

CARIBBEAN - Caribbean Embraces Cuba, Chastises U.S. (Peter Richards, IPS)

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12/09/2005 ([IPS](#)) - The summit was the second in three years, and for Cuban President Fidel Castro, dressed in a business suit rather than his usual olive fatigues, it was the ideal opportunity to salute the Caribbean Community for its "unflinching" opposition to the decades-old United States trade embargo against the only Communist state in this hemisphere.}

In a 13-minute speech to the joint Cuba-CARICOM Summit in Barbados Thursday, Castro praised the 33-year-old diplomatic ties between Havana and the 14-nation bloc on its anniversary, dubbed "Cuba-CARICOM Day", while paying homage to the regional leaders who defied U.S. pressure and kept their close ties with Havana.

"We once more reiterate our appreciation for the unflinching solidarity of the Caribbean countries with Cuba. It was most recently expressed through the unanimous Caribbean vote at the United Nations in favour of lifting the 45-year-long blockade on our people," said Castro, who is now 78.

In recent years, the relationship between Havana and the regional grouping has included the provision of educational opportunities and medical care to thousands of Caribbean nationals.

St. Lucia's Prime Minister Kenny Anthony, the current CARICOM chairman, urged Washington to remove the 45-year-old blockade, reiterating that the region regarded "Cuba (as) an integral part of the hemispheric community and we remain convinced that efforts at its isolation were not only unjust but counter-productive".

Anthony said the embargo was "blatantly inconsistent with international trading norms" and urged Washington to engage in "constructive engagement" with the Cuban government.

"We continue to offer our view that effective resolution of conflict and difficulty can only come from constructive engagement," Anthony said.

"When we convened in Havana three years ago, the Caribbean Community sent a clear and unambiguous statement to the rest of the world that Cuba, by virtue of geography and history, was an integral part of the Caribbean family and would not be treated otherwise," he said.

The summit ended with a call for Washington to lift "with immediate effect... the unjust economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed against the Republic of Cuba and cease the application of measures adopted as of 6 May 2004 to reinforce that policy".

The leaders also made it clear that they enjoyed "a shared Caribbean identity that enriches and strengthens our support for South-South cooperation and enhances opportunities for coordination and cooperation in the promotion and protection of our common values, objectives and interests in various international fora and organisations".

The summit discussed the status of global trade negotiations, as well as United Nations efforts to implement the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

The eight MDGs include a 50 percent reduction in poverty and hunger; universal primary education; reduction of child mortality by two-thirds; cutbacks in maternal mortality by three-quarters; the promotion

of gender equality; environmental sustainability; reversal of the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; and a global partnership for development between the rich and poor.

While supporting the MDGs, Caribbean leaders emphasised that every country has the sovereign right to determine its own development priorities and strategies, and called on the international community "to categorically reject any conditionality in the provision of development assistance".

They also stressed the "critical importance of South-South Cooperation, particularly within the framework of the implementation of the Doha Plan of Action adopted at the Second South Summit of the G77 and China in June 2005 under the Chairmanship of Jamaica".

But the summit also provided Havana with another venue to press its claim on Washington to extradite Luis Posada Carrilles, the anti-Castro Cuban émigré who is alleged to have plotted the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner off the coast of Barbados.

Last April, Posada, a naturalised Venezuelan citizen who developed a relationship with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, sought political asylum in the United States. A U.S. judge has ruled that he cannot be deported to Venezuela, which has formally requested Posada's extradition, upholding his claims that he would be tortured on his return.

In a "Statement on Terrorism", the regional leaders and Castro urged "the Government of the United States of America to consider favourably this request, to ensure that he is brought to justice on charges of terrorism, in accordance with its obligations under international law and its national legislation".

They described terrorism as "abhorrent to all humanity", urged all countries to become parties to the international conventions and agreements relating to terrorism, and to comply with the obligations mandated by those instruments.

"We therefore reaffirm our commitment to fighting terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, with strict adherence to international law and relevant General Assembly and Security Council Resolutions, international standards of protection of human rights, and to international humanitarian law for which, among other actions, we will reinforce our national laws and will promote active and efficient international cooperation in order to prevent and eliminate this scourge."

"In conformity with international law, we affirm our commitment not to assist or harbour perpetrators and promoters of, or participants in terrorist activities. Likewise, we repudiate any action, which assists or supports perpetrators and promoters of, or participants in terrorist activities."

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