Humanitarian convoy to Cuba sets sail March 21

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The Nuestra América Convoy will set sail for Havana on March 21 to bring humanitarian aid to Cuba.

The convoy is being organized by "an international coalition of individuals and organizations," according to its website. Some of the organizations backing the movement include the U.S. Peace Council, the People's Health Movement and the National Lawyers Guild.

The convoy is asking participants to provide humanitarian aid such as dry goods, baby food, over-the-counter medicine and batteries among other things. The aid will be brought to a designated collection point, which has yet to be announced, before March 21 to be shipped to Cuba according to the convoy's website.

Nuestra América means "Our America," in Spanish, referencing the 1891 essay of the same name written by José Martí, a Cuban Nationalist who advocated for Cuba's independence throughout the 19th century. In the essay, Martí called for unity among the nations of Latin America against the Spanish crown but also warned of the United States' increasing influence in the region.

"Trump is very much in favor of the Donroe Doctrine," said David Adler, an organizer of the convoy in an interview with AJ+, "which aims to dominate the entire hemisphere in the name of the United States."

President Donald Trump said the U.S. would be interested in a "friendly takeover" of Cuba in a comment obtained by NBC News in Februrary. On Feb. 28, Mike Hammer, the U.S.'s highest diplomat in Cuba, said the "dictatorship will end," in an address reported on by the Miami Herald.

The convoy charged the Trump administration with "strangling" Cuba, calling the U.S. trade blockade criminal.

Cuba has been subject to an embargo from the United States since 1962 that has restricted trade with the nation, making it dependent on other countries for support. Much of this support came from the Soviet Union until its collapse in 1991, launching the island nation into a "special period" marked by a search for new sources of support.

Cuba once relied on Venezuela for oil until its oil industry came under the control of the United States with Venezuelan Leader, Nicholas Maduro's capture on Jan. 3.

Since then, Venezuela has been under an "oil quarantine," Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in a Jan. 4 interview with Margaret Brennan of CBS News. This quarantine refers to the seizing of sanctioned oil shipments on ships from Venezuela Rubio explained.

"That's a tremendous amount of leverage that will continue to be in place until we see changes that not just further the national interest of the United States, which is number one, but also that lead to a better future for the people of Venezuela," Rubio said.

Then on Jan. 29, Trump signed an executive order that vowed to impose tariffs on any country that "directly or indirectly sells or otherwise provides any oil to Cuba," putting the country in a tougher position than before.

Venezuela's oil industry being under U.S. control and this executive order have made it difficult to make up the gap in Cuba's oil supply. Then, on Feb. 10, El País reported that Cuba announced it had run out of fuel for commercial flights, further straining its already dwindling tourism sector.

United Nations human rights experts denounced the executive order on Feb. 12, calling it "a serious violation of international law and a grave threat to a democratic and equitable international order."

"We hope that this initiative in defense of the fundamental rights of the Cuban people will also be an opportunity to forge an international movement in favor of a hemisphere based on the principle of sovereign equality and full respect for international law," Adler said.

Adler also helped organize the Global Sumud Flotilla which sought to break Israel's blockade on the Gaza Strip and bring humanitarian aid to its residents last year. The 42 boats that formed the flotilla were captured and its crew detained by Israel in early October.



The official social media poster for the Nuestra América Convoy to Cuba. The humanitarian aid convoy is set to sail to Havana on March 21st.
PHOTO COURTESY OF @PROGINTL_EN ON INSTAGRAM



A Cuban flag waiving in Havana, Cuba. A humanitarian aid convoy is set to sail to Havana on March 21st.
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