

10-20-2000

## U.S. State Department Denies Visa to Cuban Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen>

---

### Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "U.S. State Department Denies Visa to Cuban Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon." (2000).  
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/8763>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [amywinter@unm.edu](mailto:amywinter@unm.edu).

## **U.S. State Department Denies Visa to Cuban Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon**

*by LADB Staff*

*Category/Department: Cuba*

*Published: 2000-10-20*

In August, the US State Department refused a visa to Ricardo Alarcon, president of Cuba's National Assembly, to attend a four-day meeting of the Geneva-based Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Alarcon's assistant, Alberto Gonzalez Rodriguez, was also denied entry, but two lower-ranking officials were given visas to attend. The IPU is an organization that promotes democracy through meetings of parliamentary heads from 140 nations.

The New York meeting was the IPU's first Conference of Presiding Officers of National Parliaments. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said the visa was denied under a 1985 presidential proclamation that allows the president to bar visitors considered "contrary to US interests." Since the IPU is not a UN organization, the US is under no obligation to grant visas, he said. However, the UN was co-sponsor of the event and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan presided at the inauguration.

Denial of the visas became an issue during the meeting. An IPU committee debated the US action and passed a resolution condemning it. The refusal to grant the visas appeared to be a continuation of the sharp exchanges between Cuba and the US over immigration issues. Earlier in August, the US sent a note to Cuba attacking its record of granting exit permits to Cubans holding US visas (see NotiCen, 2000-09-08).

Asked by a reporter what was behind the visa denial, Philip Reeker, State Department deputy spokesman, cited immigration law that makes visa information confidential and cited the 1985 proclamation. "I was just hoping that we could get some explanation why the attendance by the top parliamentarian is inimical to US interest, but the attendance by two of his deputies is OK," said a reporter. "I...it does smack of...the kind of arbitrary behavior...you and the secretary [of state] are accusing Cuba of yesterday." Reeker replied, "Once again, if you'll listen to what I said just a moment ago, as the secretary outlined in January 1999, our policy is that we would, among certain other actions, streamline the visa issuance for qualified persons other than senior Cuban government officials."

When asked what about Alarcon was contrary to US interests, Reeker said, "I'm just not in a position to describe our deliberations on a specific visa case. But again, to point out that our actions, and the way we review these, are very consistent with what the secretary instituted in January 1999, in terms of our policy, that we would try to streamline this visa issuance for qualified persons other than senior Cuban government officials."

Najma Heptulla, president of the IPU's Inter-Parliamentary Council, said the US action was "unfortunate," and added that the US had not paid its membership dues in the organization.

Heptulla said the exclusion of Alarcon was "contrary to the spirit with which the IPU and the United Nations...were founded." The State Department said that the US had not sent a delegation to the union since 1996.

Neither Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert (R-IL) nor Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-MS) replied to the invitation to attend. A spokesperson for Hastert said the speaker could not attend because he was travelling in Colombia with President Bill Clinton, and Lott's office made no comment. In early September, the State Department again denied Alarcon a visa to attend a meeting of the Congressional Black Caucus in Washington scheduled for Sept. 13-16. [Sources: Associated Press, Granma (Cuba), 08/30/00; State Department daily press briefing, 08/31/00, 09/02/00; Reuters, 08/30/00, 09/07/00]

-- End --