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Sent: Friday, October 01, 2004 6:26 PM

To: APSA Council (apsa-council@apsanet.org)

Subject: APSA Position on Cuban academics denied US visas for major conference

TO: APSA Council

The entire delegation of Cuban scholars attending of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) have been denied visas by the US at the last minute. The delegation includes political scientists. The US government has alternatively cited a desire to protest human rights practices in Cuba, and an executive order allowing denial of visas to Cuban public officials (all Cuban academics are public employees in the sense of working for state universities) as individuals "detrimental to the interests of the United States." The Chronicle of Higher Education article on this is pasted in below, and you can find much more now on the web news sources on this.

At the direction of the Administrative Committee, I will prepare a letter to Secretary Powell strongly objecting to this - on academic freedom grounds and on grounds that it undercuts opportunities for Cuban intellectuals with substantial influence over students and leaders in Cuba to engage with US and other non-Cuban scholars and thinkers - to be sent on Monday - absent Council direction to the contrary. I've also been in touch with LASA, and have gotten good guidance from Bill LeoGrande, who is often a liaison for us between APSA and LASA, on where best to send the letter.

I'd welcome any brief suggestions this weekend about how best to frame the argument.

Thanks.

Michael

FROM Chronicle of Higher Education:

All 65 Cuban scholars who had planned to attend an international conference of the Latin American Studies Association next week in Las Vegas were informed on Tuesday that their requests for U.S. visas had been denied.

The conference is held every 18 months, and on previous occasions the U.S. Department of State has refused to issue visas for some Cubans who sought to attend. This is the first time that the entire delegation has been turned away since the first Cubans participated in the conference, in 1979.

Representatives of the association, which is commonly known as LASA, expressed frustration that the State Department had announced its decision so close to the date of the conference.

"Those of us who are suspicious say that it's not by accident -- it's simply part and parcel of making the process as complicated and as stressful as possible," said H. Michael Erisman, co-chairman of the association's Cuba section and a professor of political science at Indiana State University. "But that's just a conspiratorial theory."

Mr. Erisman had visited the U.S. Interests Section in Havana last November to "work out a procedure which we hoped would avoid any of these kind of last-minute crises," he said. The Cuban scholars, who were told that their visa-application process would take approximately three months, applied as early as April for this month's conference.

In May, Marysa Navarro, president of LASA and a professor of history at Dartmouth College, and Milagros Pereyra-Rojas, the association's executive director, met with officials in the State Department's Office of Cuban Affairs, in Washington.

"We were given every indication that decisions would be made on the merits of individual cases," Ms. Navarro said in a written statement issued on Wednesday.

Mr. Erisman said he believes that the Cuban scholars' visa applications "were pushed upstairs, and the decisions were made at a higher level than would normally have been the case." When the Cubans learned of the blanket denial, they quickly informed their U.S.-based colleagues, and both groups sought explanations from the State Department.

Those inquiries were met with different responses, said Ms. Navarro, asking a reporter, "What did they tell you?"

Steven L. Pike, a spokesman for the State Department, blamed the problem on the Cuban government of Fidel Castro.

"Restricting access of Cuban academics to the United States is consistent with the overall tightening of our policy," Mr. Pike said. "Our policy is not about restricting academic exchanges or freedom of expression. It is the Castro regime that does that through restrictive issuance of passports and exit permits only to those academics on whom it can rely to promote its agenda of repression and misrepresentation."

In denying the visas, the State Department cited a 1985 proclamation by President Ronald Reagan declaring the presence in the United States of Cuban-government employees "detrimental to the interests of the United States." (All professors are public employees in Cuba.)

LASA officials said they planned to protest the department's decision, "but I think all of us know that that's a long shot," said Mr. Erisman.

Meanwhile, at least three conference panels in which the Cuban scholars were to have participated have been suspended. And the scholars themselves must cancel and seek reimbursement for their airplane flights, which were already reserved. Furthermore, the \$100 visa-application fee paid by each Cuban is not refundable, a policy that will create economic hardship for the professors, who earn approximately \$40 per month, according to Mr. Erisman.

One of the Cuban delegates, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that the scholars had spent up to a year preparing papers to present at the conference.

"Suddenly, with this decision that we can't participate, all of that is up in the air," she said. "We consider it an unjust measure without rationale."

<http://chronicle.com/temp/email.php?id=r6junjfw2acf94ahvle9tdlzhbugoc1>

