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**Solidarity with Cuba**  
**Speech by TUC General Secretary**  
**5 June 2010**

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## **Cuba: UK, EU and US policy must change**

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber set out why UK, EU and US policy towards Cuba must change, when he spoke to the Cuba Solidarity Campaign AGM on 5 June 2010. Here is the text of his speech.

It's a pleasure to bring greetings and solidarity from the TUC, and to restate the close bonds between the British and Cuban trade union movements.

We have a unique and enduring relationship; and it has certainly grown stronger over the past year or so.

I was proud that CTC General Secretary Salvador Valdes Mesa travelled to Liverpool in September to address the TUC Congress.

His speech received a standing ovation – which I have to tell you is a much better response than I usually get.

And I was also very proud to make my first visit to Cuba just over a year ago, to take part in the May Day celebrations and to mark the 50th anniversary of the revolution and the 70th anniversary of the CTC.

For me, there were many highlights.

Addressing a huge international solidarity conference, which underlined both the depth and breadth of support for the Cuban revolution.

Visiting a special needs school and the Latin America Medical School, which brought home Cuba's overwhelming commitment to social justice at home and abroad.

And – most movingly – meeting the wives and mothers of the Miami Five, which reminded me of the human cost of American intransigence.

I'm delighted that we have Adriana and Olga here with us today, and let us assure them that none of us will rest until this terrible injustice is overturned and they are reunited with their husbands.

Adriana, Olga: you can count on our support and our solidarity.

For our part, let me assure you that the TUC will continue to work closely with the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, Unite and colleagues in the American trade union movement to seek justice for the Miami Five.

And more broadly, the TUC will continue to campaign for a more progressive approach to Cuba – from the British government, from the EU, and yes, from the Obama administration too.

First, we want to encourage the new Liberal-Tory coalition government to send ministers to Cuba.

Now I know you'll be thinking "what have the Cuban people done to deserve that", but regardless of who is in power in this country, I think the case for political engagement is unanswerable.

I know William Hague has visited Cuba in the past, so this is not necessarily just wishful thinking on our behalf.

Second, we want to see a fundamental change of approach at EU level.

The TUC is currently seeking a meeting with the EU's foreign policy chief Baroness Ashton, and we want to see Europe develop an independent, forward-looking policy towards Cuba.

Rather than acquiescence with Washington, we need a much more positive engagement – not just on trade, but around cultural, educational and scientific contact too.

And third, we want to see the Obama administration signal a decisive break from the failed policies of the past.

In particular, we want to see an end to the destructive, vindictive US blockade of Cuba, with American policy finally reflecting the will of the United Nations.

I hope the President finds the courage to do the right thing and reverse this brutal and unnecessary embargo.

Let us be clear about this: as a sovereign nation, Cuba has every right to determine its own economic and political future and so be free to fulfil its true potential.

Colleagues, despite the blockade, despite the odds being stacked against it, Cuba has achieved so much.

It has delivered levels of literacy and numeracy that would shame most richer nations.

It has provided high-quality healthcare for all its people, which of course is more than can be said for its neighbour 90 miles to the north.

And it has offered a beacon of hope for the poor and the dispossessed right across the world.

For Cuba, internationalism is not just a fashionable slogan; it is a living, breathing reality.

That's why Cuba has always provided aid and support to the world's poorest nations.

And that's why Cuba has always offered medical assistance to those most in need.

Let's remember that when tragedy struck Haiti earlier in the year, Cuban doctors were among the first on the scene – saving lives, preventing the spread of disease, making a difference in the most trying of circumstances.

But Cuba's unique contribution goes far beyond the outstanding medical support it routinely offers, because the country has always been at the forefront of the struggle for global justice, freedom and liberation.

Let me read you a quote: "If it was not for Cuba, I would not be a free man today. If it was not for Cuba, apartheid would never have been defeated".

The words, of course, of Nelson Mandela.

As South Africa gears up for the World Cup – something unthinkable just a generation ago – let us remember how Cuba has enriched the lives of ordinary working people the world over.

And as we reflect on Cuba's enormous contribution to international solidarity, today let us pledge our solidarity in return.

So together let us offer our support to ordinary Cuban workers.

Together let us fight for more progressive policies towards Cuba.

And together let us speak up for the achievements of the Cuban people.

Viva Cuba!