



PARLIAMENT
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

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Report

Parliamentary Delegation Visit to the Republic of Cuba February 10-15, 2015



Report of the Delegation – Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Visit to the
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Background

At the kind invitation of the President of the National Assembly of the People’s Power, Lazo Hernandez, MP; the Speaker of the House the Hon. Wade Mark, led a Parliamentary Delegation to visit the Republic of Cuba. One of the major objectives of the visit was to facilitate the deepening of parliamentary relations between the National Assembly of Cuba and the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Letter of invitation at Appendix I

Approval, Travel Details and Courtesies

Cabinet Vide Minute 264 of January 29, 2015 approved the attendance of the Hon. Wade Mark, MP, Speaker of the House and a delegation on an official visit to the Republic of Cuba from February 10 -15, 2015. The delegation’s itinerary is at Appendix II

Delegation

The delegation comprised –

Hon. Wade Mark, MP	Speaker of the House and Leader of the Delegation
Mr. Rodger Samuels	MP for Arima
Mr. Kwasi Mutema	Government Senator
Dr. Lester Henry	Opposition Senator
Mr. Brian Caesar	Marshal of the Parliament and Secretary to the Delegation

Jose Marti Exhibition Hall

The delegation's first official engagement involved a visit to the 'Jose Marti' Exhibition Hall in the Cuban Capital of Havana. Jose Julian Marti Perez (January 1853 – May 1895), a national icon in Cuba, was a political theorist, a revolutionary philosopher, and educator who was a symbol of Cuba's move towards independence from Spain. At the Exhibition Hall, the Trinidad and Tobago delegation was enlightened on how and when planning for the 1950's revolution began, and they were introduced to many vestiges of that revolution. The tour of the Jose Marti Exhibition Hall was both eye-opening and stimulating. It also demonstrated the deep sense of inner strength of the Cuban people under the leadership of Fidel Castro.



People's Council Meeting

On the first full day of the visit, the delegation attended a meeting of the People's Council, in inner Havana. The President and Vice President of the Council delighted the delegation with a power point presentation on the different demographics and interests that reside within their community, and the methodologies used to engage people participation. 'This form of participation allows the masses to have a genuine input in the decisions that affect their community'. The systems of participation were outlined by the leaders of the Council, and they shared with the delegation how the decisions of the Council impact the strategic objectives of the National Assembly.



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Visit to Old Havana

The delegation was also hosted to a visit of Old Havana where a number of heritage buildings with historic architecture were viewed. Although Old Havana is described as a metropolis, it has maintained a mix of baroque and neoclassical monuments. The private houses have also maintained their designs with balconies, internal courtyards and wrought-iron gates. Additionally, in instances where modern infrastructural upgrades were required, it was skilfully integrated into the old Spanish structures that beautifully adorn Old Havana.



Meeting with the President of the National Assembly



Day three **(3)** of the visit commenced with a meeting with the President of the People's National Assembly and host to the delegation, Deputy Esteban Lazo Hernandez. At the start of the discourse, he welcomed Speaker Mark and the delegation to Cuba, and he spoke of the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries from as early as 1972.

Deputy Esteban Lazo Hernandez, referred to the recently held CARICOM Summit which took place in Havana, Cuba. Mr. Hernandez spoke of several

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modern day economic crises and global issues -: for example, food prices, climate change, and the ‘five decade old struggle to defend the Cuban identity’. The President of the National Assembly also spoke of the role that the Trinidad and Tobago Parliament has played in the defense of the people of Cuba. He remarked ‘in unity there is strength and this is something that both Parliaments must work on’.

Deputy Lazo Hernandez spoke of the need for Caribbean/Regional solidarity. He lamented that people of the world ‘should not only be giving what they have in excess, but also what we have’. He spoke about the number of countries that are against the United States blockade against Cuba. He highlighted, that the delegation arrived in Cuba at a ‘reformative and exciting period’ as ‘there is a



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national social and economic transformation that is occurring; an elation about the release of five (5) Cubans from prison’.

