are among these countries. Out of these 61 instruments, Cuba has complied with 47 of these human rights instruments. There are countries that may comply with more, those that comply with less.

I think human rights issue should not be politicized. That is not correct. If that is a purpose, that we will stay the same way. Like, for example, for Cuba, that does not fulfill all the rights. Do you think there's any other more sacred right than the right to health so that billions of children don't die just for the lack of a vaccine or a drug or a medicament? For example, do

you agree with the right to free education for all those born anywhere in the world or in any country? I think many countries don't think this is a human right. In Cuba, all children are born in a hospital, and they are registered that same day, because when mothers are in advanced pregnancy, they are—they go to hospitals days before, many days before delivery so that all children are born in hospitals. It doesn't matter if they live in faraway places or in mountains or hills. We have many other rights: a right to health, the right to education.

Do you—and this is my last example that I will mention. Do you think that for equal work, men get better paid than women just for the fact of being women? Well, in Cuba, women get same pay for same work. I can give you many, many examples, so I don't think—we cannot use the argument of human rights for political confrontation. That is not fair. It's not correct.

I'm not saying that it's not honest. It's part of confrontations, of course. But let us work so that we can all comply with all human rights. It's like—talking about pride, I'm going to end here because there is a commitment that we should end in time. It's not correct to ask me about political prisoners in general. Please give me the name of a political prisoner.

Moderator. And I think with this—is enough. We have concluded. Thank you for your participation.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at approximately 2:05 p.m. in the Palace of the Revolution. In his remarks, President Obama referred to Jaime Lucas Cardinal Ortega y Alamino, Archbishop of San Cristobal de la Habana; former President Fidel Castro Ruz of Cuba; former Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton, in her capacity as a Democratic Presidential candidate; and Donald J. Trump, chairman and chief executive officer, Trump Organization, in his capacity as a Republican Presidential candidate. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization. President Castro, the moderator, and reporters spoke in Spanish, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Joint news conference:: Cuba, President Castro.

Locations: Havana, Cuba.

Names: Cardin, Louis F.; Castro Ruz, Fidel; Castro Ruz, Raúl; Clinton, Hillary Rodham; Francis, Pope; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Ortega y Alamino, Jaime Lucas Cardinal; Trump, Donald J.

Subjects: Africa : West Africa, Ebola epidemic, response and containment efforts; China : Human rights issues; Colombia : International diplomatic efforts; Communications : News media, Presidential interviews; Cuba : Agriculture, cooperation with U.S.; Cuba : Communications technology, cooperation with U.S.; Cuba : Democracy efforts; Cuba : Educational exchanges with U.S.; Cuba : Human rights issues; Cuba : President Obama's visit; Cuba : Relations with U.S.; Cuba : Trade with U.S.; Cuba: President; Cuba: President Obama's visit; Diseases : Zika virus in Western Hemisphere, containment and prevention efforts; Drug abuse and trafficking : Foreign narcotics traffickers; Education : Foreign exchange programs; Environment : Climate change; Holy See (Vatican City) : Pope; Iraq : Security cooperation with US; Iraq : U.S. servicemember, death; Sports : Baseball; Terrorism : Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization; Venezuela : Economic growth and development; Vietnam : Human rights issues.

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