



DISARM/GLOBAL HEALTH PARTNERS

PEACE
SOCIAL JUSTICE
HUMAN RIGHTS

A Special Report & Personal Update

July 10, 2015

From:

Edward Asner

Dear Friend,

An enormous change in U.S.-Cuba relations is under way – the fruit of your decades of support, solidarity, and activism to end the cruel, punitive embargo. Thanks to you, Disarm/Global Health Partners has been in the forefront of this movement for change at home, while providing huge, ongoing shipments of medical aid to Cuban hospitals and clinics hamstrung by Washington's economic warfare. Together, you and I can take a victory lap as the normalization talks proceed, but we can't fully celebrate until the embargo is lifted once and for all.

We're indeed witnessing remarkable progress: Washington has removed Cuba from its unjust place on a list of countries sponsoring terrorism, and the two nations are opening embassies in each other's capitals. A steady stream of U.S. legislators and business figures are visiting Havana to explore opportunities stemming from normalized relations. And a bipartisan Senate bill to repeal the ban on travel by U.S. citizens to Cuba has already drawn 46 co-sponsors.

In an editorial strongly supporting this bill to permit unrestricted Cuba travel, the *New York Times* says, "The ban – the only travel prohibition American citizens are currently subjected to – never made sense, and it's particularly misguided in an era of broadening engagement between the United States and Cuba." The *Times* also warns that "a loud, but dwindling, cadre of lawmakers who appear unwilling to let the Cold War era go, are pushing initiatives that would prolong – and in some instances intensify – the web of sanctions the United States imposes on Cuba."

Right now, these hardliners – led by Sens. Marc Rubio (R-FL) and Robert Menendez (D-NJ), and Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) – are stepping up their backward-looking efforts. With the main pillars of the embargo still on the books, the House has already approved two bills that would thwart any easing of travel and trade restrictions with Cuba. Although President Obama has vowed to veto these measures if they pass the Senate, Congress is working to open the funding taps for actions

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to destabilize Cuba. In June, the House Appropriations Committee earmarked \$8 million supposedly for “promoting democracy” in Cuba, augmenting \$20 million already in the pipeline.

It is crucial now that we let our members of Congress know that the American people support Obama’s opening to Cuba and reject any return to irrational, mean-spirited Cold War hostility. We’ve come so far – please help Disarm-GHP keep up the pressure for real change by renewing your support. Your gift will amplify our voices, and continue stocking our vital medical shipments to Cuba. Together, we’ve provided Cuba with more than \$125 million worth of medicine and medical supplies over the past two decades. Last month alone, we sent \$577,000 in medicine to Cuban hospitals, with another large shipment slated for August.

In June, my daughter Liza took part in a Disarm/GHP site visit to see first-hand the results of my longtime support for this work. She visited hospitals and community clinics, and met with key Ministry of Health officials to monitor Disarm/GHP’s impact on patients and the dedicated medical personnel who care for them. I was thrilled and inspired to hear Liza’s report, and to learn that everywhere she went, she was greeted with a tremendous outpouring of thanks for Disarm/GHP’s lifesaving aid and solidarity. I know you share my pride in all we’ve accomplished together, and hope I can count on you to renew your support. We need you now more than ever!

As you know, Disarm and Global Health Partners merged last year, to solidify a highly productive, longstanding partnership. That means we’re the same great organization that has worked for peace and social justice for nearly four decades, with even more resources at our disposal. Now, as our Cuba Medical Project enters a new era with more opportunities and challenges, and we expand our work in Nicaragua to assist children with disabilities and their families, we want to reflect these changes in our name. This fall, we will simplify our organizational title to Global Health Partners (GHP). This change will encompass Disarm’s history and accomplishments, and our exciting way forward.

Washington’s opening to Havana enables us to restart a key element in our medical aid and solidarity work. We organized numerous visits to Cuba by prestigious teams of U.S. doctors to perform complex surgeries and collaborate with their Cuban counterparts – a partnership that was brought to an abrupt halt by the Bush administration six years ago. Now we’re gearing up to resume these working visits by volunteer doctors, starting with two surgical teams this fall. But we need your help to make this possible.

Please make your tax-deductible gift to Disarm/GHP with the enclosed form or at our secure website, www.disarm.org. Together we can build this surgical project, stock our vital medical shipments, and beat back right-wing efforts to derail normalized relations between the U.S. and Cuba.

As the new embassies open in Washington and Havana, key elements of the immoral and illegal U.S. policy that has punished generations of Cubans remain fully in place. While President

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Obama has taken vital steps toward normalization, only Congress can lift the embargo and allow full economic and political relations. We must keep up the pressure on our Senators and Representatives. Normalization means complete freedom for U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba, building bonds of friendship, along with trade and cultural exchanges.

True normalization would also mean closing the U.S. base at Guantanamo, a site that has become infamous for violations of human rights. A just resolution would be to return this territory to Cuban sovereignty. We must also press for an end to the racially tinged “wet foot/dry foot” immigration policy, which privileges illegal migrants from Cuba, while deporting Haitians fleeing poverty and oppression. This policy is part of the longstanding, ongoing U.S. pressure to destabilize Cuba, efforts now set to receive a huge infusion of new funding. Recipients will include the National Endowment for Democracy, the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development, who will distribute nearly \$30 million preferentially to right-wing groups with a track record of disrupting Cuban economic and political life.

So we have our work cut out. Your support for Disarm/GHP’s activism and humanitarian aid has helped bring about a historic turning point in U.S. policy toward Cuba. Let’s celebrate, but also make sure we keep on struggling together for normal, fair and decent relations between our two countries. Your renewed support for Disarm/GHP means so much right now – we’ve come so far; now let’s finish the job! Please give as quickly and as generously as you can, using the enclosed form or our secure website, www.disarm.org.

With your help, we can secure genuine, lasting change, while building our lifesaving Cuba Medical Project in a new era of friendship and cooperation. Please join me in supporting Disarm/GHP to make a real difference in the exciting openings and strong challenges ahead.

With my deepest gratitude,



Edward Asner

P.S.: Don’t let the congressional hardliners disrupt the normalization process; let’s work now for a complete end to the travel ban and embargo! And let’s increase our solidarity by stocking Disarm/GHP’s upcoming medical shipments and building lifesaving partnerships between U.S. and Cuban doctors.