

Cuba has never perpetrated, nor will it ever perpetrate attacks of any sort against diplomatic officials or their relatives, without exception

Press conference with national and international media presented by Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba, at the Ministry headquarters, October 3, 2017, Year 59 of the Revolution

(Council of State Transcript - GI translation)

• **ALEJANDRO González Galiano (Moderator).**- Good afternoon.

We thank colleagues from the national and international press for their presence here at this press conference called by Cuba's Minister of Foreign Affairs, compañero Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla.

With us are 60 correspondents from 31 foreign press outlets, in addition to the principal national media, of course.

This conference, I inform you, is being broadcast live on Cuban Television, Cubavisión Internacional, Radio Rebelde, Radio Habana Cuba, and is being streamed on the Cubaminrex site YouTube channel.

The Minister will first present a statement and then will be at your disposal for a few questions.

Bruno Rodríguez.- Good afternoon.

In accordance with instructions from my government, in the name of the Cuban people, I would like to convey heartfelt condolences to families of the victims and U.S. people, for the attack which occurred October 1 in the city of Las Vegas.

We had previously conveyed our profound condolences, as well, to the people of the United States, relatives of victims, and those affected by Hurricane Irma.

More recently, we expressed our sentiments of friendship and solidarity to the sister people of Puerto Rico, to whom we offered our modest cooperation with a field hospital, a team of 41 doctors specialized in disasters, and four brigades of engineers and electrical technicians. We are waiting for a response from authorities, but we reiterate our profound solidarity with the Puerto Rican people.

I will now read a:

STATEMENT FROM THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

On September 29, 2017, the U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson announced the decision to significantly downscale the diplomatic staff of the U.S. embassy in Havana and withdraw all their relatives, claiming that there had been "attacks" perpetrated against U.S. Government officials in Cuba which have harmed their health.

Once again, on October 3, the U.S. Government, in an unwarranted act, decided that 15 officials of the Cuban Embassy in Washington should depart from the United States, claiming that the U.S. had reduced their diplomatic staffing levels in Havana and that the Cuban Government had failed to take all appropriate steps to prevent "attacks" against them.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly protests and condemns this unfounded and unacceptable decision as well as the pretext used to justify it, for it has been asserted that the Cuban Government did not take the appropriate measures to prevent the occurrence of the alleged incidents.

In the meeting that, at the proposal of the Cuban side, was held with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, the minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba, Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, warned him against the adoption of hasty decisions that were not supported by evidence; urged him not to politicize a matter of this nature and once again required the effective cooperation from the U.S. authorities to clarify facts and conclude the investigation.

It is the second time, after May 23, 2017, that the State Department orders two Cuban diplomats in Washington to abandon the country; that the U.S. Government reacts in a hasty, inappropriate and unthinking way, without having evidence of the occurrence of the adduced facts, for which Cuba has no responsibility whatsoever and before the conclusion of the investigation that is still in progress.

Just as was expressed by the Cuban Foreign Minister to Secretary of State Tillerson on September 26, 2017, Cuba, whose diplomatic staff members have been victims in the past of attempts perpetrated against their lives, who have been murdered, disappeared, kidnapped or attacked during the performance of their duty, has seriously and strictly observed its obligations under the Geneva Convention on



Diplomatic Relations of 1961 referring to the protection and integrity of diplomatic agents accredited in the country, in which it has an impeccable record.

As was informed by the Ministry on August 9 last, since February 17, 2017, when the U.S. embassy and State Department notified the alleged occurrence of incidents against some officials of that diplomatic mission and their relatives as from November 2016, arguing that these had caused them injuries and other disorders, the Cuban authorities have acted with utmost seriousness, professionalism and immediacy to clarify this situation and opened an exhaustive and priority investigation following instructions from the top level of the Government. The measures adopted to protect the U.S. diplomatic staff, their relatives and residences were reinforced; new expeditious communication channels were established between the U.S. embassy and the Diplomatic Security Department and a committee of experts was created to make a comprehensive analysis of facts, which was made up by law enforcement officials, physicians and scientists.

