

The Interview with Josefina Vidal – Part Two

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This is a continuation of Cuba Business Report's interview with Her Excellency, Josefina de la Caridad Vidal Ferreiro, the Ambassador of Cuba to Canada. The interview took place in late January in Ottawa. In part two of the interview, the Ambassador of Cuba to Canada.

The Interview with Josefina Vidal - Part Two speaks about economic development in Cuba, politics – in terms of Helms-Burton Title III, foreign investment, more of the lives of women in Cuba, and shares a little about her career.

Cuba Business Report: And what do you see personally, as Cuba's challenges over the next five years?

Ambassador Vidal: As a country, I think our main challenge is how to make our economy more efficient and how we accelerate the development of the Cuban economy so that we can deliver more and respond to the increasing needs of the society and the Cuban population, and improve the standard of living of our people. I think this is what is more needed. We have a wonderful people, well trained and nice people, a strong culture, and in the State and the government we are very well aware of that.

And this is one of the key goals of the process of huge economic transformation we are going through in the country. The goal is to accelerate our development, to be more efficient, to produce more so that we can improve the life of our people.

And you know, we have made our own mistakes in the economic field, and that is why we have

been reviewing many policies in the last eight years. But it's not all our mistakes. There are the mistakes that we have made, because making a revolution is not easy, no one had a model how to do that, we have had to learn in the process within the years, and to rectify many things that we were doing after we realized that wasn't the right way to do and that we had to make changes.

But you cannot forget all the pressures, the permanent and constant external pressures of the US blockade that is still in place, and still makes our life very, very hard, very difficult. That's why we say that, in spite of the mistakes that we might have made, the blockade is the main obstacle for the development of the Cuban economy in all its potential, because it's not just a matter of what we want to do; we want to do many things and many times we find in our operations abroad, in our financial, trade operations a lots of obstacles because of the US policy.

So that fact has to be taken into account, as it costs a lot of money to the Cuban economy and affects the life of the people directly; it's a reality, it's not propaganda. We have many examples every year of how the blockade affects our people, affects the economy, because with the idea and the goal of affecting the government, the Americans have been hurting the people. Those are our challenges, how to continue improving our economy, how to make it more efficient so that we can improve the life of the people and satisfy their needs, and at the same time, how we do that in an international environment in which the US seems to be going to a policy of confrontation with Cuba once again, unfortunately.

Cuba Business Report: A lot of companies want to do business with Cuba. I've talked to many investors with good projects for Cuba and they complain about how long it takes and some people (the investors) end up walking away.

Ambassador Vidal: We are working on that. This is a problem we have already identified and we have been changing the procedures for foreign investors to the current US government already adopted several measures a year ago, to crack down on travel to Cuba, on business with Cuba. It issued a list of hundreds of Cuban companies and entities with which the Americans cannot have any transaction, and now they're considering other actions against Cuba... like implementing Title III of Helms Burton Act, which would be a gross violation of international law, the rules of international trade the sovereignty of States. It will affect foreign investors, traders, everyone.

Cuba Business Report: The head of the European Union, Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the Commission, said that the U.S. would not dictate EU policy. She said this about a year ago when she was in Havana. A Britain politician also said this recently.

Ambassador Vidal: She said that a year ago when she was in Havana. I saw that. It is important that people know that the US is reinforcing the blockade and is permanently looking for other ways to tighten it more, and to go further in its confrontation with Cuba. Additionally, they are talking again about putting Cuba back in the so called terrorist list to which we have never belonged to.

There is a group of very hardline people which represent a minority in the U.S., in Florida mainly, who don't want to see any rapprochement between Cuba and the United States, and they're working fast, now that they occupy important foreign policy positions, looking for ways to revert everything that was done under the Obama administration.

Cuba Business Report: There is not enough about Cuba in the mainstream media. There's a lot in the Cuban press but how many people read that outside of Cuba? I mean, a lot of what you've told me here today is published nowhere in the mainstream media.

Ambassador Vidal: You are right. At the end of last year I attended a reception for the whole diplomatic corps here, where I had the opportunity to talk to the Canadian Minister of Women Issues and when I said to her that more than half of the Cuban Parliament is women and that more than 65% of the professional and technical working force in Cuba is women, when I said to her that we have always received the same salary as men and that our reproductive sexual rights are totally guaranteed, so I just mentioned three or four examples, she asked me, how did you do that? And I just said, we had a Revolution 60 years ago and that changed completely the life of women in Cuba.

Cuba Business Report: In the American press, we always hear about racism in Cuba and no religious freedom in Cuba.

Ambassador Josefina Vidal: Pure propaganda. Cuba Business Report: A personal question for you. How did you enter the field of politics? Was it your goal to be an ambassador? No. As a child I used to tell my mother that I would like to study something that permitted me to learn foreign languages, to know other cultures, other countries, other places my mother (she's already passed away) spoke English very well.

So when I was in the last high school year, 12th grade, and I was thinking about what I wanted to study at the University, I said to myself, why not study international relations? So this is what I decided to do. After graduating from the University, I worked for several years at the University of Havana, and then I decided to join the Foreign Service... and this is it.

I've always worked very hard, I'm a workaholic. And then, they were giving me one responsibility after the other, but I never set that as a goal, to become an Ambassador. It evolved naturally.

Business Report: Ambassador, I'd like to thank you for your time and for the very interesting interview. Deeply appreciated.
