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ECLAC hails thaw in US-Cuba relations

Thursday, December 25 2014

THE following is a statement delivered by Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Executive Secretary Alicia Barcena on last Wednesday's historic announcement by United States President Barack Obama of plans to restore diplomatic relations between the US and Cuba. The statement was issued last Friday:

We have witnessed with enormous optimism the unveiling of good tidings. Signals that we had hoped to see for so long, gestures that reveal a shared will to use regional integration—through dialogue, collaboration and mutual respect—as the basis for a new relationship between Cuba and the United States, which is formally bilateral but impacts our entire region. At the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) we value this historic step as a welcome shift after more than half a century of ruptured diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States of America. This announcement mirrors the unanimous and insistent call by our continent for the anachronistic limits imposed on Cuba to be lifted.

As President Obama said, "We are all Americans." The nations of our hemisphere are united by increasingly deep familial, cultural, geographic and economic ties.

Latin America and the Caribbean today is a region with its own voice, which embraces with respect its diversity and political plurality, persists in its efforts to close the painful social gaps that characterise it, attempts to overcome its legacy of inequality, and demands its own place in the concert of nations.

A path has been forged that we hope will soon lead to the end of the economic, trade and financial embargo imposed on Cuba, a stance that was supported by 188 countries at the United Nations General Assembly in October. ECLAC calls for continued work to dismantle this embargo that has done so much damage to the Cuban people and contaminated relations between the United States and Latin America.

We value the US government's new disposition, its will to constructively approach a different relationship with Cuba and also with Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole, a region that has its own face and voice, that tries to overcome the weight of inequality via original means and that demands cooperation, not tutelage.

In light of the challenges facing the region and the world, the new status of ties between Cuba and the United States — stripped of unyielding antagonism — not only allows the hemisphere to close the door on the vestiges of the Cold War, but also enables it to better approach strategic efforts on matters of shared interest, such as the global fight against the Ebola epidemic, which has prompted the heroic deployment of Cuban health workers and North American military officials who are working together in the trenches. ECLAC, which has an active collaborative agenda with Cuba, views the announcements made on Wednesday as a positive omen. We know firsthand the impediment that these unilaterally imposed restrictions have meant for Cuban development. We also know about the enormous potential for Cuba that can be unlocked as it resumes normal trade with the world, because of the quality and education of its people, its strategic geographic location and its efforts to update its economic model.

ECLAC, as a United Nations organisation, reiterates its willingness to continue working with Cuba with renewed energy at this auspicious time.

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