



# NEHAWU

## Weekly International Monitor

ADVANCING WORKING CLASS POWER TOWARDS OUR 10TH NATIONAL CONGRESS AND OUR 26TH ANNIVERSARY

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## 1.1. GLOBAL CAMPAIGN TO FREE MARIO MASUKU & ALL PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE IN SWAZILAND NOW!

14 April 2015

COSATU Statement

Background

PUDEMO is proud to proclaim 31 years of decisive and unbroken struggles for democracy. Since birth in 1983, we have been consistent and principled in fighting for democracy, people's power and justice for the people of Swaziland.

These struggles have resulted in the brutal arrests, persecution, forced exiling and even killing of our leaders and activists. This explains why PUDEMO has political prisoners and exiles spread all over the world.

We are undoubtedly the only political party in Swaziland, with recorded political prisoners in jail today (on official state records) and remain the most targeted, even by law as evident in the Suppression of Terrorism Act, 2008.

The arrest and detention of our President Mario Masuku on the 1st May, 2014 together with the Secretary General of

SWAYOCO, Maxwell Dlamini signalled the intensification of the further persecution of our movement, particularly its leader who has long come to symbolise the undying resistance and bravery of our people and their leading movement, PUDEMO.

Since the 1990 Treason trial against PUDEMO leadership, the political landscape of Swaziland has never been the same and the gigantic wave of struggle for democratic change has never been stoppable. No amount of state violence, royal terror and torture has succeeded in crushing or killing the desire of our people to be free.

As we talk, our Secretary General Mlungisi Makhanya and 7 other cadres of PUDEMO remain in out-of-prison detention with strict bail conditions. This is just a part of the numerous cadres of PUDEMO who are facing various sentences and some already serving them, ranging from 15 to 20 and even 85 years prison sentences.

This includes our stalwart and heroic soldier of MK Amos Mbedzi, from the SACP and ANC in South Africa who is serving 85 years in jail in tinkhundla jails for supporting our struggle in practical terms.

The Campaign and its elements - What is it about?

The campaign is primarily about the unbanning of political parties, particularly the decriminalisation of PUDEMO which is currently the only proscribed political organisation, together with its auxiliaries, on Swazi soil. While political parties in general remain banned in Swaziland, only PUDEMO is legally proscribed and its activities criminalised by the 2008 Suppression of Terrorism Act (STA).

This forms the legal basis for the consistent, targeted and ruthless crackdown on PUDEMO leaders and activists and all its activities.

It is the movement that bears the bulk of tinkhundla state terror against the people, for being the consistent defender of the people's cause and for advancing the most fundamental principles of the struggle for democracy in Swaziland.

By demanding the release of President Mario Masuku;

- We are at the same time demanding the release of all political prisoners
- We are at the same time demanding the full release of all prisoners of conscience
- We are the same time demanding the release of all Swazis from the one big open jail called tinkhundla that our country has been turned into by the royal family
- We are therefore demanding our full liberation and the speedy movement towards a new and democratic society

It is in this light that we locate the campaign for the release of all political prisoners and all prisoners of conscience, arrested for defending and advancing civil liberties in general. In this regard, we defend and fight for the rights of all who suffer tinkhundla persecution for exercising their rights and speaking out against corruption, abuse of state power, royal looting and all forms of oppression against the people.

We salute the courage demonstrated by fellow civil society activists, in this case, Thulani Maseko, the Human Rights Lawyer and Bheki Makhubu the Editor of the Nation Magazine.

They have demonstrated that to defend the rights of the people is the duty of all Swazis, regardless of their station in life or space in society they occupy. It is a battle that all patriotic Swazis must fight and win. That is why PUDEMO proclaims that in unity, there is strength and in action there is victory!

Our President Mario Masuku has become synonymous with political prison for his undying commitment and frequent and targeted arrest over the years.

He has become the most well known political prisoner on Swazi soil. Since the famous 1991 Treason Trial of PUDEMO he has come to symbolise the resistance and determination of the Swazi people to stand brave against state terror. He is the figurehead of the ever growing resistance and defiance movement in Swaziland, which has been the hallmark of PUDEMO, SWAYOCO and its allies together with the whole progressive civil society family.

It is for that reason that while this campaign is about the release of all political and other prisoners of conscience, but he has become the main target of tinkhundla brute force and therefore, his release would be significant to the struggle for the release of all and the liberation of Swaziland as a whole.

### Activities and Coordination of the Global Campaign

The following are the key phases and activities of the Campaign

1. National Launch of the Campaign - shall be held at a place to be announced by the National Executive Committee (NEC) of PUDEMO, it shall include the whole mass democratic movement of Swaziland and all progressive forces in general.
2. Global Launch of the Campaign - shall be held in Johannesburg soon with the full and active involvement of all our partners of the South African revolutionary alliance, the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) and the international solidarity movement, particularly the Swaziland Solidarity Network (SSN) and the Swaziland Democracy Campaign (SDC).
3. Local Campaign Committees (LCC) - shall be created in all major places and communities to popularise the campaign and mobilise for popular support and activities demanding the right to free political activities, end to corruption and poverty, end to unemployment and inequalities, as well as the right to organise and participate in all local and national issues affecting the people.
4. Week of mass actions - a series of resistance and defiance campaign activities by the movement and all activists, with the support of our international allies, shall ensue in full force.
5. National Rally for the rights and freedoms of all Swazis - shall be held on the day of the court appearance of President Mario Masuku and SWAYOCO Secretary General, Maxwell Dlamini

Source: COSATU

## 1.2. XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS ON FOREIGN NATIONALS IN SOUTH AFRICA

15 April 2015

### African Union Commission Statement

The Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma has described the attacks of foreign nationals in the province of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa as “unacceptable,” calling an immediate halt while expressing once again her deep concerns regarding the attacks on foreign nationals.