The President of the National Assembly also proffered that there should be a strengthening of relations in other fields. He offered as an example the recent visit to Cuba by officials from the Ministry of Health, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and the on-going discussions for a visit by that Ministry’s line Minister in March 2015. He also made reference to the Cuban involvement in the fight against Ebola in Africa, and the presence of Cuban health care professional in



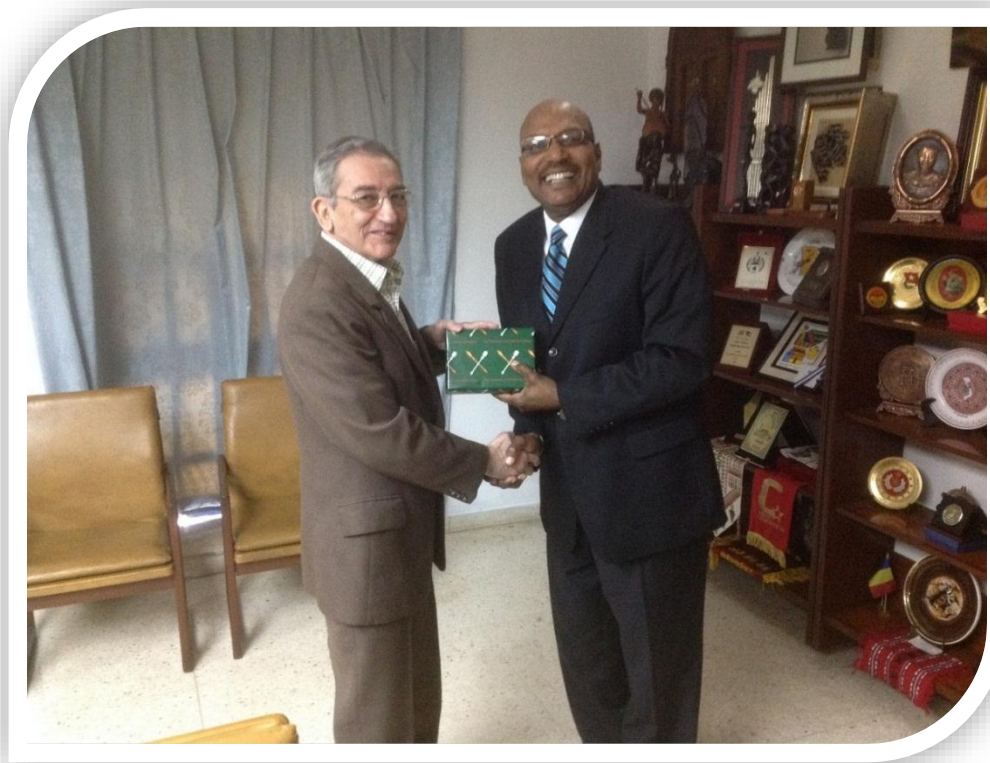
that region. He opined that ‘it is not just going to Africa, but also a case of what else we can do to protect ourselves’.

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The delegation engaged extensively with the President of the National Assembly and was certainly enlightened as a result of his wide ranging experience and wealth of knowledge. Both Presiding Officers agreed that there will be on-going discussions and sharing between our Parliaments

Meeting with the Head of International Relations

On Friday February 13, 2015, the delegation met with Jose Ramon Balaguer Cabrera, MP and Member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee and Head of International Relations. Mr. Cabrera commenced the meeting by referring to the 2009 Summit of the Americas held in T&T, and the strong message that was sent to President Obama by the people of the Caribbean, with regards to Cuba and Caribbean Solidarity. He opined that for fifty years the US has tried to isolate Cuba, but ended up isolating itself. He indicated that a lot of Caribbean people work in the different provinces of Cuba, and he acknowledged the ‘role and experience of CARICOM as a means of integration’.



