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## Blockade Against Cuba Slammed At Summit

*by LADB Staff*

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The US blockade against Cuba suffered unanimous opprobrium at the XV Cumbre Iberoamericana in Salamanca, Spain, which ended Oct. 15. All 22 member states of the regional community signed on to a Special Declaration calling for an end to the economic, financial, and trade sanctions the US has imposed on the island for the past 40 years. The declaration also demands that the US suspend all laws contrary to international law, including the Helms-Burton Act (see NotiCen 1997-04-17, 2001-07-26), and rescind all measures adopted in the last two years strengthening the impact of the blockade.

The declaration rested on previous UN resolutions on the same issues, reading in part, "We call on the United States of America to comply with that [which was] laid down in 13 successive resolutions approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations, and to bring an end to the economic, trade, and financial blockade it maintains against Cuba." The US responded by complaining that the text could be interpreted as a "kind of support for the dictatorship in Cuba." It also objected early on to the use of the word blockade, preferring the term embargo.

The assembly declined to change the word, but added the qualifiers economic, trade, and financial, bringing it into line with the wording used in the UN resolutions. Dictatorship or no, the declaration was characterized universally by its signers as backing for Cuba in its battles with the US and emphasized that backing by separately calling for the US to expel Luis Posada Carriles. Posada Carriles remains in US detention after a judge refused to extradite him to Venezuela in accordance with an extradition treaty between the countries (see NotiSur, 2005-06-10).

The statement on Posada Carriles was contained in a resolution condemning terrorism and said that the summit "backed moves to obtain the extradition and bring to justice the person responsible for the terrorist attack on a Cubana Aviation plane in October 1976, which caused the death of 73 innocent civilians." Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez used the issue to continue pressing the US. He said the US "says it fights terrorism but protects terrorists in its own territory."

Following announcement of the declaration, the US sought to minimize its importance, Cuba sought to maximize it, Spain sought to temper it, and Mexico sought to clarify its position regarding it. US State Department spokesperson Sean McCormack took the tack that there was nothing new here. "If you look at the history of these declarations in this kind of summit, this is a common declaration," he said, adding that Cuba had no reason to take comfort in the declaration because "our European friends and our allies" have criticized Cuba on human rights and "the importance of promoting democracy" during the same period. This, however, was the second US try at spinning the event.

The earlier statement from the US Embassy in Madrid had expressed "concern" regarding it, according to the Spanish media. McCormack declined to comment on the Posada Carriles

declaration, other than to say that the matter was in accordance with US law, or on the use of the bellicose term blockade rather than the economic term embargo.

### *Embargo, blockade the language is important*

Cuba seized on the terminology. Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular (ANPP) president Ricardo Alarcon called the wording "historic" and said that the summit "spoke in a more precise, exact language." For him, the difference meant "rejection of the economic-war policy used by the United States against Cuba." He explained that, as a point of international law, an embargo is a bilateral measure, whereas a blockade is extraterritorial.

The language allows Cuba to charge, said Alarcon, that "the blockade is a genocidal policy that has left more than US\$82 billion in losses since it began to be applied [1962], a figure that increases by US\$2 billion each year." On the strength of the language, the ANPP passed a resolution calling on world parliaments and governments to demand "an immediate and unconditional end to the blockade." They also asked world condemnation of the US President George W. Bush administration's Plan para Asistir a una Cuba Libre, which would "coordinate the political transition of the island" after Fidel Castro's death.

On Oct. 17, Cuba was re-elected for the third time to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), a 54-member body elected regionally. Cuba reported this as a demonstration of support from the UN, given that there were more candidates than slots for the position, and Cuba received 154 of 188 votes. Cuba's UN Ambassador Orlando Requeijo said the US had campaigned against the re-election.

Spain's Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero agreed that resolutions of this kind are "almost a conventional ritual." While saying a "false polemic" had been created by the controversy regarding language, it was also the case that it was his government that refused to modify the wording to the satisfaction of the US. US-Spanish relations have been strained since Spain withdrew its troops from Iraq in March 2004, soon after Zapatero's election.

As Spain appeared to soften the interpretation of the resolution to salve its relationship with the US, Mexico toughened it to repair its standing with Cuba. Mexican President Vicente Fox said the statement reflected the beliefs of the Mexican people. "Mexico has long held this position, a position that it will not change but maintain out of what we deem to be respect and justice," said Fox. He said that the US position "is out of touch with reality." Mexico and Cuba recalled their respective ambassadors in May 2004 (see NotiCen, 2004-05-12) after the Fox administration accused Cuba of interfering in Mexico's domestic affairs. They agreed to exchange ambassadors again in July 2004 (see SourceMex, 2004-07-21), but relations have been tense ever since.

### *US Cuba policy harms other countries*

Designating US policy a blockade rather than an embargo has potentially beneficial consequences for countries other than Cuba, consequences that provide a rationale for the enthusiasm with which member nations embraced the language, even if they had reservations about other facets of the

island's behavior. Other nations, companies, and individuals face increasing hurdles in trying to do business with Cuba.

In 2004, the US fined 77 companies, banks, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) a total of US \$1.2 million for various violations of the blockade. Among those fined, 11 are foreign companies or subsidiaries of US companies headquartered in Mexico, Canada, Panama, Italy, the United Kingdom (UK), Uruguay, and the Bahamas. The airlines Iberia, Alitalia, and Air Jamaica and Daewoo and the Bank of China all received sanctions because their branches in the US violated the blockade in some way. Mexico's Trinity Industries and Chiron Corporation Ltd. paid out US\$168,000 in fines for exporting vaccines to Cuba between 1999 and 2002, according to Prensa Latina. Martinair Holland, a Netherlands airline, was fined for flying to Cuba without a US license. The US also excludes ships that have transported goods to or from Cuba from US ports for a designated period of time, and foreign banks are prohibited from opening accounts in US dollars and from financial transactions in US dollars with Cuban nationals or entities.

Nineteen of the 22 heads of state whose countries are members of the Comunidad Iberoamericana de Naciones attended the summit. Notably absent was Fidel Castro who kept the gathering guessing about his attendance until the last minute, as he does regularly on foreign trips, for security purposes. Organizers were reportedly relieved that Castro would not be there with Chavez of Venezuela, who did attend, because the two tend to divert media attention from the issues at hand. Castro said he would stay at home to coordinate sending medical aid to areas struck by Hurricane Stan.

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