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USA: President Obama should take the lead on lifting embargo against Cuba

President Barack Obama should take the first step towards dismantling the US embargo against Cuba by not renewing sanctions against the island under the Trading with the Enemy Act, Amnesty International said today as the 14 September deadline for the renewal of sanctions under the Act approaches.

Amnesty International's call is part of a report being published today which looks at the impact of the US economic embargo against Cuba. The report *The US embargo against Cuba: Its impact on economic and social rights* concludes that the sanctions, imposed by the USA since 1962, are particularly affecting Cubans' access to medicines and medical technologies and endangering the health of millions.

"This is the perfect opportunity for President Obama to distance himself from the failed policies of the past and to send a strong message to the US Congress on the need to end the embargo," said Irene Khan, Secretary General at Amnesty International.

"The US embargo against Cuba is immoral and should be lifted," said Irene Khan. "It's preventing millions of Cubans from benefiting from vital medicines and medical equipment essential for their health."

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.

Products patented in the USA or containing more than 20 percent US-manufactured parts or components cannot be exported to Cuba, even if they are produced in third countries.

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. According to UNICEF, in 2007 that affected 37.5 per cent of Cuba's children under three years old.

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.

Similar situations have affected the implementation of UN programmes to prevent and fight HIV/AIDS on the island.

"Although responsibility for providing adequate health care lies primarily with the Cuban authorities, governments imposing sanctions such as embargoes need to pay special attention to the impact they can have

on the targeted country's population," said Irene Khan.

Amnesty International also calls on members of US Congress to repeal the legislation defining the embargo.

Background Information

New legislation from 2000 attempted to loosen the embargo and facilitate exports to Cuba but exports of medicine continue to be restricted by "on-site inspections approved by the President" of the USA to determine the end purpose of the medicines and materials to be exported. In 2008, Cuba imported from the USA US\$ 710 million of food and agricultural products and only US\$ 1.2 million of medical equipment and pharmaceutical products. Imports into the USA from Cuba are totally prohibited.

A copy of the report "The US embargo against Cuba: Its impact on economic and social rights", is available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR25/007/2009/en>

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