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## UN assembly calls for end to US embargo on Cuba

(AFP) – 15 hours ago

UNITED NATIONS — The UN General Assembly overwhelmingly voted Tuesday for a resolution calling on the United States to end its five-decade old embargo of Cuba.

The 19th straight annual condemnation of the embargo was supported by 187 countries, with only the United States and Israel against and three smaller US allies abstaining.

The embargo was first partially imposed in 1960, just after Fidel Castro staged his revolution, turned into law in 1962 and is now the biggest remaining hangover from the Cold War. The United States bans trade with and most travel to Cuba.

US President Barack Obama last year called for a "new beginning" with communist Cuba. But the island's Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez told the UN assembly the blockade has been "tightened" this year and that the US government did not want to end the measures.

"There is not even a sign showing that its government is willing to dismantle the most irrational aspects of what is already the most comprehensive and long-lasting set of sanctions and coercive measures ever applied against any country," he added.

"Its everyday impact continues to be visible in all aspects of Cuban life," the minister said, listing medicines that Cuban children get no access to, which Havana claims is due to the sanctions.

Rodriguez estimated that the blockade had cost Cuba more than 750 billion dollars at current values. He called the blockade "an act of economic warfare and genocide."

Washington wants "a pro-Yankee government but that is not going to happen."

Ron Godard, a US mission representative, called the annual motion "rhetorical posturing" and condemned what he called "the egregious misuse" of the term genocide.

The US official also highlighted some of the changes made since Obama took power.

He said the United States sold 526 million dollars in agricultural products to Cuba in 2009 and a few million dollars in medical devices and medicine. It had ended restrictions on family visits and expanded the amounts of humanitarian items that Americans can send to Cuba.

The US administration has renewed the embargo while welcoming Cuba's release of more than 40 political prisoners since July and signs that more will be follow.

"It is the view of the United States that a new era in US-Cuban relations cannot be fully realized until the Cuban people enjoy the internationally-recognized political and economic freedoms that this body has done so much to defend in other countries around the world," he said.

European Union nations and other US allies all voted for the motion.

"We cannot accept that unilaterally imposed measures impede our economic and commercial relations with Cuba," said Belgium's ambassador to the UN, Jan Grauls, speaking for the European Union.

Latin American countries -- whether friends or foes of the United States -- all rallied around Cuba. Nicaragua's representative called the US measures "the most heinous blockade in the history of mankind."

There are signs of growing support in the United States, even among some conservative voices, for at least an easing of the blockade.

"The embargo had a national security rationale before 1991, when Castro served as the Soviet Union's proxy in the Western Hemisphere. But all that changed with the fall of Soviet communism," said a report by the conservative Cato Institute think tank in Washington released this month.

It called Cuba "a poor and dysfunctional nation of 11 million that poses no threat to American or regional security" and said the US sanctions had "completely failed" to change politics in the country.

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