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Cuba and the Fifth Summit of the Americas

The exclusion of Cuba from the Fifth Summit of the Americas is not helpful in achieving improved respect for human rights in Cuba.

Heads of State and Government of all countries in the Americas, except for Cuba, will gather for the Fifth Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago, 17-19 April 2009. They will discuss some of the most serious challenges facing the region and advance a regional agenda for the promotion of human prosperity, energy security and environmental sustainability. The absence of Cuba, the only country to be excluded, will diminish attempts to find regional solutions to regional problems.

The battle of ideologies in the context of the Cold War that led to the exclusion of Cuba in 1962 from the Organization of American States no longer prevails. While all Latin American and Caribbean nations have slowly bridged their differences with Cuba, the US government maintains a policy of isolation that has reached its limits, has not achieved its stated objectives and is impeding Cuba's growth and development. The USA is now the only country in the Americas not to maintain diplomatic relations with Cuba.

Amnesty International urges the US government to lift the nearly five--decade long economic and trade embargo against Cuba as it is detrimental to the fulfillment of the economic and social rights of the Cuban people. It obstructs and constrains efforts by the Cuban government to purchase essential medicines, medical equipment and supplies, food and agricultural products, construction materials and access to new technologies. The embargo also denies Cuban-Americans their right to travel freely to their country of origin. The embargo has been overwhelmingly rejected by the United Nations General Assembly for the past seventeen years.

Although the US administration has recently eased remittances and travel restrictions for Cuban-Americans, and has allowed US companies more flexibility in selling food and medicine to Cuba, these measures are limited to the end of the current fiscal year. Nevertheless, Amnesty International hopes that they herald a comprehensive review of US foreign policy towards Cuba.

US foreign policy towards Cuba has also led to the denial of travel visas to two of the wives of five Cubans imprisoned in the USA since 1998, a measure that is unnecessarily punitive and contrary to standards for the humane treatment of prisoners. Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the US government to grant temporary visas for visitation purposes to the wives of the prisoners.

The Cuban government, for its part, must align its laws and policies with its obligations under the American Convention on Human Rights and other international treaties to which it is party, particularly in respect of freedom of expression, association and assembly.

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 207413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK

www.amnesty.org