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**Negative Impact of Lack of Staff in US Embassy in Cuba Worries Congressmen**

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Washington, Aug 23 (Prensa Latina) The negative impact of the reduction of personnel in the US embassy in Cuba ordered by the Trump Administration was today reflected in a memorandum from the Congressional Research Service (CRS), some media reported.

Democratic representative Eliot Engel, ranking House Foreign Affairs Committee member, announced this week he asked the CRS to assess the effects of the situation in the diplomatic legation in Havana, after the number of staffers was reduced from over 50 to only 14. The Hill, a newspaper on Congressional affairs, highlighted staff at the U.S. embassy in Havana are taking on multiple responsibilities and say they are undermined in their ability to carry out embassy duties by drastic staff reductions imposed by the Trump administration. The administration unilaterally took the decision to cut personnel in September last year, following alleged health incidents reported by US officials who worked in the Cuban capital, but providing no evidence of the ailment whose causes are unknown until now.

Additionally, the US Administration suspended the delivery at its mission in Havana of visas for immigrants and non-immigrant's, expelled 17 Cuban

diplomats from Washington and increased to level three, of a maximum of four, its travel warning to Cuba.

From the moment these measures were implemented, both the Island's Government and US sectors, including legislators, warned of the negative effects they would have for families in both countries and the risk that the United States would fail to comply with its commitments.

CRS memorandum, quoted by media such as The Hill and by the Engage Cuba coalition, referred to the fact that the majority of Cubans applying for a visa to travel to the US must resort to US embassy or consulate in a third nation.

As a result, it is more difficult for Cubans to visit their relatives in the United States, while trips of people from the private sector are also difficult and some cultural groups have had to cancel their presentations in the United States.

During the first nine months of fiscal year 2018, which began on October 1, less than 4,000 immigrant visas were granted to Cubans. The migration agreement reached in 1994 between the two nations establishes the granting by Washington of 20,000 visas a year. According to Engage Cuba, the memo also indicates that there are limited services to serve US citizens in Cuba and problems maintaining 45 diplomatic residences, most of which are now empty.

The report noted that the staff situation 'potentially reduces the capacity of the State Department to understand the situation on the ground', among other issues.

The news on this report is released after this month the US Government reduced to one year the term that its diplomats can stay in Cuba, under the argument of security reasons, although many sectors of this country recognize the island as a very safe place.

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