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Obama should follow UN lead on Cuba embargo

Barack Obama should follow the lead of the UN General Assembly and take all necessary steps to end its economic embargo against Cuba, said Amnesty International today after the UN body condemned US sanctions against the island.

Amnesty International believes the embargo is particularly affecting Cubans' access to medicines and medical technologies, putting lives at risk.

In a record vote, 187 countries said the US should end its embargo against Cuba. The US, Israel and Palau voted against the resolution. Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands abstained. It is the 18th consecutive year the UN passes such a resolution and the first under President Obama.

“The US embargo against Cuba is putting at risk the lives of millions by preventing them from accessing vital medicines and medical technologies,” said Kerrie Howard, Americas Deputy Director at Amnesty International. “These sanctions are immoral and should be lifted immediately.”

Because of the US embargo, Cuba faces severe restrictions in importing medicines, medical equipment or technologies from the USA or from any US company abroad. The sanctions also limit other imports to the island and restrict travel and the transfer of money.

According to data from the United Nations, Cuba's inability to import nutritional products for consumption at schools, hospitals and day care centres, is contributing to a high prevalence of iron deficiency anaemia. UNICEF reported that in 2007, 37.5 per cent of Cuba's children under three years old had anaemia.

Children's health was also put at risk by a decision from US syringe suppliers to cancel an order of three million disposable syringes made in 2007 by UNICEF's Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization when it became known that the units were destined for the implementation of a programme in Cuba.

For more information, please see: “The US embargo against Cuba: Its impact on economic and social rights”:
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR25/007/2009/en>

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