In the face of the belated, fragmented and insufficient information supplied by the U.S., the Cuban authorities requested further information and clarifications from the U.S. embassy in order to carry out a serious and profound investigation.

The U.S. embassy only delivered some data of interest on the alleged incidents after February 21, when President Raúl Castro Ruz personally reiterated to the Chargé d'Affairs of the U.S. diplomatic mission how important it was for the competent authorities from both countries to cooperate and exchange more information. Nevertheless, the data supplied later on continued to be lacking in the descriptions or details that would facilitate the characterization of facts or the identification of potential perpetrators, in case there were any.

In the weeks that followed, in view of new reports on the alleged incidents and the scarce information that had been delivered, the Cuban authorities reiterated the need to establish an effective cooperation and asked the U.S. authorities for more information and insisted that the occurrence of any new incident should be notified in real time, which would provide for a timely action.

Besides all of the above and in the interest of contributing to the investigation and legal process established by virtue of the Cuban Criminal Procedural Law, the U.S. received from Cuba some requests for information as part of the inquiry procedure.

The information delivered by the U.S. authorities led the committee of Cuban experts conclude that this was insufficient and that the main obstacle to clarify the incidents had been the impossibility to have direct access to the injured people and the physicians who examined them; the belated delivery of evidence and their deficient value; the absence of reliable first-hand and verifiable information and the inability to exchange with U.S. experts who are knowledgeable about this kind of events and the technology that could have been used, despite having repeatedly

stating this as a requirement to be able to move forward in the investigation.

Only after repeated requests were conveyed to the U.S. Government, some representatives of specialized agencies of that country finally traveled to Havana on June last, met with their Cuban counterparts and expressed their intention to cooperate in a more substantive way in the investigation of the alleged incidents. They again visited Cuba in August and September, and for the first time in more than 50 years they were allowed to work on the ground, for which they were granted all facilities, including the possibility of importing equipment, as a gesture of good will that evidenced the great interest of the Cuban government in concluding the investigation.

The Cuban authorities highly assessed the three visits made by the U.S. specialized agencies, which have recognized the high professional level of the investigation started by Cuba and its high technical and scientific component, and which, as a preliminary result, concluded that, so far, according to the information available and the data supplied by the United States, there were no evidence of the occurrence of the alleged incidents or the causes and the origin of the health disorders reported by the U.S. diplomats and their relatives.

Neither has it been possible to identify potential perpetrators or persons with motivations, intentions or means to perpetrate this type of actions; nor was it possible to establish the presence of suspicious persons or means at the locations where such facts have been reported or in their vicinity. The Cuban authorities are not familiar with the equipment or the technology that could be used for that purpose; nor do they have information indicating their presence in the country.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs categorically rejects any responsibility of the Cuban Government in the alleged incidents and reiterates once again that Cuba has never perpetrated, nor will it ever perpetrate attacks of any sort against diplomatic officials or their relatives, without any exception. Neither has it ever allowed nor will it ever allow its territory to be used by third parties with that purpose.

The Ministry emphasizes that the U.S. Government announced decision to reduce Cuba's diplomatic staff in Washington without the conclusive results from the investigation and without evidence of the incidents that would be affecting their officials in Cuba has an eminently political character.

The Ministry urges the competent authorities of the U.S. Government not to continue politicizing this matter, which can provoke an undesirable escalation and would rarify and reverse even more bilateral relations, which were already affected by the announcement of a new policy made in June last by President Donald Trump.

The Ministry reiterates Cuba's disposition to continue fostering a serious and objective cooperation between the authorities of both countries with the purpose of clarifying these facts and conclude the investigation, for which it will be essential to count on the most effective cooperation of the U.S. competent agencies.

Moderator.- Ok, now for questions. I'd like to ask journalists to please identify themselves and the agency they work for and make use of the microphones in the room.

Thank you.

Andrea Rodríguez (AP).- Good afternoon.

Mr. Rodríguez, do the measures taken by both the United States and Cuba mean that what we are seeing here today in Havana is the beginning of a refreezing of relations between both countries, after a kind of two-year thawing which occurred under Obama? I'd like to know what your thoughts are in this regard.

On the other hand, personally it's not clear to me what has happened with the Canadians, I mean, apparently these diplomats had the same issues as the U.S. diplomats, so is it that Canada decided not to protect them or something like that?

Thank you.

Bruno Rodríguez.- Cuba has taken absolutely no measures at all against the United States. It does not discriminate against its companies, it invites its citizens to visit us, promotes dialogue and bilateral cooperation, it does not occupy any part of U.S. territory, and has adopted absolutely no measures of a bilateral nature, but rather,

has, in the interests of both peoples, promoted a respectful path based on sovereign equality, by which to address our differences and coexist in a civilized manner.

The policy announced by President Donald Trump on June 16, and other such measures, constitute, in effect, a setback and have put a strain on bilateral relations.

The unjustifiable and unwarranted political decision demanding 15 officials from our Embassy leave U.S. territory, is an act of an absolutely political nature, which only benefits those wanting to derail the possibility of the continued advancement of relations between the two countries, those who want to reverse the progress made over recent years, the decision can only benefit the sinister interests of a handful of people.

I can say that Cuban authorities continue to be in contact and to cooperate with Canadian authorities.

Jorge Legaña (ACN).- Good afternoon Minister,

Could you talk a bit more about the reasons given by the United States government to the Cuban government justifying the withdrawal of Cuban diplomatic personnel in Washington, and in that regard, could you also comment on how things now stand regarding the functioning of the Cuban Embassy in the United States.

Thank you.

Bruno Rodríguez.- Thank you.

The U.S. part could respond better and more directly to this.

It's difficult to explain why the State Department has decided to both withdraw part of its personnel in Havana and expel part of Cuba's diplomatic personnel from U.S. territory.

This is Secretary Tillerson's statement from September 29. (Shows the document).

Months after U.S. spokespeople continually talking about incidents, and continually talking about a lack of evidence, investigative conclusions or information enabling them to link the health issues described by U.S. diplomats with said incidents, Secretary Tillerson uses, for the first time, months later, the word "attacks," and states that "Embassy employees have suffered a variety of injuries from attacks of an unknown nature." Curiously, he goes on to note that: "Investigators have been unable to determine who is responsible or what is causing these attacks."

I can confirm that in the meeting held with Secretary Tillerson, he did not provide a single piece of information as of that time unknown to the Cuban side, nor did he include a single shred of evidence or conclusive investigative results, or even information from elements of the investigation underway.

According to the letter sent today by the Department of State (shows the document) Cuban officials must leave Washington now that personnel at the U.S. Embassy in Havana have been withdrawn following Cuba's failure to take appropriate steps to avoid any attack on the physical integrity, liberty or dignity of accredited U.S. diplomatic personnel and members of their respective nuclear families.

The State Department does not state that attacks have occurred: it once again talks about incidents in which the physical security of personnel has allegedly been harmed. It also accuses the Cuban government of failing to take all the necessary steps to avoid an attack, but does not state that such events have occurred.

Curiously, this is the reason cited for requesting that specific Cuban personnel leave the United States within seven days.

It is unacceptable and inexplicable that the United States has decided to demand Cuban diplomatic personnel leave U.S. territory because it took the decision to reduce its diplomatic personnel in Havana, or because the Cuban government has allegedly failed to take certain steps.

What does the United States want to protect the health of its diplomats, who might be suffering health problems, have to do with the decision to reduce the presence of Cuban diplomatic personnel in Washington? Is this an act of reciprocity? Clearly it can't be, because Cuba has not taken any steps or made any decisions that could warrant reciprocal action. Is it a preventative measure or one aimed at protecting the health of U.S. diplomatic personnel? It's absolutely unthinkable. What is this?

It is quite clearly a political decision, it is not a technical decision related to the ongoing investigation. Is it an act of reprisal? And if so what is its purpose? It would be helpful if the U.S. part could explain.

In a communiqué this morning, Secretary Tillerson added as an objective of his order - that is, of the order that Cuban diplomatic staff in Washington leave - ensuring "equity in our respective diplomatic operations." What does this mean?

I ask the Department of State. That is, why is it an objective to assure equity with a unilateral, impulsive, unfounded, and unjustifiable decision by the State Department regarding their own personnel? One they could attempt to explain for preventative health reasons, but what relation does this have with the arbitrary, politically motivated decision, obviously with objectives of a political nature to cut part of the

Cuban diplomatic presence in Washington?

What has the State Department official said this morning? Well, he has made an announcement, he has said that another affected diplomat has appeared. The press, right away, has asked him when this happened - September, August, last week? He responded no, he responded that it happened in the month of January this year, and that they had decided to announce it now, because it has been, they say, reevaluated. The lack of seriousness of this approach is astounding.

To answer your question, the response given by the State Department official, anonymously - it must be said that State Department officials have been constantly leaking malicious information to the U.S. press for political objectives - this other official, also anonymous, underground, author of this morning's briefing, attempts to answer your question saying - I have it here in English: "The attacks reflect an ongoing series of incidents that are affecting our diplomatic personnel." I don't know if the translators here can explain what this phrase means in English or Spanish, "The attacks reflect an ongoing series of incidents that are affecting our diplomatic personnel, and they have persisted over a long period of time now that has made it very clear that our people are suffering and are suffering these attacks from some unknown means and method." That's to say, the attacks reflect some "incidents," that supposedly were caused by someone using "unknown means and methods."

"And the decision to call them attacks," the anonymous official says, "reflects that there's been a consistent pattern of our people being affected." What does this mean, in English or Spanish? "And the decision to call them attacks reflects that there's been a consistent pattern of our people being affected?"

But then, to boot, he says, "There's no other conclusion that we could draw."

Science fiction, futurism? What is he talking about?

"I think the issue with regard to the number of Cubans departing" - that is the Cuban diplomats who must leave the country - "is that it ensures that we have equitable staffing levels to allow our embassies to operate."

That is, reducing personnel in the two territories facilitates, guarantees, allows for the functioning of the embassies? When the State Department has said that the U.S. embassy will be limited to solely providing emergency services. It doesn't make sense.

The U.S. official continues, "I know that the medical teams are looking at all of the symptoms and are considering all of the possibilities. But they have been able to confirm the symptoms that we've previously described are occurring and our people are demonstrating physical symptoms." Cantinflas, that is, this is incomprehensible rhetoric that attempts to cover up the essential, which is the lack of facts, conclusive results from investigations, evidence, information.

They ask him: "Family reunification would be severely impacted. What's the message to Cuban Americans?"

He answers: "I think we are evaluating the impact our reduction of staff will have on those issues," that is, how can the impact on family reunification, immigrant visas and visitors to the United States be assessed a posteriori; how can the impact of abruptly and almost completely cutting off consular services in Havana and Washington be evaluated after having done so?

Because the situation - in which the Cuban Consulate in Washington is today - is extremely precarious: after the decision by the United States to withdraw Cuban personnel, a single consular official has remained in Washington. I understand that the same thing is happening, unfortunately, also in the U.S. Consulate General here in Havana.

And he emphasizes that it has been said that the priority is "the safety, security, and well-being of our diplomatic personnel overseas," and confesses that "There will be emergency services that will remain available."

If the U.S. government applied these standards across its foreign service, it would have to close dozens of embassies around the world now.

Patrick Oppmann (CNN-International).- Thanks.

Could you tell me a little more about what Cuban investigators have done in these eight months? Have they been in the houses and hotels where the attacks are supposed to have happened, and how do they know that it was not in a third country, or a terrorist group of the type that has made attacks here in the past?

Bruno Rodríguez.- Could you tell me what attacks by terrorist groups or third countries have been carried out here, in past years?

Patrick Oppmann (CNN-International).- Well, Hotel Capri, you know, at the Hotel Nacional they placed bombs not many years ago, in the 90s.

Bruno Rodríguez.- Of course, you are talking about terrorist groups based in the United States, not third countries, but I understand. I can say that the Cuban investigation is extremely professional, exhaustive, as has been indicated by the highest level of government in Cuba.

I already mentioned that it has included the reinforcement

of all protection measures for U.S. diplomatic personnel. No other additional measures have been adopted by decision of the State Department. This includes establishing a direct line of communication between the United States Embassy and the mechanisms created as part of this investigation to assist and investigate any incident. Unfortunately, the vast majority of incidents were reported by the U.S. Embassy months after they were supposed to have occurred.

The group of Cuban experts, of Cuban specialists, has not had the possibility to visit the affected places that involve diplomatic personnel residences, because this has been prevented by the U.S. side. There have been no meetings, as I have already mentioned, between the Cuban medical personnel involved in this investigation and the U.S. medical specialists, which has been repeatedly requested. It has not been possible - as mentioned here - to hold specialized meetings between experts from both sides, in relation to aspects of a technological order and of a diverse nature.

I can also say that - as I mentioned here - the scant evidence, supposed evidence, shared by the U.S. side, after consulting highly professional expert opinions, which meet the highest international standards, has been considered irrelevant to the effects of the ongoing investigation; but I can reiterate the decision of the Cuban government to continue this investigation under all conditions.

And secondly, I reiterate to the United States government authorities the request that they share evidence, allow meetings between U.S. and Cuban doctors who have dealt with these matters, and undertake more effective cooperation.

Moderator.- Cristina. One last question.

Cristina Escobar (Cuban Television).- Good afternoon. Cristina Escobar, Cuban Television.

I understand from that response you just gave, that beyond the U.S. medical authorities, no other medical professional has evaluated the diplomats who allege these symptoms, as corroboration.

Bruno Rodríguez.- No, I did not say that. That is, what I have said is that there has been no contact between U.S. medical authorities and Cuban medical authorities.

Cristina Escobar.- And the committee of Cuban experts has been able to exchange with the diplomats who allege the symptoms?

Bruno Rodríguez.- No, not at all. I also mentioned that this has not been allowed.

Cristina Escobar.- Meanwhile, there is an agenda. A few days ago there was a meeting of the Bilateral Commission between the two governments; however, in the latest announcement by the State Department, they affirm that all the meetings that were to be held here in Havana are to be suspended, due to the alleged risks in the country; but not those that were to be held in Washington. Where does the bilateral agenda stand? What will Cuba do about this?

Thank you.

Bruno Rodríguez.- That's a good question for the State Department. That is to say, if in the same way that they are to apply "parity" and have drastically reduced the Cuban diplomatic personnel in Washington, will they apply "parity" and go on to suspend dialogue meetings in areas of mutual interest, or the holding of meetings to make possible bilateral cooperation in areas of maximum interest, not only for Cuba, but also the U.S. government?

But the reality is that there is not a single shred of evidence on the occurrence of the alleged incidents, nor their causes, nor their origin, as the tongue twister of the State Department official makes evident. You can ask the State Department what evidence or investigative results they have available, what factors of that nature they took into account to make these arbitrary decisions.

These decisions certainly affect and will affect bilateral relations, Cristina, in a number of areas. The atmosphere, already tense given the policy change announced on June 16 in Miami, and the recent discourse of the highest figures of the United States government in the United Nations, will undoubtedly be further strained by these hasty political decisions.

I have already seen that in some media it is said that part of the Cuban diplomatic officials who have been forced to leave U.S. territory are intelligence officers. I can categorically state that since the creation of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington until this moment, Cuban diplomatic officials have never carried out or carry out intelligence activities. They did not, nor did any of the diplomatic officials included in the State Department's list who have been asked to leave that country.

I must reiterate that the United States government, with these politically motivated and rash measures, is responsible for the present and probable future deterioration of bilateral relations.

Thank you very much.

Moderator.- We have concluded. Thank you very much to all.

Upon leaving, the Declaration will be distributed in English and Spanish.

Thank you all for your presence. •