“Whatever the challenges we may be facing, no circumstances justify attacks on people, whether foreigners or locals. It is unacceptable.” She lamented.

While calling for an immediate halt to the attacks, the AU Commission welcomes the interventions from the South African government, including the deployment of the Inter-Ministerial committee to KwaZulu Natal to engage with those affected and with local communities, as well as the deployment of more police to provide protection and keep law and order.

The AU Commission Chairperson decried the incidents as particularly unfortunate, as celebrations of Africa month approaches. “On 25 May we remember the founding of the Organisation of African Unity, which played such a critical role in mobilizing international solidarity for the end of Apartheid.” She added.

The challenges faced by South Africa, poverty and unemployment, are challenges faced by all countries on the continent and we must work together to address these, and build a better future for all Africans.

The AU Commission Chairperson appealed for dialogue in and amongst communities, to address the challenges and find peaceful solutions.

### **1.3. AFRICAN UNION TO OBSERVE TOGO'S 25<sup>TH</sup> APRIL PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND BENIN'S 26<sup>TH</sup> APRIL PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**

16 April 2015

African Union Statement

As the Togolese Republic and the Republic of Benin prepares for their presidential and parliamentary elections to be held on 25th and 26th April 2015 respectively, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC), Her Excellency Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, has approved the deployment of African Union Election Observation Missions (AUEOM) to Togo and Benin.

The AUEOM's in Togo will be led by H.E Kabiné Komara, former Prime Minister of the Republic of Guinea while the AUEOM for the Republic of Benin will be led by H.E Dioncounda Traoré, former Interim President of the Republic of Mali.

The two (2) Missions comprise short-term observers from AU Member States. Observers will be deployed throughout the countries to follow the electoral process and to meet with government and electoral officials, candidates and political parties, civil society representatives and media in order to provide a critical assessment of the conduct of the elections.

The AUEOM's has a mandate to observe and report on the election process in Togo and Benin in line with relevant AU instruments on democracy and elections, such as the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Election and Governance, the 2002 OAU/AU Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa and the 2002 AU Guidelines for Election Observation and Monitoring Missions, as well as international best practices and standards. The AUEOM to the two countries will make an independent, impartial and objective assessment of the processes and determine if the elections in the two countries are conducted in line international and regional best practices and standards on democratic elections.

Source: African Union

### **1.4. THE AFRICAN UNION STRONGLY CONDEMNS THE TERRORIST ATTACKS AT THE SANAI PENINSULA IN EGYPT**

13 April 2015

African Union Commission Statement

The Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, expresses deep concern over the terrorist attacks that happened in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt, on 12 April 2014. She strongly condemns these criminal attacks that have claimed the lives of innocent citizens, wounded many others and led to destruction of property. She notes that such acts can only be carried out by enemies of peace.

The Chairperson of the Commission expresses the AU's solidarity with the Government and people of the Egypt, and offers her condolences to the bereaved families and wishes to those wounded a speedy recovery.

She reiterates the AU's strong rejection of terrorism and violent extremism and the collective action of Member States to prevent and combat terrorism, within the framework of the AU and relevant international instruments.

Source: African Union Commission

### **1.5. PANAMA SUMMIT WENT DOWN IN HISTORY**

15 April 2015

CubaInsideTheWorld

Panama cities recovers today from the intense activity lived as the Host of the VII Summit of the Americas, which goes in history as the scenario of the first official meeting between president of Cuba and United States in half a century. Beyond the last week debates through forums on social, youth, business and academic issues, the conclave also will also be remembered as the first time that the 35 countries of the Western Hemisphere sit around the same table.

That figure was completed by Cuba, invited by the Panamanian government after years of complaints of progressive governments in the region, which was excluded from this type of conference opened in 1994 in US territory.

After a formal greeting at the welcome ceremony offered Friday by Juan Carlos Varela, as host president, Raul Castro and Obama shook hands yesterday before the cameras and a group of journalists in one of the halls of the convention center Atlapa in this capital.

Everything can be discussed if it is done with respect to the other side's ideas, including the issues on which they disagree, stressed the head of state of the Greater Antilles to note that there are many differences in the complicated history between the two countries 'but we are willing to move forward'.

In the same vein, the head of the White House acknowledged that "after 50 years that there was no change in politics, we have to try something new".

It was also the first time the two presidents addressed statements to the press together, and then talk privately for about more than an hour, as confirmed.

That exchange tackled the process for the re-establishment of diplomatic relations and the opening of embassies in Havana and Washington and the possibilities of cooperation in various fields.

Shortly before the meeting with Obama, Raul Castro reaffirmed to the Summit that the economic, commercial and financial blockade of the US against Cuba still applies in all its intensity, causes damage and shortages to the people and is the key obstacle to development of the Cuban economy.

He clarified that the current occupant of the White House is not responsible for the implementation of the blockade and labelled him honest man of humble origin and with the courage to confront the Congress in a debate on the removal of the fence to the island.

