

Cuba sanctions likely to ease

The election of Barack Obama opens the door for the U.S. to relax sanctions against Cuba for the first time in more than a decade, commented The Wall Street Journal on November 7, 2008.

Mr. Obama, in a May campaign speech in Miami, went where presidential candidates have long feared to go by promising to lift restrictions on family visits and remittances by Cuban-Americans seeking to help relatives on the island.

Mr. Obama is likely to roll back sanctions put in place by President George W. Bush in 2004 and 2005, advisers say. Those moves restricted Cuban-Americans from visiting family on the island more than once every three years, and narrowed the list of family members to whom they can send remittances.

On Wednesday November 6, 2008 Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva called on the president-elect to lift the nearly 50-year-old trade embargo entirely. That is more difficult to do because the embargo is codified in federal law. Mr. Obama has signaled that he would move toward normalizing relations if the Cuban government improves human-rights record.

There is a generational division among Cuban-Americans. Many older people born in Cuba who came in the 1960s as political refugees in the early years of Fidel Castro's rule support keeping sanctions. Their American-born children, as well as refugees who came more recently for economic reasons, are more likely to support easing of sanctions.

Mr. Obama won 35% of the Cuban-American vote in Florida, surpassing the previous high-water mark for Democratic candidates of 30% set by Bill Clinton in 1992, according to an exit poll conducted in Miami-Dade County by Bendixen & Associates, an opinion research firm. Among voters ages 18 to 29 years old, he won 55%, while Sen. John McCain carried 75% of those 60 and older.

Dario Moreno, a political-science professor at Florida International University and director of the Metropolitan Center says his institute conducted exit polls showing that Cuban-Americans younger than 44 supported Mr. Obama by 49% to 46%. That figure "is the first sign of a shift in the Cuban-American electorate that I've seen," he said.

Source: The Wall Street Journal

Powerful Paloma roars ashore in Cuba, then weakens

November 10th, 2008 - CAMAGUEY, Cuba -- Hurricane Paloma demolished hundreds of homes along Cuba's southern coast before rapidly losing steam over land Sunday, weakening from a dangerous Category 4 storm into a tropical depression in less than a day.

Crashing surf and a powerful sea surge sent waves almost a mile (1 1/2 kilometers) inland Saturday night. More than 10-foot-high (3-meter-high) waves washed away nearly all traces of about 50 modest houses in Santa Cruz del Sur. Civil Defense authorities said altogether 435 homes in the community were destroyed.

Authorities said the late-season storm toppled a major communications tower, interrupted electricity and phone service, but no storm-related deaths were reported.

Cuba had feared that Paloma could cripple its recovery from Gustav and Ike, hurricanes that struck this summer, destroying nearly a third of the island's crops.

Near Santa Cruz del Sur, flooding submerged homes up to their flimsy metal roofs and washed out banana crops and other farmland, though there were no official estimates on the immediate effects to the national food reserves.

Cuba balked at U.S. offers of humanitarian aid after Gustav and Ike and Machado Ventura said the country would take the same position if Washington pledged more help after Paloma.

Across central and eastern Cuba, 1.2 million people were evacuated. About one-fifth of those were taken to shelters in schools and government buildings, but most spent the night with neighbors or relatives whose homes authorities deemed able to withstand the hurricane.

Source: Miami Herald

Cuba after hurricanes Gustav and Ike

The Czech NGO People in Need has written a report on situation in Cuba in respect of the hurricanes Gustav and Ike which swept over Cuba in late August and early September. The report was written based on the information from travelers who recently went to Cuba primarily to work with independent journalists and to provide aid for the families of political prisoners.

According to the Reliefweb.int hurricanes Gustav and Ike caused an estimated total of US\$ 5 billion in damages, 7 deaths and over 440 000 damaged houses out of which over 63 000 were totally destroyed.

The report suggests that Cuban government is failing to provide disaster relief while refuse international assistance.

Cuba has received 230 offers of aid from 63 countries by the end of September. However, many of these offers were either not accepted or are still under consideration.

From the European countries, Cuba only accepted aid offers from Spain and Belgium, but has recently accepted the EU Commission's offer of US\$ 2.6 million in immediate hurricane recovery aid and up to US\$ 38.8 million more in financing next year. However, the Czech Republic offer of 100 000 € was refused outright and other offers, such as those of the Slovak Republic, Germany, Poland, Netherlands and Sweden, have not been told definitively whether or not they will be accepted. Other EU countries, like Finland, United Kingdom and Portugal have chosen to donate assistance through organizations like the Red Cross or Caritas.

The full report in English is available also [here](#).

Source: People in Need