

This document is a translation of the original Spanish-language document.

See the original [here](#).

February 22, 2017

Rosa Maria Payá

Chair of the Latin American Youth Network for Democracy

Dear Rosa Maria,

I have the honor of addressing you regarding my attendance at the awarding of the Oswaldo Payá prize today in Havana.

In this regard, please be informed of my inability to attend because my visa application for the official OAS passport was denied by the Cuban Consulate in Washington, while I was also denied the possibility of entry with a Uruguayan document, which does not require a visa.

Last Thursday, OAS official Chris Hernandez-Roy was called to a meeting by the Consul of Cuba in Washington and the First Secretary of the Consulate during which the following was conveyed to him:

- 1.-The surprise of the Cuban authorities at the reason for the visit
- 2.-That they would not grant us the visa
- 3.-That our entry to Cuba would be denied, (even in the case of travelling with a Uruguayan diplomatic passport)
4. - Their "astonishment" at the involvement of the Secretary General of the OAS in anti-Cuban activities
- 5.-That the reason for which we requested the visa is considered "an unacceptable provocation"
- 6.-That the prize is not recognized by the Cuban state
- 7.-They characterized the activities of "Cuba Decides" as undermining the Cuban electoral system.

We have responded to these arguments that *"The only interest on our part has been, continues to be, and will continue to be to facilitate bringing Cuba closer to the values and principles of the Inter-American system, both in terms of the defense of democracy and the promotion and respect for human rights, while expanding the achievements of Cuba in science, health, and education across our region."*

Moreover we have responded that some *"superficial and alarmist analysis appears to have warned that my visit and the ceremony could pose a danger for the future of Cuba-United States relations, and the well-being of the Cuban people, as it could motivate a hardening of the stance of the government toward groups that do not agree with it."*

Therefore we consider that *"it would be quite ridiculous if, after 58 years of revolution, both the well-being of the Cuban people and bilateral relations with the United States depended on this ceremony."*

It is not my interest to evaluate the internal political situation of Cuba or its different political tendencies and it is not for me to comment on it.

I explained that “my presence and the ceremony of February 22 are no different from other similar events that take place in other countries of the region and in which I have participated and that are carried out without the government necessarily supporting them, but without censoring them, because they are part of the tolerance of democratic systems and values.”

I also underlined that “my only additional concern is to guarantee that there is no form of repression or reprisal against the organizers of the event. That would be absolutely unjust and undesirable.”

I reiterated that “my presence and activities are in no way anti-Cuban. On the contrary I want Cuba to achieve the maximum levels of development and social well-being for its people, with all rights guaranteed for all Cubans.”

It is obvious that I disagree with the criminalization of the "Cuba Decides" group because the constitutional mechanisms of direct democracy they proclaim are an essential instrument for the expression of peoples. It is also clear that, on the contrary, I want to honor the memory of Oswaldo Payá.

That is why I requested that the decision taken be reviewed, but that was not possible.

Naturally I wish to continue working in the framework of cooperation established between the Latin American Youth Network for Democracy and the OAS.

I take advantage of this opportunity to reiterate to you the assurances of my highest consideration.

Luis Almagro
Secretary General