The Panama meeting also brought the favourable conditions for a brief meeting with president of Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro, amid the Latin American and Caribbean clamor against the decision of the US president to consider the South American country a threat to his national security. (PL)

Source: <https://cubainsidetheworld.wordpress.com/2015/04/15/panama-summit-went-down-in-history/#more-11917>

## **1.6. CASTRO REMARKS AT THE SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS**

11 April 2015

TeleSUR

His Excellency Juan Carlos Varela, President of the Republic of Panama;

Presidents and Prime Ministers;

Distinguished guests;

I appreciate the solidarity of all Latin American and Caribbean countries that made possible Cuba's participation in this hemispheric forum on equal footing, and I thank the President of the Republic of Panama for the kind invitation extended to us. I bring a fraternal embrace to the Panamanian people and to the peoples of all nations represented here.

The establishment of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) on December 2-3, 2011, in Caracas, opened the way to a new era in the history of Our America, which made clear its well-earned right to live in peace and develop as their peoples freely decide, and chart the course to a future of peace, development and integration based on cooperation, solidarity and the common will to preserve their independence, sovereignty and identity.

The ideals of Simón Bolívar on the creation of a "Grand American Homeland" were a source of inspiration to epic campaigns for independence.

In 1800, there was the idea of adding Cuba to the North American Union to mark the southern boundary of the extensive empire. The 19th century witnessed the emergence of such doctrines as the Manifest Destiny, with the purpose of dominating the Americas and the world, and the notion of the 'ripe fruit', meaning Cuba's inevitable gravitation to the American Union, which looked down on the rise and evolution of a genuine rationale conducive to emancipation.

Later on, through wars, conquests and interventions that expansionist and dominating force stripped Our America of part of its territory and expanded as far as the Rio Grande.

After long and failing struggles, José Martí organized the "necessary war", and created the Cuban Revolutionary Party to lead that war and to eventually found a Republic "with all and for the good of all" with the purpose of achieving "the full dignity of man."

With an accurate and early definition of the features of his times, Martí committed to the duty "of timely preventing the United States from spreading through the Antilles as Cuba gains its independence, and from overpowering with that additional strength our lands of America."

To him, Our America was that of the Creole and the original peoples, the black and the mulatto, the mixed-race and working America that must join the cause of the oppressed and the destitute. Presently, beyond geography, this ideal is coming to fruition.

One hundred and seventeen years ago, on April 11, 1898, the President of the United States of America requested Congressional consent for military intervention in the independence war already won with rivers of Cuban blood, and that legislative body issued a deceitful Joint Resolution recognizing the independence of the Island "de facto and de jure". Thus, they entered as allies and seized the country as an occupying force.

Subsequently, an appendix was forcibly added to Cuba's Constitution, the Platt Amendment that deprived it of sovereignty, authorized the powerful neighbor to interfere in the internal affairs, and gave rise to Guantánamo Naval Base, which still holds part of our territory without legal right. It was in that period that the Northern capital invaded the country, and there were two military interventions and support for cruel dictatorships.

At the time, the prevailing approach to Latin America was the "gunboat policy" followed by the "Good Neighbor" policy. Successive interventions ousted democratic governments and in twenty countries installed terrible dictatorships, twelve of these simultaneously and mostly in South America, where hundreds of thousands were killed. President Salvador Allende left us the legacy of his undying example.

It was precisely 13 years ago that a coup d'état staged against beloved President Hugo Chavez Frías was defeated by his people. Later on, an oil coup would follow.

On January 1st, 1959, sixty years after the U.S. troops entered Havana, the Cuban Revolution triumphed and the Rebel Army commanded by Fidel Castro Ruz arrived in the capital.

On April 6, 1960, barely one year after victory, Assistant Secretary of State Lester Mallory drafted a wicked memorandum, declassified tens of years later, indicating that "The majority of Cubans support Castro [...] An effective political opposition does not exist [...]; the only foreseeable means of alienating internal support [to the government] is through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship [...] to weaken the economic life of Cuba [...] denying it money and supplies to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government."

We have endured severe hardships. Actually, 77% of the Cuban people was born under the harshness of the blockade, but our patriotic convictions prevailed. Aggression increased resistance and accelerated the revolutionary process. Now, here we are with our heads up high and our dignity unblemished.

When we had already proclaimed socialism and the people had fought in the Bay of Pigs to defend it, President Kennedy was murdered, at the exact time when Fidel Castro, leader of the Cuban Revolution, was receiving his message seeking to engage Cuba in a dialogue.

After the Alliance for Progress, and having paid our external debt several times over while unable to prevent its constant growth, our countries were subjected to a wild and globalizing neoliberalism, an expression of imperialism at the time that left the region dealing with a lost decade.

Then, the proposal of a “mature hemispheric partnership” resulted in the imposition of the Free Trade Association of the Americas (FTAA), -linked to the emergence of these Summits- that would have brought about the destruction of the economy, sovereignty and common destiny of our nations, if it had not been derailed at Mar del Plata in 2005 under the leadership of Presidents Kirchner, Chavez and Lula. The previous year, Chavez and Fidel had brought to life the Bolivarian Alternative known today as the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America.

Excellencies;

We have expressed to President Barack Obama our disposition to engage in a respectful dialogue and work for a civilized coexistence between our states while respecting our profound differences.

