

April 17, 2023

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Hon. Harjit Sajjan  
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**RE: Canadian support and diplomatic aid to Cuba**

Dear Honorable Ministers Joly and Sajjan:

We write as an informal alliance of Canadian churches, trade unions, development agencies and other civil society groups to encourage the Government of Canada to increase emergency assistance to Cuba in this time of exceptional need, and to expand diplomatic efforts to ease sanctions imposed by the United States.

Many of us in Canadian civil society organizations have watched with increasing alarm the deterioration of the Cuban economy and consequent impacts on the Cuban people. Given the difficult living conditions, up to [230,000 people left the island for the United States](#) in 2022. Our partner civil society organizations in Cuba and recent visitors report that these negative impacts are due in large measure to the decades-long imposition of sanctions (sometimes referred to as the “embargo” or the “blockade”) by the United States. This situation has been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic, the loss of tourist and remittance income and Cuba’s inclusion on the United States’ State Sponsor of Terrorism list in 2021 by the Trump administration.

Canada has traditionally had strong relations with Cuba. Canada and Mexico were the only two countries in the Western hemisphere in the 1960s to preserve diplomatic relations with Cuba, former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau was the first leader of a NATO country to visit the island, and Cuba was the first country to be granted permission to fish in Canadian waters when Canada extended the 12-mile territorial limit to 200 miles. Today, Canadians comprise the largest number of tourists to visit the island (34% of all tourists to the island), and as the Global Affairs Canada website notes, [Cuba is Canada’s top market in the Caribbean/Central American sub-region](#) and is Canada’s largest merchandise export market in that region. In short, Canadians have strong ties with Cuba.



Today, we write with three proposals:

- That Canada use its significant capacity to scale up its efforts to provide immediate food, medicines and medical supplies to Cuba, and to do so directly through bilateral government to government relations, through multilateral fora like the United Nations and through Canadian and Cuban civil society initiatives. In particular, there is urgent need for powdered milk and other milk products, basic grains and antibiotics. We note with appreciation recent announcements of GAC support to the [CARE Canada “She Produces Too”](#) project and to the [United Nations Development Programme project to strengthen fruit production chains](#) in Cuba.
- That Canada use its influence with the United States to encourage the easing of sanctions, at least to the levels they were during the second Obama administration, before the Trump administration imposed new sanctions or re-imposed older ones.
- That the Canadian government use its influence to urge the Biden administration to remove Cuba from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, as the Obama administration had done in 2015. The Trump administration’s decision to return Cuba to the list in 2021 has only produced harm to the people of Cuba, limiting even financial support from individuals to family members and transfers among non-governmental organizations. We remain convinced that constructive engagement is a better approach than willful and harmful isolation.

We, representatives of the organizations that sign below, have worked continuously with Cuban partners, some since the beginning of the 1959 revolution and others in subsequent decades. Some examples of the level of support given by this broad coalition will illustrate the desire on the part of many Canadians to continue to assist the Cuban population:

- Building on its decades-long engagement in Cuba, the Primate’s World Relief and Development Fund of the Anglican Church of Canada (PWRDF) in December 2022 approved an additional \$20,000 for urgent food needs and medicines shared through the Martin Luther King Memorial Centre and the Episcopal Church in Cuba. The PWRDF also supports the Episcopal Church’s Integrated Development Program food security initiative.
- In August 2020, the Canadian Network on Cuba delivered 1,920,000 syringes to Cuba’s COVID-19 vaccination program. These syringes were purchased in Canada thanks to hundreds of donations from individuals, trade unions and organizations, from Halifax to Victoria. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) and the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) were among the unions that supported this effort.
- In August 2022, the Public Service Alliance of Canada supported the Ottawa Cuba Connection Fundraiser to support Victims of the Matanzas Fires.
- Co-Development Canada, in collaboration with the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), led a delegation to Cuba in October, delivered aid, and is planning to ship another container of goods in 2023.
- Mennonite Central Committee works with the Christian Centre for Reflection and Dialogue (CCRD) and Brethren in Christ Church to provide humanitarian aid, including four 40ft-containers of canned meat and hygiene items, and programs addressing

gender-based violence. Through its Washington office, they press for changes in U.S. policy toward Cuba.

