

United States Senate

January 14, 2022

Mr. Lars Thykier
Chair
World Travel Agents Association Alliance
Rue Dautzenberg 36
B-1050 Bruxelles
Belgium

Mr. Zane Kerby
President and Chief Executive Officer
American Society of Travel Advisors
675 North Washington Street
Suite 490
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Mr. Thykier and Mr. Kerby:

Each and every day, the illegitimate communist regime in Cuba commits horrific atrocities against its own people - unjustly imprisoning, torturing and silencing anyone who dares to stand against it. It is an indisputable fact that nearly all commerce, especially tourism, directly benefits the regime and its military, not the people, and funds the regime's brutal oppression. These human rights abuses cannot be ignored. Today, I write to implore you to consider these crimes and the terrible implications of promoting travel and doing business with the brutal communist Cuban regime.

While tourists may be able to travel freely to the island, the Cuban people are unable to enjoy the same freedoms under the Castro and Díaz-Canel regime, creating an inexcusable apartheid system. The experience of tourists and travelers on the island is completely organized by the Cuban regime. The average Cuban does not mix with tourists freely. Only Cubans approved by the government can interact with tourists. The Cuban Communist Party controls everything and every person on the island. Everywhere a tourist goes, every event they attend, and every hotel and restaurant they visit, is either owned by the Cuban military or closely controlled by the regime. A traveler's every move is watched.

In addition to privacy concerns, we know that the few Cubans who are permitted to work in the tourism industry make pennies on the dollar and are forced to live in extreme poverty. Food, water, electricity and gas shortages are common, and these basic items are close to unaffordable for most Cubans. The pandemic has only exacerbated this injustice. Freedom of information is also heavily restricted, and the government maintains its control by charging unaffordable prices for internet access.

The illegitimate communist Cuban regime is also exploiting the COVID-19 pandemic to traffic its own medical workers for profit through their medical mission, the Cuban doctors

Mr. Lars Thykier and Mr. Zane Kerby
January 14, 2022
Page Two

program. The regime's medical mission is the government's largest source of revenue, reportedly generating more than \$7 billion in 2017 and more than \$6 billion in 2018 – bringing in more money than rum, sugar, and cigars combined. Sadly, these doctors are paid a fraction of what the regime brings in from their services. This repressive communist economic system controls every aspect of the Cuban people's lives and has deprived them of freedom for over 60 years.

As you may know, on July 11, 2021, freedom and democracy activists led thousands of Cubans to march in the streets and voice their opposition to the communist regime of Cuba. During those protests, Cubans in more than 40 cities held demonstrations chanting "Freedom!" "Down with the Dictatorship!" and "Patria y Vida" ("Homeland and Life"). Through those protests, the people of Cuba demanded basic human rights, their God-given freedoms and the end of communism. Cubans gathered outside of the headquarters of the Cuban Communist Party chanting, "Cuba isn't yours!" In a clear message, Cubans exercised their fundamental rights to peacefully assemble, express their political opinions and live free from censorship and oppression. They demanded the Cuban Communist Party release their control of the government and give the power back to the people.

During these protests, the Cuban Communist Party unleashed a wave of terror throughout the island by deploying its secret police and military forces on peaceful protesters and unlawfully detaining them. The regime harassed and threatened people in their homes, abducted and tortured civil society leaders and other Cubans peacefully exercising their fundamental rights, and detained more than 1,000 Cubans, including minors, for peacefully protesting. In a crude and savage effort to silence the Cuban people, the regime cut internet connectivity and mobile services throughout Cuba, which prevented the Cuban people from organizing, and hid images and videos of the regime's oppressive and brutal crackdown from the outside world.

An example of one of the courageous demonstrators is José Daniel Ferrer, the Cuban freedom and human rights activist and the leader of the Patriotic Union of Cuba (UNPACU), who has been unjustly imprisoned for more than 180 days, and is being psychologically and physically tortured by the illegitimate communist Cuban regime in an attempt to end his life.

According to his family members, José Daniel's health is dire and only getting worse. He's suffering from severe headaches, mouth bleeding, malnutrition, cough and insomnia – all products of the cruel torture and inhumane treatment from the Cuban regime. It is clear that these actions stem from the regime's total fear of the movement for freedom and democracy spreading across Cuba.

This week, I was proud to see the Senate unanimously pass my [resolution](#) supporting José Daniel and his fellow democracy activists, and strongly condemning the brutal communist regime. In passing this resolution, the United States Senate sent a clear message to the regime that its time is up and the United States stands with those crying out for freedom and democracy on the island. I continue to work with the United Nations and the Organization of

Mr. Lars Thykier and Mr. Zane Kerby
January 14, 2022
Page Three

American States, and demand the White House take action to secure humanitarian medical visits for José Daniel and all unjustly imprisoned by the regime and demand their immediate release.

The violence, instability and chaos we see today in Latin America is directly tied to the oppressive Cuban regime which continues to prop up dangerous dictators throughout the region, including Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua.

I urge you to consider the implications of facilitating travel to Communist Cuba and take the time to understand the full implications of supporting travel and business with the Cuban regime. If the past six decades of atrocities, oppression and misery inflicted on the Cuban people are not enough, think about how your dollars will be used to further cause harm. When travel agencies promote or facilitate travel to Cuba, it shows support of a ruthless dictatorship that has denied Cubans their basic rights for far too long. I urge you to stand with the people of Cuba as they fight for a new era of freedom and opportunity.

For the sake of the democracy and freedom that allows you to do business around the world, I hope you reconsider any plans to support the Cuban regime and distribute this letter with your members.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rick Scott". The signature is stylized with a large initial "R" and a prominent "S".

Rick Scott
United States Senator