I welcome as a positive step his recent announcement that he will soon decide on Cuba’s designation in a list of countries sponsor of terrorism, a list in which it should have never been included.

Up to this day, the economic, commercial and financial blockade is implemented against the Island with full intensity causing damages and scarcities that affect our people and becoming the main obstacle to the development of our economy. The fact is that it stands in violation of International Law, and its extraterritorial scope disrupts the interests of every State.

We have publicly expressed to President Obama, who was also born under the blockade policy and inherited it from 10 former Presidents when he took office, our appreciation for his brave decision to engage the U.S. Congress in a debate to put an end to such policy.

This and other issues should be resolved in the process toward the future normalization of bilateral relations.

As to us, we shall continue working to update the Cuban economic model with the purpose of improving our socialism and moving ahead toward development and the consolidation of the achievements of a Revolution that has set to itself the goal of “conquering all justice.”

Esteemed colleagues;

Venezuela is not, and it cannot be, a threat to the national security of a superpower like the United States. We consider it a positive development that the U.S. President has admitted it.

I should reaffirm our full, determined and loyal support to the sister Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, to the legitimate government and civilian-military alliance headed by President Nicolas Maduro, and to the Bolivarian and Chavista people of that country struggling to pursue their own path while confronting destabilizing attempts and unilateral sanctions that should be lifted; we demand the repeal of the Executive Order, an action that our Community would welcome as a contribution to dialogue and understanding in the hemisphere.

We shall continue encouraging the efforts of the Republic of Argentina to recover the Falklands, the South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, and supporting its legitimate struggle in defense of financial sovereignty.

We shall maintain our support for the actions of the Republic of Ecuador against the transnational companies causing ecological damages to its territory and trying to impose blatantly unfair conditions.

I wish to acknowledge the contribution of Brazil, and of President Dilma Rouseff, to the strengthening of regional integration

and the development of social policies that have brought progress and benefits to extensive popular sectors, the same that the thrust against various leftist governments of the region is trying to reverse.

We shall maintain our unwavering support for the Latin American and Caribbean people of Puerto Rico in its determination to achieve self-determination and independence, as the United Nations Decolonization Committee has ruled tens of times.

We shall also keep making our contribution to the peace process in Colombia.

We should all multiply our assistance to Haiti, not only through humanitarian aid but also with resources that help in its development, and, in the same token, support a fair and deferential treatment of the Caribbean countries in their economic relations as well as reparations for damages brought on them by slavery and colonialism.

We are living under threat of huge nuclear arsenals that should be removed, and are running out of time to counteract climate change. Threats to peace keep growing and conflicts spreading out.

As President Fidel Castro has said “[...] the main causes rest with poverty and underdevelopment, and with the unequal distribution of wealth and knowledge prevailing in the world. It cannot be forgotten that current poverty and underdevelopment are the result of conquest, colonization, slavery and plundering by colonial powers in most of the planet, the emergence of imperialism and the bloody wars for a new division of the world. Humanity should be aware of what they have been and should be no more. Today, our species has accumulated sufficient knowledge, ethical values and scientific resources to move forward to a historical era of true justice and humanism. Nothing of what exists today in economic and political terms serves the interests of Humanity. It cannot be sustained. It must be changed,” he concluded.

Cuba shall continue advocating the ideas for which our people have taken on enormous sacrifices and risks, fighting alongside the poor, the unemployed and the sick without healthcare; the children forced to live on their own, to work or be submitted to prostitution; those going hungry or discriminated; the oppressed and the exploited who make up the overwhelming majority of the world population.

Financial speculation, the privileges of Bretton Wood, and the unilateral removal of the gold standard have grown increasingly suffocating. We need a transparent and equitable financial system.

It is unacceptable that less than ten big corporations, mostly American, determine what is read, watched or listened to worldwide. The Internet should be ruled by an international, democratic and participatory governance, particularly concerning its content. The militarization of cyberspace and the secret and illegal use of computer systems to attack other States are equally unacceptable. We shall not be dazzled or colonized again.

Mister President;

It is my opinion that hemispheric relations need to undergo deep changes, particularly in the areas of politics, economics and culture, so that, on the basis of International Law and the exercise of self-determination and sovereign equality, they can focus on the development of mutually beneficial partnerships and cooperation in the interest of all our nations and the objectives proclaimed.

The adoption in January 2014, during the Second Summit of CELAC in Havana, of the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Peace Zone made a transcendental contribution to that end, marked by Latin American and Caribbean unity in diversity.

This is evident in the progress we are making toward genuinely Latin American and Caribbean integration processes through CELAC, UNASUR, CARICOM, MERCOSUR, ALBA-TCP, SICA and the ACS, which underline our growing awareness of the necessity to work in unison in order to ensure our development.

Through that Proclamation we have committed ourselves “to have differences between nations resolved peacefully, through dialogue and negotiation, and other ways consistent with International Law.”

Living in peace, and engaging in mutual cooperation to tackle challenges and resolve problems that, after all, are affecting and will affect us all, is today a pressing need.

As the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Peace Zone sets forth, “the inalienable right of every State to

choose its political, economic, social and cultural system, as an essential condition to secure peaceful coexistence between nations” should be respected.

Under that Proclamation we committed to observe our “obligation to not interfere, directly or indirectly, in the internal affairs of any other State, and to observe the principles of national sovereignty, equality of rights and free determination of the peoples,” and to respect “the principles and standards of International Law [...] and the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter.”

That historical document urges “all member states of the International Community to fully respect this Declaration in its relations with the CELAC member States.”

We now have the opportunity, all of us here, as the Proclamation also states, of learning “to exercise tolerance and coexist in peace as good neighbors.”

There are substantial differences, yes, but also commonalities which enable us to cooperate making it possible to live in this world fraught with threats to peace and to the survival of the human species.

What is it that prevents cooperation at a hemispheric scale in facing climate change?

Why is it that the countries of the two Americas cannot fight together against terrorism, drug-trafficking and organized crime without politically biased positions?

Why can we not seek together the necessary resources to provide the hemisphere with schools, hospitals, employment, and to advance in the eradication of poverty?

Would it not be possible to reduce inequity in the distribution of wealth and infant mortality rates, to eliminate hunger and preventable diseases, and to eradicate illiteracy?

Last year, we established hemispheric cooperation to confront and prevent Ebola, and the countries of the two Americas made a concerted effort. This should stimulate our efforts toward greater achievements.

Cuba, a small country deprived of natural resources, that has performed in an extremely hostile atmosphere, has managed to attain the full participation of its citizens in the nation’s political and social life; with universal and free healthcare and education services; a social security system ensuring that no one is left helpless; significant progress in the creation of equal opportunities and in the struggle against all sorts of discrimination; the full exercise of the rights of children and women; access to sports and culture; and, the right to life and to public safety.

Despite scarcities and challenges, we abide by the principle of sharing what we have. Currently, 65 thousand Cuban collaborators are working in 89 countries, basically in the areas of healthcare and education, while 68 thousand professionals and technicians from 157 countries have graduated in our Island, 30 thousand of them in the area of healthcare.

If Cuba has managed to do this with very little resources, think of how much more the hemisphere could do with the political will to pool its efforts to help the neediest countries.

Thanks to Fidel and the heroic Cuban people, we have come to this Summit to honor Martí’s commitment, after conquering freedom with our own hands “proud of Our America, to serve it and to honor it [...] with the determination and the capacity to contribute to see it loved for its merits and respected for its sacrifices.”

Thank you

Source: <http://www.telesurtv.net/>

## **1.7. REGIONAL LEADERS BACK VENEZUELA AT PANAMA SUMMIT AS US BLOCK FINAL DECLARATION**

13 April 2015

Regional leaders flocked to Panama City this past weekend for the VII Summit of the Americas, which has been widely hailed as a victory for left-leaning and progressive forces in the region, particularly Venezuela and Cuba.

The summit was marked by the historic presence of Cuba whose president Raul Castro addressed his counterparts and held face to face talks with Barack Obama, the first Cuban leader to do so since the socialist nation's US-imposed expulsion from the Organization of American States in 1962.

However, the much anticipated rapprochement between the two nations was largely upstaged by regional leaders' near uniform rejection of President Obama's March 9 Executive Order labelling Venezuela a "national security threat", which has been condemned by all 33 nations of the CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) and other regional bodies.

While positively noting the steps taken by Obama to re-establish bilateral ties with Cuba, Castro nonetheless criticized the US president for his aggressive measures against Venezuela.

"Venezuela is not and could never be a threat to the national security of a superpower like the US," declared the Cuban leader, calling on Obama to "repeal the Executive Order" and "lift unilateral sanctions".

"I must reaffirm all of our loyal and resolute support for the sister Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, for the legitimate government and civil-military union headed by President Nicolas Maduro."

The US president's Executive Order was further denounced by numerous other heads of state who called for its repeal.

"President Obama's Executive Order against Venezuela flagrantly violates international law," stated Ecuador's Rafael Correa.

"The regional response has been overwhelming, rejecting the Executive Order and calling for its repeal. Our peoples will never accept more tutelage, nor intervention."

For her part, Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff indicated that "unilateral measures of isolation" were no longer tolerable in this new "moment of hemispheric relations".

"We reject the adoption of sanctions against Venezuela," she added.

Argentine head of state Cristina Fernandez also denounced Executive Order, which she termed "ridiculous".

"Its ridiculous [...] that not just Venezuela but any country on our continent could be some kind of threat to the huge country that is the U.S."

During his speech before the summit, Bolivian president Evo Morales slammed US imperial intervention in the region.

"We don't want more Monroes in our continent, nor more Truman doctrine, nor more Reagan doctrine, nor more Bush doctrine. We don't want any more presidential decrees nor more executive orders declaring us threats to their country."

Recently elected Tabare Vasquez of Uruguay added his voice to the resounding chorus condemning the White House's Executive Order.

"As we've already expressed in other bilateral and multilateral spheres such as the Union of South American Nations and the Organization of American States, we reject the executive decree of the US government, approved March 9."

The US leader's Executive Order was also strongly criticized by Daniel Ortega and Salvador Sánchez Cerén, the presidents of Nicaragua and El Salvador.

"This is a blow to our America," remarked Ortega, referring to the US decree against Venezuela.

"Appealing to the principle of self-determination of peoples, we consider that the recent Executive Order about Venezuela should be annulled," asserted the leftist Salvadoran president.

US President Barack Obama failed to stay for the speeches of Christina Fernandez and Nicolas Maduro, leaving the plenum early in order to reportedly meet with his Colombian counterpart, Manuel Santos.

#### Obama and Maduro Meet Face to Face

During the summit, President Obama agreed to a ten minute closed door meeting with Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro, which the latter termed "serious, frank, and cordial".

"I told president Obama that I am not an enemy of the United States, nor are my people," declared the Venezuelan leader following the meeting.

During his speech before the summit, Maduro indicated his openness to direct talks with his US counterpart, emphasizing that Venezuelans "are not anti-United States" but "anti-imperialists".

"I extend my hand to you president Obama to resolve the problems we have between us, in peace, without any intervention in internal matters," he stated.

The Venezuelan head of state also named several key issues he called on Obama to address in the context of bilateral talks, including US refusal to "recognize our Revolution", the White House's Executive Decree, the US embassy's role in destabilization efforts, as well as US support for anti-government groups operating from US soil.

#### US and Canada Block Final Summit Declaration

Towards the close of the summit, the US and Canada blocked the approval of a final declaration backed by the 33 other nations of the region, which was the result of four months of prior negotiations.

The final declaration requires approval by consensus and the two North American nations opposed several points in the draft document, including health as a human right, technology transfers to developing countries, an end to electronic espionage, and the repeal of Obama's Executive Order.

The US-Canadian veto was criticized by Bolivian President Evo Morales.

"One point was important: health as a human right, and the U.S. government did not accept that health should be considered a human right [...] President Obama did not accept the document," explained Bolivia's first indigenous president.

The previous Summit of the Americas held in Colombia in 2012 likewise failed to issue a final document due to US rejection of language opposing its blockade against Cuba.

#### US Refuses to Revoke Executive Order

Despite repeated calls throughout the summit for President Obama to repeal his Executive Order targeting Venezuela, the US administration has dug in its heels, refusing to repeal the decree.

Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson stated on Saturday that although her government did not consider Venezuela a "threat", the Executive Order would not be repealed given that "it's something that's already been implemented."

The comments follow similar contradictory remarks by Barack Obama on Thursday who also denied that Venezuela posed a threat to the United States, an admission which has been hailed as a victory by President Nicolas Maduro, who initiated a

petition campaign that has collected 13 million signatures against the Executive Order.

"We do not believe that Venezuela poses a threat to the United States, nor does the United States threaten the Venezuelan government," clarified Obama in an interview with EFE.

Nonetheless, the US leader indicated no intention of repealing the Executive Order, going on to justify the sanctions imposed on Venezuela, which are allegedly aimed at "discouraging human rights violations and corruption."

The White House's Executive Order has over the past month ignited a global backlash against US aggression, a reaction which has been lamented by Jacobson.

"I am disappointed that there were not more countries to defend [the sanctions]. They were not made to harm Venezuelans or the Venezuelan government," noted the Assistant Secretary of State.

Source: <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/11334>

## **1.8. OBAMA BETWEEN ISRAEL, IRAN AND THE PALESTINIANS: WHERE IS BLACK AMERICA?**

13 April 2015

Afro-Middle East Centre Insights

US President Barack Obama, in his struggle to fashion a transformative foreign policy by reshaping the balance of America's relationships in the Middle East, faces formidable resistance from Israel's right-wing Likud government allied with the most reactionary Republican-controlled US Congress in recent memory. There are, however, two missing dimensions that must be inserted into Obama's equations regarding Iran and Israel within the context of the framework accord between Tehran and the P5+1 (US, UK, France, China, Russia, and Germany): the Palestinians, and the level of black support for Obama's Middle East policy.

Israel's prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, cynically uses an alleged Iran nuclear existential threat to distract international attention from Israel's main problem: the Palestinian national question. This despite his intelligence establishment regarding the Iranian nuclear programme with much less alarm. At the same time, the US African-American political establishment within Obama's Democratic Party constituency appears to be 'missing in action' instead of acting as a core base of support for Obama's attempt at a complicated resetting of Middle East policy.

The absence of American black political leadership in the debate over Obama's Middle East change agenda focusing on an Iran nuclear deal must seriously be considered within the context of the polarised balance of political forces confronting Obama. These include a powerful Likud-Republican Party alliance that has successfully destabilised a once solid bipartisan Israel lobby dominating the US Congress; a congressional Democratic Party divided over whether to support Obama's Iran diplomacy or to follow the Likud-Republican lead aimed at undermining the nuclear deal; a powerful minority of billionaire plutocrats financing the Likud- Republican alliance (and rightwing Republican presidential hopefuls for 2016).

Yet, as powerful as these forces are, the Israel lobby has never been as vulnerable as it currently is, and this is mainly because of Netanyahu. His belligerent intransigence in blocking a peace agreement with Palestinians, and his abrasive opposition to any nuclear accord with Iran, coupled with his exploiting partisan polarisation in American politics - including implacable anti-Obama hatred among Republicans - is unintentionally exposing how detrimental the Israel lobby is to US interests, and emphasising that the interests of the USA and Israel are not identical.

Netanyahu, in the process, has divided the Jewish community, drawing rebukes from some of its leading Senate members. He has also managed to sharply divide Israelis. This almost cost him the re-election; he was saved by his last-minute renouncing of an Israeli-Palestinian two-state solution, and his racist pandering to a constituency fearful of Arab voter mobilisation in Israel. Revealingly, the opprobrium caused by Netanyahu's fear mongering among many Americans and Israelis over how this would impact the close US-Israeli relationship was not shared by Republicans. Little wonder since Republicans are seized with anti-black and anti-Hispanic voter suppression that is backed by a Supreme Court that has gutted the Voting Rights Act.

Given this unique set of converging circumstances, a concerted mobilisation in support of Obama's Iran diplomacy could

reshape the domestic politics of US Middle East policy that is currently dominated by the Israel lobby. A critically important consideration in this dynamic is how the intensity of political polarisation instigated by Netanyahu and his Likud-Republican alliance over an Iran deal has rendered ineffective accusations of anti-Semitism against those opposed to the confrontational anti-Iran and anti-peace policies of Tel Aviv. Netanyahu's oppositional coalition to Obama, and the disrespect he and Republicans exhibit toward the US president, are substantial enough in the USA to overcome accusations of anyone being anti-Israel or anti-Semitic.

Keeping in mind that a major aim of Netanyahu in opposing any diplomatic solution to Iran's nuclear programme is to distract the USA and the international community from focusing on the urgency of an Israeli-Palestinian resolution, there are a number of openings emerging to challenge current Middle East policy. This requires identifying the weak links and potentialities in devising an Obama-Iran support strategy that resonates in other areas of Middle East policy as well, principally in supporting an Israeli-Palestinian resolution. The weak link in the Netanyahu coalition is the congressional Democratic Party. This is where pressure could be exerted on Obama's behalf with a strategic insertion of black political support for him on Iran, accompanied by pressure to shift policy emphasis toward the plight of Palestinians and Arab citizens of Israel.

The nexus between exerting pressure on congressional Democrats and black mobilisation in support of Obama on Iran is underlined by the strategic role of Jewish Democrats in the House and Senate linked to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), and the need for the Congressional Black Caucus to erect a political firewall of support around Obama that promotes an alternative Middle East policy agenda. New York senator Chuck Schumer, the likely successor to Nevada senator Harry Reid as Senate minority leader, has already expressed support for a bill requiring any Iran nuclear deal to be approved by Congress - in violation of the president's constitutional prerogatives in conducting US foreign policy. Should a final deal be reached in June between Iran and the P5+1, it will not be a treaty subject to Senate ratification. Schumer's support for this anti-Iran deal breaker could prove decisive in a Senate bid to override Obama's certain veto.

The liberal activist community has already mobilised in support of Obama. Does the Congressional Black Caucus have the courage to lead this battle in battling for America's first black president on this legacy issue and, in the process, turn it into a policy challenge to Netanyahu and the Israel lobby on the issue of Palestine? A visible black intervention would heighten contradictions for Democrats looking to jump on the Netanyahu-Republican bandwagon. If Schumer and other Democrats join Republicans in a bid to undermine Obama's Iran policy, thereby isolating the USA internationally, the Caucus must devise a counter strategy that not only publically supports an Iran nuclear deal but goes beyond to:

- Call on the USA to support a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East; and
- Prevail upon Israel, as a nuclear weapons' state, to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as Iran has done.

As a corollary to an Iran deal aimed at promoting peace in the Middle East, the Obama administration should more closely align its policy on Israel with that of its European allies, some of whose parliaments are recognising Palestinian statehood. In that vein, since Netanyahu has tried to 'walk back' his statement that there would never be a two-state solution as long as he is prime minister, the Obama administration must:

- Require Tel Aviv to make good on this by ceasing all settlement building and expansion in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, failing which the USA will refrain from using its UN Security Council veto to shield Israel from criticism; and
- Support a French UN Security Council resolution laying out the terms and parameters of a two-state solution based on 1967 borders, Jerusalem as the shared capital of Israel and a Palestinian state and a just solution for Palestinian refugees.

Meanwhile, the Congressional Black Caucus should elevate its support for Palestinian statehood to be on par with its anti-apartheid South African solidarity campaign. It should:

- Support the international Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel's illegal occupation of the West Bank and settler expansionism;
- Initiate exchange visits with Joint List members of the Israeli Knesset, and act as a bridge between Arab Knesset members and US Congress members;
- Partner with Iranian-Americans, Palestinians and other progressive stakeholders in convening a congressional conference on an alternative US Middle East policy; and
- Mobilise black communities, institutions and organisations as well as university student constituencies in support of

these positions.

African Americans have largely been invisible in the debate over Obama's foreign (and domestic) policy and national security strategy. Yet there is a close interrelationship between a transformative foreign policy and the domestic agenda Obama has tried, with difficulty, to advance in shaping his legacy over implacable Republican and rightwing reactionary resistance. Black America has a stake in helping Obama advance a progressive agenda on Iran and the Palestinians, issues which provide the Caucus with an opportunity to enhance its relevance.

Source: <http://www.amec.org.za/articles-presentations/151-israel/495-obama-between-israel-iran-and-the-palestinians-where-is-black-america>

## 1.9. OBAMA TO REMOVE CUBA FROM LIST OF STATE SPONSORS OF TERRORISM

17 April 2015

The Guardian.com

White House says Obama has submitted required certifications to Congress indicating his intent to take Cuba off list, in latest move to normalise relations

Barack Obama will remove Cuba from a list of state sponsors of terrorism, the White House said on Tuesday, marking the president's biggest move yet towards the resumption of diplomatic ties with Havana.

The White House confirmed that Obama had notified Congress of his intention to remove Cuba from the list, reversing a designation that has been in place since 1982. The announcement came days after a historic meeting between Obama and Cuban president Raúl Castro on the sidelines of the Summit of the Americas in Panama, in the first formal talks between the two countries' leaders in more than 50 years.

In his letter to Congress, Obama wrote that the Cuban government "has not provided any support for international terrorism" in the past six months, and has "provided assurances that it will not support acts of international terrorism in the future".

White House press secretary Josh Earnest said the US would continue to have differences with the Cuban government, "but our concerns over a wide range of Cuba's policies and actions fall outside the criteria that is relevant to whether to rescind Cuba's designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism.

"That determination is based on the statutory standard - and the facts - and those facts have led the President to declare his intention to rescind Cuba's State Sponsor of Terrorism designation," Earnest said in a statement.

Cuba welcomed the move, adding that it "rejects and condemns" all acts of terrorism. A statement by Josefina Vidal, the Cuban foreign ministry's chief of US affairs, said: "The Cuban government recognized the fair decision made by the president of the United States to eliminate Cuba from a list that it never should have been included on, especially considering our country has been the victim of hundreds of acts of terrorism that have cost 3,478 lives and maimed 2,099 citizens."

Obama's decision was made after a State Department review of Cuba's presence on the terror list - one of several steps the president announced in December as part of his administration's new policy toward the island nation. The slow pace of the review had been one of several sticking points among Cuban diplomats, thus holding up diplomatic progress and the possibility of reopening embassies in Havana and Washington after a 50-year estrangement.

Cuba was placed on the list in 1982 for training and supporting communist rebels in Latin America and Africa, but the country has long since renounced direct military support for foreign militants and the US has not accused the island nation of actively supporting terrorism for years.

Recent State Department reports have criticised Cuba for offering safe haven to members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, Farc, and the Basque separatist group ETA. But Cuba has distanced itself from ETA, and is currently hosting peace talks between Farc and the Colombian government.

The only countries that will now remain on the US terror list are Iran, Sudan and Syria.

Cuba's removal from the list will also alleviate some of the economic sanctions on the island, thus opening up avenues to access US banking facilities that Cuban officials have said are necessary to reopen an embassy in Washington.

Ben Rhodes, the US deputy national security adviser, tweeted: "Put simply, POTUS is acting to remove Cuba from the State Sponsor of Terrorism list because Cuba is not a State Sponsor of Terrorism."

Secretary of state John Kerry said the department's review focused on whether Cuba provided any support for international terrorism over the past six months, and whether the US has received assurances from the Cuban government that it will not support future acts of international terrorism.

"Circumstances have changed since 1982 ... Our Hemisphere, and the world, look very different today than they did 33 years ago," Kerry said in a statement. "Our determination, pursuant to the facts, including corroborative assurances received from the Government of Cuba and the statutory standard, is that the time has come to rescind Cuba's designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism."

Lawmakers on Capitol Hill have 45 days to respond to Obama's action, but it is unlikely they will seek to block the president from taking Cuba off the list. The move does not end other commercial, economic and financial restrictions under the US embargo on Cuba, as only Congress has the authority to end the freeze.

Senior administration officials told reporters in a conference call Tuesday that they remain optimistic about opening an embassy in Cuba, but acknowledged that obstacles remain. "We're still not quite there yet," one official said.

Although Republicans have sharply criticized Obama's overtures to Cuba, polls show that nearly two-thirds of Americans support the re-establishing of ties. A broad majority of Americans are also in favour of lifting travel restrictions and ending the trade embargo, according to several surveys over the last few months.

Specialists on Latin America agreed that lifting the terror designation was a major step in the normalisation of relations between Washington and Havana.

Richard Feinberg, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution - and an architect of the first Summit of the Americas - said that the move was part of a process which would culminate in the re-opening of embassies in the two capitals. Feinberg added: "It also suggests that the White House now sees the opening to Cuba as a political winner."

Dr. Gregory Weeks, a Latin America expert who heads the political science department at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, said that removing Cuba from the list was "symbolically a demonstration that the two countries were moving beyond the Cold War."

"It's a common sense move given the changing realities of global terrorism -- that's just not something that Cuba's involved in," he said. "It was obviously also a major obstacle to normalization of relations. Cuba has not been a security threat to the United States for many years."

The news had not yet filtered out to the public in Havana, where the vast majority of people have little or not access to the Internet. But hopes in the Cuban capital had already been raised by Saturday's meeting between President Raul Castro and Barack Obama.

"The relationship is getting better. I think it will take more time, but in one or two years I feel improved ties will make a big difference in our lives," said fencing coach Eduardo Delgado, as he chatted with friends in a suburb of the city.

The groups of youngsters were quick to credit Obama for the improvement in relations. "He is very intelligent, a real source of hope," said 22-year-old legal student Dyron Hernandez. "Among Cubans, I think Obama is the most popular world leader right now."

That view was widely echoed. "Obama is the best US president of my lifetime," said 67-year-old Fria Nieve. "We must not expect too much because presidents alone do not make decisions, but we can hope for change once trade and travel picks up with a country that less than 100 miles away."

The benefits of the rapprochement are already apparent. Foreign tourist numbers this year are already at the level of the whole of 2014. In Havana, local say almost all the hotels were booked out for the Easter holiday.

Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/apr/14/obama-remove-cuba-list-state-sponsors-terrorism>

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