May 6, 2013

The Honorable John F. Kerry
U.S. Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I write on behalf of the American Anthropological Association to request your support to facilitate visas for Cuban scholars who have been invited to participate in the XXXI International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) to be held May 29 to June 1, 2013 in Washington, D.C. Our association is the primary professional society of anthropologists in the US. Founded in 1902, we now have more than 12,500 members, many of whom are active in Latin American and Caribbean studies, and who work closely with LASA.

LASA is the largest professional association in the world for individuals and institutions engaged in the study of Latin America. With over 8,000 members, 45 percent of whom reside outside the United States, LASA is the one association that brings together experts on Latin America from all disciplines and diverse occupational endeavors, across the globe. LASA's mission is to foster intellectual discussion, research, and teaching on Latin America, the Caribbean, and its people throughout the Americas, promote the interests of its diverse membership, and encourage civic engagement through network building and public debate. The annual meeting of the Latin American Studies Association offers a unique opportunity for academics from around the world to gain insight into the field of Latin American Studies, as well as the opportunity to network and disseminate the latest research being done in and about the region.

While many Cuban scholars are LASA members, they are not always able to participate in the annual meetings. In 2004 the George W. Bush administration denied visas to all 61 Cuban scholars who had been invited to attend that year's meeting in Las Vegas, prompting the organization to move subsequent meetings outside the United States in protest. In 2012, LASA returned to the United States as it had come to believe that the Obama administration was more permissive of academic exchanges between the United States and Cuba. However, ten Cuban scholars were denied visas even though many of them had previously visited the United States with fellowships at some of the nation's most prestigious universities and had met with high-level officials at the State Department.

It has come to my attention that five Cuban scholars have already been denied visas to attend this year's meeting in May. These visa denials undermine the administration's policy of promoting academic exchange with Cuba, which has been one of the most positive and successful changes in US policy toward Cuba in recent years. These exchanges have helped promote the free flow of ideas, information, and dialogue and have helped feed the desire for greater openness in Cuba. The visa denials are damaging to US-Cuban relations, they hurt Cubans who are seeking increased engagement with the United States and they are harmful to US scholars who have the right to learn from their Cuban colleagues.
I hope that as Secretary of State you will support LASA's endeavor to include our Cuban colleagues in
democratic and scholarly debates.

Sincerely,

Leith Mullings

Leith Mullings
President, American Anthropological Association

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