
Golden Jubilee of Cuba-Sri Lanka relations

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By Nirsia Castro Guevara (July 29, Colombo Sri Lanka Guardian) I am privileged to issue this message on the auspicious occasion of the 50th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between Cuba and Sri Lanka that falls on July, 29, 2009. With great satisfaction we can say that our relations during these 50 years have been marked with fruitful exchanges, mutual support and cooperation for the benefit of our two peoples.

As soon as the revolution took power in Cuba, in January 1959 the Revolutionary Government decided to establish relations with different countries specially those within the Non-Aligned Movement. The then Ceylonese government recognized the new Government of Cuba and embraced the idea of establishing diplomatic relations. A few days later, Che Guevara leading a delegation visited the country and signed a trade agreement to sell Cuban sugar. The Cuban Embassy in Colombo was opened in 1960 and was functioning till 1971 when economic reasons forced its closure and the Ambassador in Delhi was concurrently accredited to Colombo. Later in 1974, Cuba reopened its Embassy here and gave all her support to the Sri Lankan Government on the occasion of the Fifth Summit of the NAM which was held in Colombo in 1975. The political relations between Sri Lanka and Cuba have been one of respect and mutual collaboration.

In international meetings, conferences, as well as in matters of bilateral interests our two countries have had a very fruitful exchange of ideas. The relations between the former Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike and President J. R. Jayewardene with leader Fidel Castro were very cordial. The two visits to Cuba by the late President Jayawardene, in 1979 to participate the VI NAM Summit and a bilateral visit in 1985 were very significant and also the discussions during the NAM Summits between then Presidents Fidel Castro, the late R. Premadasa and Chandrika Kumaratunga enhanced the personal and official exchanges at the highest level. Cuba and Sri Lanka signed a Cultural Agreement in 1976 that was later updated by subsequent protocols and a Scientific and Technical agreement in 1978 updated also by subsequent Protocols. The execution of Scientific and Technical Collaboration started in 1987 with the arrival to Colombo of the First Cuban medical brigade and other specialists in fields as education, sports, culture, science and technology and others. In the 90s the changes in the economic situation of Cuba, among other reasons, prevented further development of our relations of cooperation. The Higher Education sector has been a good example of the exchanges between our two countries. Cuba has granted Sri Lanka, till this year, approximately 100 scholarships in different specialties. The health sector has also been scenario of bilateral cooperation. Cuban doctors worked in the hospitals of Ampara and Anuradhapura for many years and in 2004, after the tsunami they came to help the suffering of the people affected by the natural catastrophe. The visit to Cuba of President Mahinda Rajapaksa to participate in the XIV NAM summit in September 2006 marked a new step in the process of strengthening of bilateral exchanges. In 2007, a new Agreement of Economic and Scientific Cooperation was signed, and at the end of 2008 the First Session of the Intergovernmental Commission for the Economic, Technical and Scientific Cooperation between the two countries was held in Havana. During the discussions at the First Session of the Joint Commission several subjects were identified as suitable in broadening and consolidating the bilateral cooperation. Both countries are members of the Non-Aligned Movement and have played an active role in it, as well as in other international organizations, defending the noblest causes and promoting fair and just relations among countries, no matter whether they are big or small. In this 50th year of relations between the two countries we cannot forget the uncountable manifestations of support and friendship expressed towards Cuba by political, social, cultural, women, youth and worker organizations and specially the powerful movement of friendship and solidarity that has accompanied our country during these years. Celebrating 50 years of good relations is a big achievement that has been possible thanks to the contribution of many persons here in Sri Lanka and in my country. We pay tribute to all of them at this moment. We like to express our gratitude and high appreciation to President Mahinda Rajapaksa who has contributed significantly to the development of our relations. Courtesy: srilankagaudian.org