- The United Church of Canada works with five partners in Cuba to support their ongoing priority work with women, children, youth, persons living with disabilities, food security, and organic agriculture. An additional \$38,000 has supported emergency food needs in Pinar del Rio, psychosocial care for children and youth, a pediatric field hospital, and women's empowerment in the context of COVID-19.
- The Asociación de Cubanos Residentes en Toronto Juan Gualberto Gómez sent six 40' containers of medical supplies to hospitals in Matanzas, Holguín, Havana and Santa Clara, between 2021 and the present. The value of these supplies was \$2.47million.
- Oxfam Canada, together with a variety of local partners, has responded to humanitarian needs, supported development processes and engaged in advocacy to advance U.S. policy towards Cuba with a rights-based approach for the last 30 years. Since 2009, about 15 projects have been implemented with funding from Global Affairs Canada; they mostly aimed at promoting gender justice but also supported food security, local development and humanitarian responses to the impacts of hurricanes, the tornado and the pandemic.
- CARE Canada, in partnership with a number of Cuban organizations, has also implemented projects in Cuba in the last 30 years. Since 2010, CARE has implemented more than fifteen projects funded by the Canadian Government. CARE and its partners have responded to humanitarian needs after all major disasters, including the recent pandemic, contributed to community resilience and disaster preparedness in an inclusive fashion and supported the development process in various sectors, such as food sovereignty, livelihood and gender justice.

In the early 1990s, churches and development organizations worked together with the government of Canada to permit Canadian Official Development Assistance funds to be used in Cuba to support collaboration among Canadian and Cuban organizations. At that time, over 50,000 Cubans went blind (most on a temporary basis) because of a lack of vitamins supplies following the collapse of the Soviet Union, which had a disastrous impact on the Cuban economy. The Canadian government played a major role in providing the raw materials for Cuba to produce B1 vitamins and avert a major health crisis.

We urge you to seriously consider our three proposals. All of them will help to assist the Cuban population as it struggles through the most difficult period it has faced in the past sixty years. Given our close bilateral ties on the one hand, and the huge difficulties faced by the Cuban population on the other, any humanitarian and diplomatic support for the Cuban people would be enormously helpful and would benefit Canadian relations in the region.

We further request, at your convenience, a meeting with you both and/or representatives of your offices to discuss these proposals in more detail.

In view of the urgent situation, we will continue to develop this broad based humanitarian aid initiative with our growing network of churches, trade unions, solidarity groups and development organizations in Canada and beyond.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

*Coordination Group:*

Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) - Syndicat canadien de la fonction publique (SCFP)

CARE Canada

CoDevelopment Canada

Development and Peace – Caritas Canada/ Développement et Paix — Caritas Canada

Mennonite Central Committee Canada/ Comité central mennonite

Oxfam Canada

Primate's World Relief and Development Fund

Public Service Alliance of Canada - Alliance de la Fonction publique du Canada

Student Christian Movement of Canada

The United Church of Canada – L'Église Unie du Canada

*Additional signers:*

Les Artistes pour la Paix

Association des travailleurs grecs du Québec

Association of Cubans Resident in Toronto Juan Gualberto Gómez

Association of United Ukrainian Canadians

Canadian Cuban Friendship Association/ l'Association d'Amitié Canadienne Cubaine, Kingston

Canadian-Cuban Friendship Association/ l'Association d'Amitié Canadienne Cubaine, Toronto

Canadian Cuban Friendship Association/ l'Association d'Amitié Canadienne Cubaine, Vancouver

Canadian Network on Cuba

Calgary Peace Council

Central American Solidarity Committee, Kingston Comité Centraméricain Solidarité de Kingston

Centre international de solidarité ouvrière (CISO)

Comité de solidarité Trois-Rivières

Common Frontiers

Communist Party of Canada/ Parti communiste du Canada

Frente Hugo Chavez para la Defensa de los Pueblos/ Hugo Chavez Front for the Defense of the Peoples/ Front Hugo Chavez pour la défense des peuples.

Friends of Cuba Against the US Blockade/ Amis de Cuba contre le blocus américain, Vancouver

Merrill-Long and Co.

Montreal for a world beyond war/ Montreal pour un monde sans guerre

Sustainable Common Security  
United Jewish People's Order  
Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba - Communautés de Vancouver en solidarité avec Cuba  
Vancouver Island Peace Council - Conseil de Paix de l'île de Vancouver  
Victoria Friends of Cuba  
WorldBeyondWar.org  
Young Communist League/ La Ligue de la Jeunesse Communiste

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