



World Council of Churches

General Secretariat

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H.E. George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500
U.S.A.

Geneva, 10 July 2006

Dear Mr President,

The Second Report of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba contains a recommendation that U.S. churches and ecumenical agencies should cease to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable Cuban children, women and men through the Cuban Council of Churches. This is a matter of serious concern for us. According to an advance copy, the report recommends that the U.S. Government “[t]ighten regulations for the export of humanitarian items, other than agricultural or medical commodities, to ensure that exports are consigned to entities that support independent civil society and are not regime administered or controlled organizations, such as the Cuban Council of Churches.”

In my letter of June 2004 to the Cuban churches, issued after the meeting of the Cuban Pastoral Forum, I regretted the implementation of the recommendations of the First Report of the Commission, as these have tightened the economic embargo and adversely affected the Cuban families in vulnerable situations. As I have expressed several times, the economic embargo goes beyond an economic and political measure, therefore from a humanitarian and ethical perspective, it should be lifted.

We are deeply concerned that the application of these affirmations by the U.S. Government will be a serious affront to the mission of the Church. National councils of churches and regional ecumenical organizations, whether in the United States, Canada, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, Asia or the Middle East, have the responsibility to relate to their counterparts throughout the world in pursuance of their common mission tasks.

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of 348 churches from over one hundred countries around the world and has a constituency of more than 560 million Christians. It has had a long history of relationship with the Cuban Council of Churches.

Last year, I had the opportunity to pay a pastoral visit to Cuba to meet WCC member churches in the country. I also visited the headquarters of the Cuban Council of Churches and was able to witness its important work for promoting Christian witness and service and working for human dignity in the country. During my visit I clearly stated that all Cuban churches should receive equal treatment from the state in order to meet the challenges of their

pastoral ministry. Churches, in particular the Protestant churches, are growing in Cuba. This growth entails building of new churches and seminaries and access to the media in order to tackle the pastoral challenges that arise in their service to the Cuban people.

Religious freedom would be threatened if the recommendation is followed through by the U.S. Government. It would also seriously burden the Christian mission of our sister ecumenical bodies in the United States, the Church World Service and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. And, in fact, this U.S. action jeopardizes all ecumenical Christian councils everywhere by setting the precedent that governments can determine who the churches can relate to as true Christian partners and who they cannot.

Ecumenical Christian bodies have a right to determine their ecumenical partners and to engage with them internationally. We strongly feel that it is completely inappropriate for the U.S. Government, or any government, to determine who is and who is not a legitimate national council of churches, and to restrict or deny Christian fellowship and humanitarian assistance to any particular national church council, including the Cuban Council of Churches.

In our judgment such an action would be a gross violation of religious freedom and a remarkably aggressive interference in religious matters for which no government has the right or the spiritual competence.

For these reasons we ask you to place no burden on the ability of U.S. churches and ecumenical organizations to engage in Christian fellowship and to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable Cuban brothers and sisters through the Cuban Council of Churches.

We pray God may guide your decisions and bless abundantly the American people,

Yours sincerely,

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General Secretary

CC: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez