

CUBA STUDY GROUP

Our mission, beliefs and approach

OUR MISSION

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Our mission is to help facilitate peaceful change in Cuba leading to a free and open society, respect for human rights and the rule of law, a productive, market-based economy and the reunification of the Cuban nation.

WHO WE ARE

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Our group is made up of business and professional individuals with a deeply rooted love for Cuba and the Cuban people. We aim to put our collective experience in leadership skills, problem solving, and wealth creation at the service of the Cuban people. We aim to facilitate change, help empower individuals and promote civil society development.

The Cuba Study Group is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization. We seek not, nor receive, any personal gain or profit from any of our activities or projects.

We do not receive, nor accept, funding from any U.S. government source, or government-funded subcontractor.

OUR CORE BELIEFS

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Cuba's sovereignty

We believe that Cuba's sovereignty is inviolable and must be respected, but we also believe that sovereignty rests on free people freely choosing their own destiny.

One Cuban nation

We believe in one Cuban nation, diverse, but not divided, where all Cubans share equal rights and responsibilities regardless of their place of residence or political views. We promote a process of reunification for the Cuban nation and its diaspora.

Respect for human rights

We believe that human rights are intrinsic to humanity, and the fundamental role of the state is to guarantee these rights. We believe that human rights include economic rights and accept the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the fundamental basis upon which Cuba's future should be built. Cuba has become a signatory of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and we urge the Cuban government to ratify these commitments.

Civil society

We encourage the development of a strong, independent and diverse civil society. A strong civil society is the best guarantor of democratic values. Widespread citizen participation in national affairs through its civil society strengthens the nation and its institutions.

Cuba's civil society includes democracy advocates. We unequivocally support their right to participate in national affairs and we respect and value their diverse perspectives. We welcome policies and programs that encourage and promote civil society formation and strengthening, but reject policies and practices that do not respect its autonomy and independence.

Religious institutions

We believe in a fundamental separation of church and state, but appreciate the rich contribution of faith to our society's values and richness. All churches are fundamental pillars of a vibrant and strong civil society.

However, because of its history, depth and institutional capacity, we believe that the Cuban Catholic Church has played a crucial role in Cuba's delicate transitional process. The Catholic Church's unique position in Cuba's society, its ethics, doctrine and values, can help shape the dialogue about Cuba's future, as well as facilitating the spaces and processes whereby such dialogue can occur.

While we value our cooperation with the Cuban Catholic Church, we are not affiliated with any religious institution or denomination.

A nation divided needs reconciliation

Cuba's entire history since independence has been marred by political violence. Violence begets violence, and such vicious circles have characterized our political life. The Cuban revolution, while a response to then-prevailing injustices, itself engendered violence, deepened the political divide, and resulted in the nation's largest exodus.

Such deep divisions, historical rancor and polarized political convictions need to be accepted and recognized as our national reality, and call for a process of national healing and reconciliation. While Cuban families have already begun in earnest the process of reconciliation, there is much more that needs to happen in order to build an inclusive, just, free, and prosperous future for Cuba.

We view national reconciliation as both a process and a goal. We recognize its difficulties, but are convinced of its necessity.

Our process of reconciliation must be focused on Cuba's future, not its past. It must be based on generosity and fraternal love. It must recognize our collective pain and be cognizant that substantial differences may and do exist, but give way to building common ground around a future vision as its most important goal.

Reconciliation does not imply condoning acts of wrongdoing, but it is not motivated by vengeance. It seeks the search for truth and justice and does not require forgetting past wrongdoings. As building a different and better future based on the greatest common good becomes the foremost priority, the focus shifts from seeking retribution to issues of restorative justice.

We have watched how reconciliation has shaped multiple transitions around the world. We are encouraged that the examples provided by other nations can help guide the Cuban people towards processes of change that are non-violent and where national reconciliation can lead to a brighter and better future for our nation.

Principled dialogue to solve problems

Change will come to Cuba when all sides in the conflict cease viewing it as a conflict to be won, and instead begin to view it as a problem to be solved.

Reconciliation is the process that can take us to a different and better future, but there can be no reconciliation without a process of dialogue.

This is why we at the Cuba Study Group encourage and promote dialogue as the process needed to reunify the Cuban nation and to focus on building the future. We recognize that dialogue requires mutual respect and the absence of preconditions. Engaging in dialogue does not imply a relinquishment of principles and beliefs. On the contrary, it is an opportunity to share those principles and beliefs with those with whom we may differ.

In all opportunities for engagement we will not shy away from being critical of human rights abuses or the need for political or more substantive economic reforms. We believe in a principled dialogue in which our desire for genuine reconciliation is guided by our moral convictions and desire for a better life for all Cubans.

We do not believe that there is only one process of dialogue, or that such processes can or should be sequenced, but that they occur on parallel tracks at multiple levels, at different times, eventually becoming more expansive and inclusive. Thus we encourage and support such processes whenever they may happen.

Transition and transformation

We believe that there exists a large consensus that Cuba needs to change, and do so urgently. Cuba faces enormous problems and difficulties and our people have endured many hardships and sacrifices. Such processes of change harbor significant risks, not the least consists of intrusion by criminal elements from abroad. Additionally, such changes can be disproportionately burdensome to the poorest and weakest in a society.

In order to change, Cuba needs to transform into a different political and economic order. We recognize that such processes are micro-processes whereby numerous changes occur at multiple levels at varying times. Thus, transformations become the cumulative

sum of numerous changes and reforms enacted over time in the three fundamental spheres of economic, political, and social changes. All changes and reforms that form part of the necessary ultimate transformation should be welcomed and encouraged.

There is no sequence to the numerous democratic transitions that have taken place. Such processes have occurred in incredibly diverse manners and sequences. Attempting to micromanage such transitional processes, or to impose the rigidity of a sequence, is at best a useless and illusory exercise. At worse, such attempts could actually delay or damage the process.

The only common elements that seem to correlate positively with a transition's effectiveness appear to be the following:

1. The absence of violence;
2. Improved economic conditions and higher incomes;
3. The degree of engagement (or absence of isolation) from open societies.

Thus, the mission of our group is to facilitate the processes of change that Cuba sorely needs as peacefulness does not just happen by accident, it must be sought and procured.

Our aim is not to make an already-difficult process more difficult or complicated. On the contrary, the easier we make the transitional processes, the faster the necessary transformation will take place and at the lowest societal cost.

Economic engagement

A nation with a weak and inefficient economy can hardly be considered sovereign. Similarly, a society where individuals lack the ability to create wealth cannot be considered a free one. Economic rights are a fundamental component of human rights.

Economic resources are also a necessary prerequisite to the development of a civil society, as there cannot exist a civil society without economic resources. Thus we believe that reforms in Cuba's system that result in greater economic wellbeing and increased economic independence for Cubans are fundamental elements of their inherent freedoms, and should be encouraged and supported.

We believe in the constructive power of markets to effectively allocate resources, create jobs and reduce poverty. Markets flourish when individuals can unleash their creative potential in a society. However, while we believe that for those societal problems that have a market solution, markets provide the best solutions, we also recognize that markets do not provide solutions for every problem or challenge that a society faces. We also believe that markets should not function in a manner devoid of societal values, such as ethics, compassion and solidarity.

Naturally, we regret the slow and tortuous pace of Cuba's economic reforms, and believe that their impact on improving Cuba's economy will be severely curtailed by their slow pace and timid nature. While history has largely discredited shock-therapy economic reforms, it has likewise proven the ineffectiveness of trickle-down timid and inadequate reforms. Increasing the pace, breadth and depth of economic reforms is necessary to avert the worsening of an already-ailing economy.

Thus, we believe that in order to truly implement the warranted changes in Cuba's economy, more forceful, decisive and substantive changes need to be made by Cuba's government. However, we also believe that needed macroeconomic changes require external conditions, such as access to international monetary institutions, which are not currently permitted by U.S. sanctions, even though they impose stringent requirements and reforms on borrowers. Ironically, such sanctions, originally intended to cause Cuba to change, are now becoming its major impediment to change.

Accordingly, we have no objections with those who engage in lawful trade or investment in Cuba. On the contrary, that activity, if ethically conducted, is helpful for the Cuban people. However, that is not the mission or objective of the Group and its members, since we do not seek financial gain in this process. Rather, our focus is on facilitating change in Cuba, by supporting civil society and providing Cubans with the tools and resources to succeed as entrepreneurs.

The diaspora

The Cuban diaspora is a legitimate and intrinsic part of the Cuban nation, and is thus called to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. For much too long we have confused the nation with its rulers, and its system with the nation and its people. As stated earlier, we believe in one Cuban nation.

As part of our national conflict, many in the diaspora have focused heavily on hurting the Cuban government while inflicting collateral damage on the people. Ethics and historical effectiveness call to shift our focus to help and empower the Cuban people even if it provides a collateral benefit to the Cuban government. In a nutshell, it is all about the people.

The Cuban diaspora, heavily concentrated in the South Florida exile community, should take advantage of its environment to truly promote a “free marketplace” of ideas about Cuba’s future. The Cuba Study Group is deeply committed to respecting different points of view, and we believe that such diversity enriches us.

However, we regret those among us who constantly divide, project our own divisions to Cuba’s democracy advocates, insult and offend those who differ from their points of view. We believe in tolerance and respect, because no one has a monopoly on truth.

Additionally, we believe that the Cuban diaspora represents an important asset in both experience and resources that could help empower Cubans on the island to start and expand their private businesses.

U.S. policy

For all the reasons stated above, we believe that U.S. policy towards Cuba is counterproductive and warrants change. Policies of isolation and sanctions have rarely brought about transitional changes, and disproportionately hurt the Cuban people over the government it intends to compel to change.

U.S. policy is widely seen around the world as violating Cuba’s sovereignty, thus providing the Cuban government with an unwarranted source of legitimacy, preventing a more multilateral approach to dealing with Cuba’s challenges and providing an easy scapegoat for Cuba’s failed economic system.

Economic sanctions by the U.S. could actually have the unintended effect of delaying changes in a Cuba undergoing important reforms by denying access to the world’s financial institutions, and their advice and resources necessary to support major macroeconomic reforms.

Policies of isolation, such as travel restrictions, hurt families and ordinary Cubans, and deter the necessary processes of reconciliation and family reunification that must take place on an individual and family basis. People are the best carriers of ideas, values, and information that help to better inform and share ideas across borders and oceans. Isolation is not just unethical but counterproductive to effective change.

We at the Cuba Study Group reject policies that limit and restrict travel to and from Cuba.

OUR APPROACH

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We carry out our mission by pursuing the following:

- » Promoting reconciliation and national reunification.
- » Facilitating and promoting the development of Cuba’s civil society at all levels.
- » Advocating for constructive policies that focus on helping the Cuban people be the protagonists of their own future, remove obstacles to change, promote engagement over isolation, facilitate peaceful change, and promote processes of reconciliation among all Cubans.
- » Facilitate the debate of ideas about Cuba’s present and future.
- » Aim at facilitating change by bridge-building and reaching out to those with whom we differ, seeking a better understanding and mutual respect.