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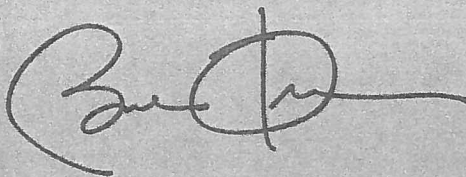
December 14, 2016

I am pleased to join in marking two years of progress since the historic decision made by the United States and Cuba to begin normalizing relations after decades of conflict and isolation.

In 2014, the United States extended a hand of friendship to the Cuban people. Our two countries have since worked together to restore diplomatic relations, open embassies, begin direct flights and mail service, increase people-to-people interaction, cooperate bilaterally on a range of issues of mutual interest, and open up space for Americans to do business on the island. These opportunities have been especially meaningful for Cuban Americans who have reconnected with family and a land that they love.

I visited Cuba earlier this year and saw firsthand the common spirit that unites our peoples despite decades of differences—the love we hold for our families, the pride we have for our countries, and the shared culture that comes from being neighbors. I believe that the American people and the Cuban people will benefit from engagement, which is why we must encourage travel and open up more space for commerce and exchange so that Americans and Cubans can collaborate further to find cures for diseases, create jobs, and open more doors of opportunity for the Cuban people. That is one reason why I have continued to call on the United States Congress to lift the trade embargo and travel ban.

By continuing to work together, we can further change an outdated approach that has failed to advance either of our interests and forge a future of greater peace and security. I thank all those who have played a role in normalizing relations between our two countries for their dedication, and I encourage you to carry forward the work of strengthening our partnership in the years ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be Barack Obama's signature, written in a cursive style.



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