

May 5, 2021

The Honorable Joe Biden and Kamala Harris
President and Vice President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden and Vice President Harris:

We are leaders and activists from a diverse set of organizations representing farmers, agroecologists, environmentalists, academics, civil society and climate justice movements. Our work is at the intersection of agrifood sustainability and climate justice, themes that are increasingly central to the debates about how to address climate change. We applaud your administration's commitment to placing climate change at the center of both domestic and foreign policy, and your recognition of the multiple intersecting issues common to climate change, health, food, agriculture and human rights and justice issues. Your decisions to rejoin the Paris Agreement, the recent BIPOC farmer relief package, and the newly established White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council are each welcome and critical actions.

Today we write to urge you to address the issue of **US-Cuba relations** and to do so through a similarly intersectional perspective. Recently your White House spokesperson said that *“human rights will be a core pillar of US policy”* towards Cuba. **Food, agriculture and the climate crisis all qualify as human rights issues.** Therefore, a policy position guided by human rights needs to address how US sanctions towards Cuba severely limit the rights of Cuban citizens to food security, climate justice and dignity.

We, the undersigned organizations, urge you and your administration to move quickly and comprehensively to make good on your campaign promise “to reverse the failed Trump policies that inflicted harm on Cubans and their families”. The four key policy recommendations outlined below can be made swiftly, and are necessary to address the global climate crisis.

- 1. Take executive action that returns the regulations governing trade and travel to Cuba to their status as of January 20th, 2017.** Through this executive action several restrictions imposed by the previous administration could be undone, including removing Cuba from the State Sponsor of Terrorism List and restoring the waiver on Title III of the Helms-Burton Act. These measures would benefit both the United States and the Cuban people. In addition, these changes would allow US NGOs, universities and other organizations to more easily carry out important collaboration and cooperation under general license provisions, many of which are currently stalled. In recent years new learning alliances, exchanges and concrete projects have been established between civil society organizations in both countries with the objective of mutually learning, researching, building capacity and in some cases providing financial and material support to advance food security, sustainability and climate resilience. Cuba has developed forward-looking, integrated policies and practices for climate mitigation-adaptation, increased resilience of socio-ecological systems, and “re-localized” food systems governance and economies. However, current sanctions severely limit implementation of these policies

and practices and in turn impacts Cuba's right to food. Furthermore, by isolating them we are isolating ourselves from the opportunity to mutually learn and solve these urgent crises.

- 2. Immediately end the application of any sanctions and restrictions against food, medicine and other humanitarian assistance and international cooperation to Cuba, including restrictions on financial and banking transactions.** It is an affront to the human rights of Cuban citizens and at odds with our values as US citizens that the US blocked the arrival of humanitarian assistance to Cuba during a global pandemic. Some of the severe material scarcities in Cuba are a direct result of US sanctions, and especially of the tightened restrictions imposed by the previous administration. These sanctions have resulted in critical impacts on human rights and ending them will go a long way to improving the lives of Cuban citizens. Any action must include lifting prohibitions on allowances of credit for the purchase of food. Since July 2020, significant economic reforms in Cuba have opened new opportunities for engagement with the non-state sector. This includes more flexibility for non-state actors to import and export, which could mean new opportunities for international cooperation to support what Cuba is already doing well towards building climate resilience. It is an opportunity for a US engagement based on fair, rights-based approaches whereby trade agreements and cooperation do not undermine local economies or ecologies on either side.
- 3. Restore a fully functioning US embassy and consular services in Cuba and re-launch the bilateral working groups.** Environmental, civil society and scientific cooperation depends not just on US citizens traveling to Cuba, but on the ability of Cuban scientists, experts and farmers to travel to the United States to share their important work at conferences and workshops and to participate in working meetings. Resuming consular services will allow for these important exchanges to occur. Fully staffing the embassy will also facilitate a re-invigoration of the several existing bilateral agreements on environment, climate and agriculture issues and the related bilateral working groups, which were established under the Obama Administration and which formally remain in force. These include two MOUs signed between the USDA and the Cuban Ministry of Agriculture. The bilateral working groups brought important progress on key issues and are a means to build bridges between technical experts and government officials on issues of mutual interest. Those focused on climate change and agriculture should be in close consultation with those of us in the NGO and academic sector who have been engaging with Cuba for a long time and who work closely with counterparts in Cuba from civil society and the growing non state sector (including farmers, cooperatives and restaurant owners) who play an essential role in building sustainable and climate resilient local economies.
- 4. For a truly bold action, we urge you to explore how to use your executive authority to its maximum extent, by not renewing the annual determination to impose sanctions under the Trading with the Enemy Act, thereby putting an end to all the existing sanctions contained in the Cuban Asset Control Regulations.**

Draconian sanctions against Cuba have always been counterproductive. This is even more evident now. We are facing a moment when ideology and politics must be put aside in order to urgently come together as a unified global community to confront the common global threats of COVID-19 and the climate crisis. We can only do this together through coordination, cooperation and

solidarity. We must share lessons learned and mistakes made in order to move forward together. The US has much to share, but much to learn as well. Cuba has so much to contribute to the fight domestically and internationally and should not be hindered by the cruel and inhumane effects of a decades long embargo. Instituting the above recommendations are a first step towards realizing a new type of trade relationship with a neighboring nation state. It would be a bold human-nature-rights centered approach to trade and bilateral relations that responds to the need to repair our relationship with each other and with the ecosystems that sustain our economies and societies.

We commit ourselves to support you in these actions, and to educate and encourage Members of Congress to support U.S. engagement with Cuba and bring an end to the embargo.

Respectfully,

ActionAid USA
Washington, DC

Agroecology and Livelihoods Collaborative
Burlington, VT

Agroecology Commons
Oakland, CA

Agroecology Research-Action Collective
Multiple Locations

Bear Swamp Farm
Wolcott, VT

Black Belt Justice Center
Washington, DC

Caribbean Agroecology Institute/Cuba-US Agroecology Network
Burlington, VT

Central Florida Jobs with Justice
Orlando, FL

Centro Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Agroecológicas (CELIA)
Berkeley, CA
Code Pink
Washington, DC

Community Agroecology Network
Santa Cruz, CA

Cornell Cooperative Extension
New York, NY

Essex Farm
Essex, NY

Glynwood Center for Food and Farming
Cold Spring, NY

Family Farm Defenders
Madison, WI

Grassroots Global Justice Alliance
Washington, DC

HEAL (Health, Environment, Agriculture, Labor) Food Alliance
Oakland, CA

High Meadows Farm
Putney, VT

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Minneapolis, MN

Ironbound Community Corporation
Newark, NJ

Los Jardines Institute
Albuquerque, NM

Naima Farms
St Paul, MN

Naked Acre Farm
Hyde Park, VT

National Family Farm Coalition
Washington, DC

National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association
Washington, DC

New School Tishman Environment and Design Center Environmental Justice Fellowship
Newark, NJ

Northeast Organic Farming Association-Vermont
Richmond, VT

Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance
Gloucester, MA

Oxfam America
Boston, MA

Pesticide Action Network North America
Berkeley, CA

Platform for Innovation and Dialogue with Cuba
Washington, DC

Soul Fire Farm Institute
Petersberg, NY

Southeastern African American Farmers Organic Network (SAAFON)
Durham, NC

Sowing Peace Farm
Putney, VT

t.e.j.a.s. Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services
Houston, TX

Union of Concerned Scientists
Washington, DC

United Today, Stronger Tomorrow
Oakland, CA