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Cuba: A Mean and Cruel Blockade

But Not a Blocked Nation

Luke 19:7-10 Revised Standard Version (RSV)
[7] And when they saw it they all murmured, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." [8] And Zacchae'us stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold." [9] And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. [10] For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost."

The ethic of love in the Scriptures is clear and undeniable. Love for neighbor, for the widow, the stranger and the orphan laces the beauty of the Word of God from beginning to end. Justice for the Lord our God is mercy. The concept of the jubilee year has built into it the creation of equality for all people to God's resources. The Acts of the Apostles 4:32 speaks to us of sharing and making sure the needs of all are met. Going forward to all nations to baptize was not a call to dominate, but a call to share Life and Life in abundance, leaving behind chains of oppression and sin. As with Zacchae'us, God has special requirements for those with more so that our world can be a more equal place, with less human suffering and more human dignity.

The Office of the Archbishop and Primate of the Ecumenical Catholic Church denounces the recent expansion of the recent boycott by the United States of America against Cuba. "It is a mean and cruel expansion of the blockade," said Archbishop and Primate David John Kalke, "designed to make the lives of the average Cubans more difficult. Its impact will be felt in the workplaces and on the streets by Cubans seeking to do simple things like get to and from work."

In total, 34 ships and 2 companies have been sanctioned for sending petroleum from Venezuela to Cuba. It is a double-edged sanction designed to take away oil proceeds from the Maduro government in Venezuela. And it seeks to cripple the Cuban economy by drastically reducing Cuba's access to petroleum and international markets.

Our Episcopal Vicar in Cuba, Father Humberto Chmelnicky Abella, writes, "In relationship to calling the blockade an instrument of war and domination, this is correct. Nothing can justify these kinds of actions. Disgustingly those who come to power in the political and economic worlds – persons or governments – try to conserve their dominion over others using all means and whatever methods, without taking into consideration the impact it will have on others. I believe the problem is in the heart of the human being. People want to take the place of God, which is the original sin from which all evil comes in human beings. They want to become owners and masters of the Other. Here is the root for the problems in people and governments."

The impact of the petroleum shortage has impacted daily life in Cuba. There are fewer buses and cars to get people to and from work. Some factories do not open because they do not have fuel needed to operate their equipment. Movement in general of the Cuban people is restricted by the lack of gasoline.

The denial of visitation rights by the US government of its citizens to travel to Cuba, commerce has been effected in Havana. 80% of small store owners have been impacted with a decrease in sales. For some of them, 50% of their income came from visiting US tourists. Businesses in the tourist sector are asking for a reversal of the Trump policies that further isolate and damage the Cuban people.

On September 19, 2019, the Government of the United States, expelled 2 members of the Cuban diplomatic team working at the United Nations. This actions goes against the spirit of the United Nations and against the principles of the General Assembly, which attempts to convene countries from the entire world to come together for dialogue. The United States is not in good faith completing its obligations as the host country for the United Nations.

The viciousness of the foreign policy of the United States doesn't stop there. A US law from the early 1960's – Helms-Burton Law – makes it illegal for companies to do businesses in Cuba that were nationalized by the Cuban government. At the time of the Cuban Revolution, the airport was privately owned and became property of the government soon thereafter. A group of conservative lawyers in Miami are advancing a legal process to make it illegal for airlines to use the José Marti Airport, because it was private property and nationalized by the Cuban government! Working with the son, José Ramón López, of the previous owner, José Lopez Villaboy, this legal team hopes to be able to prevent 46 international airlines from using the International Airport in Havana – from Air France to Lufthansa to Aeroflot and many others. This is yet one more abuse of power designed to choke the Cuban people from international contact and resources.

But the people of Cuba are a resilient people, a creative people, a people destined to protect what they have accomplished since 1959. They have built the best healthcare system in Latin America. It is a system that trains doctors and healthcare workers for many countries in Africa as well. Cuba manufacturers medicines, not to make money but to serve those in poor and developing nations who have been excluded by the greed of capitalist pharmaceuticals from the United States of America. Cuba's educational system has basically eliminated illiteracy and has been recognized by the United Nations for its excellence.

This new and intensified blockade by the United States of America will only strengthen the resolve of the Cuban people and its leaders to deepen their commitments and to defend the progress they have made. Father Humberto writes, "Remember the words of General Raul Castro when he became President of Cuba. 'We cannot continue blaming all of our problems that we have as results of the US blockade against the Government of the Republic of Cuba.' I am in complete agreement

with this statement. Only using external factors as a pretext for explaining our internal problems is not correct. We must also be critical of ourselves at the internal level. Therefor e I believe that nothing can justify the actions of neither the blockade nor the economic, political and military pressure place on our country. I also believe that our country and government must assume much of the responsibility for the social crisis that exists in our nation." … "I am completely in agreement to denounce the abuse of power implicit in the blockade against Cuba, Venezuela and Iran. I believe that the Government of the United States and those who support it must examine themselves: Do their foreign policies produce the welfare they hope to obtain for the peoples of the world. I believe our governments ask for respect for our form of governance from the more powerful governments, such as the USA. I also believe that all forms for government must be respected and people should be given the right to develop their own systems. Father Felix Varela, a national known founder of our country, said "There is no homeland (society) without virtue, nor virture without mercy. (Injustice and incredulity).""

We Need to Stand with the Cuban People and Work to End the Blockade, an Abuse of Power and New Instrument of War

1. We must maintain strong relations with our brothers and sisters in Cuba. Through our churches, synagogues and mosques, we must keep channels for dialogue and information sharing open.
2. We cannot depend only on social media for information. We must be creative to find ways to break the information blockade. Let us not forget that Twitter has blocked the account of Raul Castro and many representatives of the Cuban government.
3. Ecclesial visits to the island to pray together and worship together are important as we seek to know the reality of the Cuban people and to break the isolationism that blockades are designed to create.
4. For those of you in Europe, keep pressure on the EU to not accept the US imposition on European airline carriers for continuing to use José Marti Airport.
5. For those of you in the USA make the use of the blockades as an instrument of war against Cuba, Venezuela, and Iran a political issue. Which Democratic candidates support it and which ones do not?
6. Let our academic think tanks explore the legality of the blockades against international commerce with the UN, WTO and other international bodies that rule on issues of commerce, use of the seas and the deprival of essential materials.

Our Apostolic Succession comes through Bishop Carlos Duarte Costa, a Brazilian bishop who fought fascism in Brazil in the 1940's. As internationalists and members of the universal catholic church his words from his Manifest to the Nations of 1945 are as true

now as then. He wrote, "The blood of our brothers does not permit Humanity to continue to be suffocated and chained by men who represent, at this time, the priestly pontiff of the old law. Those who were redeemed by Christ and who redeemed us with their blood in the battlefields, victims of those who claimed to be the representatives of Christ on earth, do not permit us to be cowards in such a time when we must restore our nation. And to restore our nation, it is necessary that the religious question be resolved. We press this question not only as matter of piousness or religiosity, but as essentially a political and economic issue."

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