

# Caravan to Cuba challenges U.S. blockade, travel restrictions

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Cuba Caravan meeting in Birmingham, Ala. Photo: IFCO

On June 5, Caribbean cruise ships that were headed to Havana or other Cuban ports of call abruptly changed course, forbidden to dock there by the U.S. government's

enhanced blockade measures.

Just a week later, the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization's Pastors for Peace Friendship launched its 2019 Cuba Caravan campaign. The caravan visited 40 U.S. cities in 10 days to defend the right to travel and to organize for an end of the nearly 60-year genocidal U.S. blockade of Cuba.

IFCO's message continues to be "love is our license" to travel. Since 1992, these caravans have not sought or accepted a U.S. government license and have traveled to Cuba every year, sometimes twice. Yes, you can go to Cuba!

This year, speakers along five U.S routes plus one Canadian route talked with gatherings in churches and community centers. Meetings spanned from Brunswick, Maine, to San Pedro, Calif.; from Minneapolis to Montgomery, Ala.; and Texas, Oklahoma, Southern Illinois and Indiana. Route speakers also talked with the offices of elected officials in Virginia, Connecticut, California and Alabama, and to print and broadcast media.

IFCO continues to organize the only national North American outreach campaign that is building solidarity with revolutionary Cuba. Undaunted by Washington's announcements, people encountered on this campaign trail have eagerly planned to travel to Cuba.

After concluding the national speakers' campaign, 37 multigenerational caravan participants will travel to Cuba, many for the first time, through third countries. They will assert their right to travel to Cuba like any other country — without approval from the U.S. Treasury Department, the enforcer of the unilateral U.S. economic, financial and commercial blockade of its smaller island neighbor.

Caravan participants will return to their home cities on July 5. Please stand by on that date; if support is needed for these travelers, an alert will be posted at

[IFCOnews.org](http://IFCOnews.org) or at [IFCO/PastorsforPeace](https://www.facebook.com/IFCO/PastorsforPeace) on Facebook.

### **Congress: 'No vacations in Cuba'**

For flights to Cuba originating at U.S. airports, however, ticket purchasers must declare which general license "category" they say describes their reason for traveling to Cuba.

According to the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000, a law passed by the U.S. Congress, a U.S. resident — unlike Canadians, Europeans, Africans, Latin Americans and Asians — may not go to Cuba for "vacation"; it is against that law.

Nonetheless, direct flights are available from Boston; Newark, N.J.; New York's JFK airport; Charlotte, N.C.; Tampa, Ft. Lauderdale and Miami, Fla.; Atlanta; and Houston on American, JetBlue, United, Southwest and Delta airlines.

In addition to banning the cruises, on June 4 the most popular "category" of U.S. government-approved Cuba travel, people-to-people groups, was eliminated. This followed the earlier end of the very popular people-to-people individual travel on Nov. 9, 2017.

There are still plenty of general license categories to meet airline recordkeeping. For example, by going to Cuba, aren't we aiding the Cuban people? The Washington Post reports: "Tourism is now the most important source of foreign income for the country." One of the remaining general license categories is "support for the Cuban people."

Isn't it time to end laws that try to restrict our travel?

Nearly 2 million U.S. residents have seen Cuba for themselves since commercial flights to Cuba resumed in August 2016. These travelers have seen Cuba with their

own eyes. They have met and talked with Cubans, found socialism was not frightening at all, and many even want to return.

By and large, those 2 million U.S. residents now agree with the vast majority of the world's countries which vote annually in the United Nations General Assembly to call for the U.S. to end its brutal blockade. The 2019 vote is scheduled for November 6.

Despite the rancor and hostility toward Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua spewing forth from Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, National Security Advisor John Bolton and "Special Envoy for Venezuela" Elliott Abrams, support is visibly growing outside the Washington beltway for Cuba — the stable, socialist target of regional destabilization and regime-change machinations.

Strong examples are the many city council resolutions that show the will of the people in the U.S. is in sharp disagreement with Washington. These resolutions call for ending U.S. economic warfare against Cuba.

Already 11 cities have passed such resolutions. Richmond, Berkeley, Oakland and Sacramento, Calif.; Helena, Mont.; Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minn.; Detroit; Pittsburgh; Brookline, Mass.; and Hartford, Conn., are all on board.

Seattle is considering a resolution this summer and Washington, D.C., has submitted a resolution for a vote in the fall. The Alabama and Michigan state senates have passed resolutions. Both chambers of the California Legislature have, too.

Participants in the IFCO/Pastors for Peace southern route were especially eager to explore the possibilities for fighting back through city council resolutions in Durham, N.C.; Decatur, Ga.; and other cities. Exploratory efforts are beginning in Ashland, Ore., and the Chicago area.

Can your city, county, township or state legislature pass a resolution? Contact the

National Network On Cuba for more information. Write to [ICanGoToCuba@nnoc.info](mailto:ICanGoToCuba@nnoc.info).

## **Trump intensifies war on Cuba**

The new travel restrictions are only part of the intensified war waged against the Cuban people and their revolution.

For the first time since the Helms-Burton Act was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1996, Title III was allowed to go into effect. Title III allows U.S. citizens and corporate entities to file lawsuits in U.S. federal courts against businesses that operate on property that was expropriated following the 1959 Cuban Revolution.

Before 2019, enforcement of Title III was suspended every six months by presidential waiver. The extraterritorial reach of Title III caused Spain, Canada and the European Union to oppose it. Now, casting aside the opposition of U.S. allies, the waivers have ended. The aim is to further hurt Cuba's international economic partnerships and, as a result, hurt the Cuban people.

An article in the June 21 edition of *Granma* asserts that "[Helms-Burton is also illegal within the United States.](#)"

An internal [U.S. State Department memo](#) dated April 6, 1960, shows the early evolution of this U.S. strategy to undermine Cuba's self-determination. The memo admitted Cubans' support the revolution, and no effective opposition exists. It concluded: "The only foreseeable means of alienating internal support is through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship."

It further elaborated on what we see today: actions "adroit and inconspicuous as possible, to make the greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government."

The perpetrators of the genocidal blockade are in Washington and on Wall Street. It is no accident that one of the first lawsuits filed under Title III was by Exxon-Mobil. But the current assault on Cuba's dignity and economy has stiffened the resolve of the Cuban people to defend what they have gained and their profound culture of solidarity.

Working and oppressed people in the U.S. must unite to end the blockade, return U.S.-occupied Guantánamo to Cuba, restore our right to travel and emulate Cuba's international solidarity with the world.

