

LA JOVEN CUBA

October 24, 2024

Hon. James P. McGovern
Member of Congress
370 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Barbara Lee
Member of Congress
2470 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives McGovern and Lee:

La Joven Cuba is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization composed of U.S. and Cuban citizens. Thousands of readers access our digital magazine daily, seeking political information about the Island and analysis of the relationship between the United States and Cuba.

The Editorial Board of La Joven Cuba wishes to express our gratitude for your sustained stance of friendship and concern towards the Cuban people, particularly your recent statements regarding the country's energy situation and the impact of U.S. government sanctions during these times. As you know, millions of residents on the Island urgently need humanitarian assistance. In recent years, fuel, food, and medicine shortages have increasingly affected Cubans' lives.

On Friday, October 18, the Antonio Guiteras Thermoelectric Plant, the most important in the country, experienced a breakdown that caused the collapse of the National Electric System (SEN, by its acronym in Spanish). This collapse left the entire country in darkness, and since then, attempts to restore power have been plagued by further interruptions.¹ To worsen the situation, last Sunday, Hurricane Oscar made landfall in the easternmost part of the Island, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis for its inhabitants. According to reports, at least seven people, including a child, have lost their lives.²

Electricity production in Cuba relies on outdated technology, lacking capitalization and maintenance. Moreover, the fuel shortage has severely impacted the quality of life for Cubans. For example, transportation across the country has been reduced to historically low levels, and residents from provinces other than Havana are unable to travel to the capital for medical appointments.

Similarly, solid waste collection in cities has been reduced primarily due to the lack of fuel for operating garbage trucks, leading to the spread of diseases.³ Additionally, in various areas of the country, residents suffer from water shortages due, among other reasons, to the lack of fuel needed for pumping.⁴ In fact, one of our editors has not received potable water at home for seven days.

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2024/10/20/americas/cuba-blackout-third-day-failed-restore-intl/index.html>

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3rlr1nyx55o>

³ <https://www.barrons.com/news/trash-overwhelms-havana-as-garbage-trucks-lack-parts-fuel-00756b5c>

⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/hundreds-thousands-cuba-without-water-2024-09-13/>

La Joven Cuba does not overlook the poor management of Cuban authorities regarding the Administration of limited resources, maintenance planning, and infrastructure modernization.⁵ However, we understand that U.S. Government sanctions limit access to technology, spare parts, and international oil markets. Additionally, these sanctions prevent ships that dock in Cuban ports from accessing U.S. ports for the following six months, causing shipping companies to refuse to transport fuel to Cuba.

We firmly believe the U.S. Government should end its embargo towards the Cuban people and its regime change policy. It is up to the Cuban citizens to decide their form of government. However, in the current state of affairs, the U.S. Government can quickly take action to support the Cuban people for humanitarian reasons. There is an existing legal framework for this. 31 C.F.R. §515.591 allows “[p]ersons subject to the jurisdiction of the United States [...] to provide to Cuba or Cuban nationals services related to developing, repairing, maintaining, and enhancing Cuban infrastructure that directly benefit[s] the Cuban people,” specifically including “non-nuclear electricity generation, and electricity distribution sectors.”

Moreover, we respectfully request that you consider introducing a bill that further facilitates allowing Cuba to acquire and transport essential products for power generation. Alternatively, we ask for your good offices with the current Administration to support and ease regulations allowing American companies to sell and transfer technology and fuel to Cuba.

It is a matter of existential importance for millions of Cubans to have access to fuel, spare parts, and technology for the country’s electrical system to mitigate the frequent power outages. Such action, aimed at allowing the purchase and transport of energy resources, would be a significant step toward mitigating the current humanitarian crisis and normalizing the electrical system.

We once again express our gratitude for your dedication and sensitivity to the Cuban people’s situation, and we respectfully request your good offices to help mitigate the worsening of this crisis.

Sincerely,

Harold Cardenas Lema

Harold Cardenas Lema
Chair of the Editorial Board
Washington, DC

⁵ <https://testing.havanatimes.org/?p=226063>