

President Barack Obama

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

October 24, 2013

Dear President Obama,

We implore you to end the embargo of Cuba. It accomplishes nothing worthwhile, and is a humanitarian catastrophe for the Cuban people.

We are not a political party, or an organization; nor do we even have a shared social agenda. We are simply doctors who met in mid-September at the “DevelopingEM” medical conference in Havana, in order to share our clinical knowledge & experiences in emergency and critical care medicine. This letter stems from a resolution passed by the participants at the conference.

Approximately 185 doctors came to the conference from 18 countries, including the United States, Cuba, Australasia, Europe, and throughout the Caribbean. We heard talks by presenters from the US and other nations on clinical aspects of emergency care, as well as on related aspects of public health. One of the latter talks, given by Mr. Jorge Soberon, from the Cuban Health Ministry, addressed the impact of the US embargo on both health and healthcare in Cuba, and was extremely sobering. The following facts were presented:

- The embargo, currently in its 55th year, severely limits Cuba’s ability to import medicines, medical equipment and new technologies, including some that are essential for treating life-threatening diseases and maintaining public health programs that are important for ordinary Cubans.
- The embargo has prevented Cuba from purchasing, among other things, medicines to treat childhood leukemia, and enteric formula for children in danger of dying from treatable diarrheal diseases.
- In addition to blocking direct purchases from U.S. companies, the embargo prohibits foreign companies from doing business with the U.S. if they also trade with Cuba. The Office of Foreign Assets of the U.S. Treasury Department stopped Cuba from receiving \$4 million worth of drugs from France to combat AIDS and tuberculosis. Fines for doing business with Cuba have doubled under your administration compared to that of your predecessor, George W. Bush.

We believe that political considerations should not supersede the health needs of several million ordinary human beings. We are sure you know that many prominent individuals, including from the US, have expressed concern that the embargo violates both moral standards and international law (and even adversely impacts American business). By continuing to enforce this policy not only would you be counter to the expressed belief of the international community, but also of the

majority of the American people (62% in one poll). You would also be abetting what continues to be a humanitarian catastrophe for the people of Cuba.

The embargo simply makes no sense. Flora Roca, a Cuban psychiatrist suggested that “the U.S. thinks the embargo will make Cubans rise up against the Cuban government, but it doesn’t work that way.” Fifty-five years have proven as much. What the embargo does cause is immense suffering, to people we claim to want to help. What value is there in denying medicine to a child with leukemia?

As physician specialists in emergency medicine, we may be fortunate enough in our careers to have a positive impact on our communities, helping to ease suffering and occasionally even saving a life. By ending this senseless embargo against Cuba you would ease the suffering of millions of people, and save thousands of lives. In 2009 you were awarded The Nobel Prize for Peace for your "*extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples.*" Please extend this effort to include the people of Cuba. We call upon you please to put an end to this senseless and inhumane embargo.

Sincerely,

S. Lee Fineberg, MD, FACEP, FACEM



Mark A. Newcombe BMed, FACEM



Jerome R. Hoffman, MA, MD, FACEP

Faculty & Delegates of DevelopingEM 2013 – Havana, Cuba
569 Lawrence Hargrave Drive
Wombarra, NSW 2515
Australia
e-mail: developingEM@gmail.com