Meeting with the Vice President of the Council of Ministers

Additionally, on February 13, there was a meeting with the Vice President of the Council of Ministers, Mr. Ricardo Cabrisas Ruiz. During the meeting the Vice President posed the following question – What is Trinidad and Tobago’s assessment of the political integration? He commented that from where he stands, outside of the Caribbean, he was happy to be able to welcome the T&T Parliamentary Delegation because Cuba has a lot to thank the Caribbean for, and in particular T&T, because this country had made a decision to establish diplomatic relations with Cuba, at a time when this was very unpopular. He indicated that Cuba is aware of the pressures that had been brought to bear on Caribbean countries during this period.



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He further opined, that we must welcome and foster the type of relationship that exists between our countries, but neither side must be satisfied with the limited strides that we have made in the area of trade. 'Over the years, the quantity of trade between T&T and Cuba has remained fairly consistent. While the Cuban government has imparted instructions to companies to move into greater and deeper trading relationships, this has not been pursued aggressively'. In fact he remarked, 'there has not been an aggressive, consistent, and steady position to pursue the Cuban markets'. 'I have studied this consistently for many years. For example, Republic Bank of Trinidad and Tobago has offered a line of credit to T&T businesses in Cuba. This line of credit amounts to some ten (10) million U.S dollars which is not been effectively accessed to date.'

Meeting with Trinidad and Tobago Students in Cuba

The delegation also visited the Latin-American School of Medicine, where there was a brief meeting with officials of the institution followed by a meeting with two students who are nationals of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and who are studying medicine at that institution.

On the final day of the visit, the delegation visited the province of Mayabeque where the officials of the Provincial Assembly shared information on the history of the province and explained their governing arrangements. The officials facilitated the delegation to a tour of their National Science Centre, where research and development have been successfully carried out over the last two decades.



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The visit to Cuba was described by the delegation as extremely rewarding, and the journey towards deepening parliamentary relations between our two countries began in earnest.

The delegation departed Cuba on February 15, 2015.

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Appendix I

Unofficial Translation

La Habana

July 18th, 2014

The Honourable Mr. Wade Mark
Speaker
House of Representatives of
Trinidad and Tobago



Honorable President:

With great pleasure and as part of the policy of strengthening the ties of our Parliament to the Caribbean, I extend, on behalf of the National Assembly of People's Power of the Republic of Cuba, an invitation to visit our country in 2014, if possible during the fourth quarter.

I'm sure your visit will provide us a great opportunity to exchange views and experiences on national and international events and help to strengthen relations between our two Parliaments.

We would appreciate your prompt response to our invitation, while I reiterate, Honorable President, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Esteban Lazo Hernández

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Appendix II

**Programme for the Parliamentary Delegation
Visit from Trinidad and Tobago
(10 to 15 February, 2015)**

Tuesday, February 10th

10:50 hours

Arrival of the delegation from Panama

15:00 hours

Visit to the Museum of the Revolution

20:00 hours

Visit to La Cabaña fortress and the cannon shot Ceremony

Wednesday, February 11th

09:30 hours

Visit to a People's Council Meeting with its Members and tour around the territory

12:30 hours

Private Lunch

15:00 hours

Tour around the old Havana

Thursday, February 12th

10:30 hours

Meeting with Esteban Lazo Hernández, MP President of the National Assembly of the People's Power

12:30 hours

Luncheon hosted by the Presidency of the National Assembly of the People's Power

15:00 hours

Meeting in the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Investment

Friday, February 13th

09:30 hours

Meeting with José Ramón Balaguer Cabrer, MP Member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee and Head of the International Relations Department

11:00 hours

Meeting with Ricardo Cabrisas Ruíz, MP Vice President of the Council of Ministers and its Executive Committee

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12:30 hours

Private Lunch

15:00 hours

Visit to the Latin-American School of Medicine Meeting
with Trinitarian students

Saturday, February 14th

08:30 hours

Departure for Mayabeque province Meeting at the
Office of the Provincial Assembly
Visit to different places of the territory
Luncheon hosted by the authorities of the province

Sunday, February 15th

08:30 hours

Departure from José Martí International Airport