

CUBA - 182 Nations Condemn Cuba Embargo in the U.N. General Assembly (Martin Schuijt, IPS)

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For the 14th year in a row, the U.N. General Assembly has passed a resolution calling on the United States to immediately end its economic embargo against Cuba, imposed over four decades ago.

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 9 ([IPS](#)) - Tuesday's vote was 182 countries in favour, one abstention and four against — Israel, the Marshall Islands, Palau and the United States.

The Assembly expressed its concern that, since its earliest resolution on the issue in 1992, further measures had been taken by the United States to strengthen and extend the restrictions, which adversely affected the Cuban people and Cuban nationals living in other countries, as well as bringing penalties against U.S. and foreign firms.

Cuba has been under a U.S. embargo since President Fidel Castro defeated an assault, financed and directed by the U.S. government, at the Bay of Pigs in 1961.

Washington still restricts Cuba in many ways. For example, Cuba cannot trade with the U.S. or receive U.S. tourists, and the dollar cannot be used for foreign transactions. The island nation has no access to credit and cannot interact with many multilateral, regional or U.S. institutions.

The General Assembly resolution is non-binding and has no legal impact on the United States, but can be considered a moral victory for Cuba. The dispute has moved to the question of Washington claiming that it is a purely bilateral affair, while Havana says that the embargo affects not only Cuba, but other countries as well.

Speaking on behalf of the European Union and associated states, Paul Johnston, a British envoy, said the U.S. trade policy towards Cuba was fundamentally a bilateral issue.

"However," he added, "the extraterritorial extension of the embargo, as in the 1992 Cuban Democracy Act and the 1996 Helms-Burton Act, was unacceptable."

Cuban authorities estimate the impact of the embargo to 822.6 million dollars in 2004, and a total of 82 billion dollars since its inception. The negative impact of the blockade had been worsened in recent years due to a large number of natural disasters, such as hurricanes and drought.

Felipe Perez Roque, Cuba's foreign minister, said that during the decades-long blockade, the embargo had not been enforced with such severity as in the last 18 months. Under the George W. Bush administration, however, new measures have been introduced to reduce the flow of money and visitors, including Cuban-Americans, from the United States to Cuba.

"The blockade violates the constitutional rights of the United States, as well as the rights of Cubans," he said, adding that the restrictions also hurt the U.S. economy.

Even with virtually the whole Assembly voting against the United States, Washington's representative Ronald Godard said his country's trade embargo against Cuba was a bilateral issue, and blamed Cuba for economic mismanagement. Johnston said the European Union Council of Ministers had adopted a common position in 1996 to protect EU residents from the effects of the Helms-Burton legislation by prohibiting compliance with it.

At a 1998 Summit of the EU and the U.S., a package was agreed on that covered waivers to the Act, committed the U.S. to resist further extraterritorial legislation, and set forth an understanding on strengthening investment protections. Johnston urged the U.S. to implement its side of that package.

Julian Hunte, speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community, said Cuba was an integral part of the Caribbean region and threatened no one.

"Its commitment to the social and economic development of its neighbours was unquestionable. The embargo served no other purpose than to preserve a state of tension between two neighbouring countries, resulting only in the imposition of significant hardship and suffering on the Cuban people," he said.

Speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 developing countries and China, Stafford O'Neil from Jamaica said "the embargo was unilateral and was contrary to international law and the United Nations Charter". The recent measures to tighten the embargo violated Cuba's sovereignty, he said.

He added that the international objectives of the U.N., including fighting poverty and slowing the spread of diseases like HIV/AIDS, are diminished by the U.S. embargo.

"The United Nations Charter calls for the peaceful settlement of disputes. The destinies of Cuba and the U.S. are linked and differences between them must be resolved by dialogue and cooperation," he said.

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