
Venezuela and Bolivia Challenge OAS on Supporting U.S. and Cuba

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The OAS permanent council meeting on Monday convened to support the rapprochement between the two countries began five hours late due to disagreements over the draft declaration, distorting the image of unity that the majority of the member states wanted to promote.

“The inability to quickly reach a consensus on a thing as simple as expressing our satisfaction is an injustice to this organization,” said the ambassador of Grenada, Angus Friday, who expressed the frustration of some Caribbean countries at the start of the meeting in the absence of an agreement.

The draft had been ready since Friday, but Bolivia’s proposal to include the end of the U.S. economic embargo on Cuba forced the permanent representatives to request extra time to allow them to communicate with their countries and determine their official positions.

Although all countries agreed to classify the normalization as a “historical” fact, disagreement arose over Bolivia’s proposal – supported by Nicaragua, Venezuela, Ecuador and El Salvador – which did not get enough votes to move forward.

The lifting of the embargo on Cuba depends on the United States Congress, but the Venezuelan envoy to the OAS, Carmen Velasquez de Visbal, considered that “an appeal of this kind would help the government of this country in its contacts with the legislature.”

A day after the announcement of the restoration of relations with Cuba last week, U.S. President Barack Obama signed the sanctions adopted by the Congress against Venezuelan officials linked to violence and repression during the student demonstrations in February which resulted in 43 deaths and hundreds of wounded.

Bolivia, Venezuela and Nicaragua joined on Monday the vote on the declaration by acclamation of the final resolution on Cuba, but said that they would include footnotes reflecting their position.

The Canadian representative, Jennifer May Loten, said that her country also would have liked a more ambitious text including a reference to human rights.

Loten, however, said she believed that a document that reflects something on which everyone can agree on, should prevail.

The Colombian representative, Andres Gonzalez, said that the rapprochement between the United States and Cuba was a sign that leaves behind the resistance to change and opens a new era for the region.

"It is time for the future of the Americas," said Gonzalez.
