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Cuba rejects new travel restrictions for Americans

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HAVANA, Cuba, Jun 5 (ACN) Bruno Rodriguez, Minister of Foreign Affairs, rejected on Tuesday the new restrictions announced by the U.S. Treasury Department, which further limit the travel of U.S. citizens to the island.

I strongly reject the US announcement of new sanctions against Cuba that restrict Americans' travel and tighten the blockade. They intend to suffocate the economy and damage the standard of living of Cubans in order to wrest political concessions from us. They will fail again, the Cuban diplomat said on Twitter.

The U.S. Treasury Department announced on Tuesday new measures that eliminate the possibility of people-to-people educational trips as well as exports of private and corporate ships and planes from U.S. territory and establishes a general policy of denial of license applications involving those ships and aircraft.

The new measures, which take effect Wednesday, June 5, prohibit private and corporate aircraft, cruise ships, sailboats, fishing boats and other similar aircraft and vessels in general from traveling to Cuba.

However, the text clarifies that the only civil aircraft still authorized to go to Cuba are commercial aircraft operating under Air Transport Operator Certificates or other specifications of the Federal Aviation Administration.

In making the announcement, the Treasury Department noted that these actions mark a continuing commitment to the implementation of the presidential memorandum of national security of the Donald Trump administration of June 16, 2017, to reverse the agreements reached in pursuit of normalization of relations between the two countries.

The academic sector was one of those that historically boosted bilateral relations and after December 17, 2014, when the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries was announced, it grew significantly.

However, in the last year 24 U.S. colleges and universities that came to Cuba for the purpose of carrying out academic activities and exchanging experiences with Cuban professional researchers and scholars related to the Center for Martian Studies have been forced to cancel their projects.

In 2018, more than 639,000 U.S. citizens traveled to Cuba, according to the Cuban Foreign Minister's report to the national press in January of this year, which represented an increase over 2017, although it showed a lower rate of growth compared to the last five years.

U.S. citizens are not officially allowed to travel to Cuba, so they could take advantage of some of the categories of travel allowed by their government, or they could take advantage of cruise ship stopovers in several ports on the island.

In 2018 the Trump government issued a travel alert to its citizens based on alleged attacks on its diplomats in Havana, which it has not been able to prove and the Cuban government emphatically denies.

The Republican administration, which has handed over the reins of its Cuba policy to an extreme right-wing group, announced and later expanded a list of companies with which economic and commercial exchanges were prohibited.

On May 2 of this year, in an unprecedented action for more than four decades, it allowed lawsuits to be brought against Cuban and foreign companies under Title III of the Helms-Burton Act, which had been postponed since 1996 by successive U.S. presidents due to the negative implications for the United States and its partners.

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