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Cuba faces nationwide blackout, activists renew calls for an end to the blockade

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The inclusion of Cuba on the state sponsors of terrorism list has severely limited the island nation from accessing funds and the international market.



Thermoelectrical Center Antonio Maceo de Santiago de Cuba. Photo: Granma

The Ministry of Energy and Mines in Cuba announced on Friday, October 18, that the National Electrical Energy System experienced a complete blackout due to an unexpected outage at the Antonio Guiteras Thermoelectric Power Plant. They also reported that the Electrical Union and relevant authorities were diligently working to restore full service. Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel addressed the situation, emphasizing, “We are prioritizing our attention to solving this critical energy issue for the nation. There will be no rest until full service is restored.”

By Friday evening, the Ministry of Energy and Mines (MINEM) reported progress in the phased restoration of the electrical system. According to their [report](#), partial generation had begun at ENERGAS, Cuba’s gas company, which was supplying energy to the thermoelectric plants. Micro-electrical systems in Villa Clara, Holguín, Granma, and Guantánamo were also back online.

Engineer Lázaro Guerra Hernández, the Director of Electricity at MINEM, provided



an update during a press conference, noting that the restoration efforts started immediately after the Guiteras outage. He mentioned that they were beginning energy distribution to the Santa Cruz del Norte Thermoelectric Power Plant, and a generator was to be activated at the Mariel floating power plant, which was currently directing fuel for power generation in the area. Guerra Hernández stressed that while the restoration process is careful and systematic, they are committed to speeding it up as much as possible.

The day before the blackout, the general director of the National Electric Union (UNE), Alfredo López Valdés, had addressed the nation in a televised broadcast about the ongoing electrical sector crisis. He pointed out a significant challenge for the power grid: the difficulties in securing fuel and a long-standing fuel deficit, which he attributed to many of the electrical grid issues.

López Valdés also laid out a comprehensive plan to tackle these challenges, highlighting the need to optimize thermoelectric plants and micro-electrical systems while ensuring they have adequate fuel supplies for operation.

The blockade's role in the blackout

A major obstacle for Cuba in securing enough fuel for its electrical grid is the series of sanctions and coercive measures imposed by the United States. The blockade leads to substantial economic losses, estimated at \$13 million a day, and restricts

Cuba's access to markets and financial transactions.

In November 2019, the Trump administration [sanctioned](#) the Panamericana Corporation, a Cuban company involved in purchasing liquefied natural gas for public use, arguing it was "owned or controlled by, or acting for or on behalf of, Cubametales," which was designated for operating in Venezuela's oil sector. Treasury Deputy Secretary Justin G. Muzinich stated, "Cuba has played a direct role in preventing the return of democracy to Venezuela." The Treasury Department made it clear that since Cubametales' designation, the company has faced significant difficulties as businesses avoided transactions with it, prompting Cubametales to suggest Corporacion Panamericana S.A. as an intermediary.

The Treasury was adamant: Cuba should not be afforded the opportunity to acquire fuel for its needs due to its failure to distance itself from Venezuela in line with Washington's expectations. In January 2020, shortly after the sanctions on Panamericana, the Cubapetroleo Union announced [in a released statement](#) that "throughout 2019, the U.S. Government imposed new and successive sanctions on companies, shipowners, vessels, and insurance firms to hinder the delivery of fuel to our nation." They clarified that following the sanctioning of Panamericana Corporation, "The Company's suppliers refused to fulfill deliveries slated for late December and early January... efforts to procure LNG from other markets have not succeeded. We continue working to import LNG."

Democratic President Joe Biden, who took office shortly after the imposition of sanctions on Panamericana, did not significantly change U.S. policy toward Cuba. He maintained the additional 243 sanctions enacted under Trump and continued to designate Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism, further tightening the nation's economic constraints and trade capabilities.

The nationwide blackout in Cuba highlights the significant impact the blockade has on the population, prompting many solidarity organizations to renew their calls for

President Biden to lift these damaging restrictions.

Reporting by [People's Dispatch](#)

