**CET Statement on Cuba Travel Warning**

***Cuba Educational Travel***

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***Washington, DC***

Cuba Educational Travel President Collin Laverty released the following statement regarding the U.S. State Department’s decision to scale back the U.S. Embassy in Havana and issue a travel warning for U.S. travelers to Cuba.

“There are no reports of any incidents affecting U.S. travelers and the isolated events are not considered a threat to visitors’ safety. Cuba continues to be one of the safest places in the world for visitors,” said Laverty. “The travel warning is absolutely unnecessary and counterproductive and will only hurt the U.S. and Cuban people. It should be lifted immediately!”

The State Department announcement itself says there are “no reports that private U.S. citizens have been affected.”

Whoever is doing this is hoping to disrupt bilateral relations and affect the United States’ presence on the island. Pulling out gives them the result they are aiming for. Without a presence on the island, the U.S. cannot carry out President Trump’s Cuba policy, including supporting civil society, engaging with the private sector and fully cooperating with the Cuban government on drug interdiction, environmental issues and other matters of mutual concern. This is clearly not in the interests of the United States.

A smaller U.S. embassy incapable of issuing visas for separated families, entrepreneurs traveling to the U.S. for training programs and scientists, academics and others involved in important bilateral cooperation will cause significant harm to the American and Cuban people.

Moreover, pulling out of Cuba will set a terrible precedent for the U.S. presence around the world. If these are targeted attacks, the culprits could use same technology and techniques elsewhere.

For several months, U.S. diplomats serving in Havana have been given the option to remain in Cuba along with their family members or depart, and the overwhelming majority have chosen to stay. They are privy to the risks and should have the choice to serve or not, weighing the complexity of the situation. Many believe the suffering caused by being separated from their families outweigh the risk of staying in Cuba. Earlier this week, Barbara Stephenson, the president of the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), stated that they are against this move. Stephenson [said](https://www.buzzfeed.com/johnhudson/us-withdraws-bulk-of-staff-in-havana-over-unexplained?utm_term=.sfYW0w6Al5#.wyJ7Nxayk6) that AFSA members, "are clear that they have a mission to do. American diplomats need to remain on the field and in the game.”

The U.S. should cooperate with Cuban and Canadian authorities, as well as international organizations to duly investigate these incidents. This issue should not be politicized. Unfortunately, certain members of Congress are bringing ideology and hometown politics into an issue of national security.

“The United States must prioritize the safety of our diplomats serving overseas. At the same time, this must be balanced with policies that serve U.S. national interest, such as a functioning U.S. embassy in Havana and travel in both directions,” he added. “It’s imperative that the U.S. make decisions based on facts in an atmosphere of transparency and absent of ideology and domestic politics.”

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