
Obama 'Interested' in Visiting Cuba

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U.S. President Barack Obama said Monday he is open to visiting Cuba sometime in 2016.

"I am very much interested in going to Cuba, but I think the conditions have to be right," Obama said in an interview with Yahoo News.

The president said "progress in the liberty and freedom and possibilities of ordinary Cubans" would be a precondition for a visit. That seemed to include being able to "talk to anybody," including U.S. funded "pro-democracy" groups.

During the same interview, Obama conceded he would likely be unable to fulfill his electoral promise to close Guantanamo Bay, adding that a future U.S. president may decide to hand the site back to Cuba.

The interview was conducted on the one year anniversary of an announcement that Washington and Havana would restore diplomatic ties.

While both sides say significant progress has been made over the past year, the Cuban government says normal ties will be impossible unless the United States dismantles its blockade.

Obama said in July that the blockade had failed. Since then, he has often hinted that it would soon be lifted. But despite beginning a path to normalize bilateral dealings, including lifting some travel and trade bans to the island, the sanctions continue, as a change of policy would have to be passed by the U.S. Congress.

Cuban President Raul Castro has reiterated that in order for full relations to be re-established, the United States must meet four conditions: to leave Guantanamo detention camp; end the blockade; end the "wet-foot-dry-foot" law encouraging Cubans to pursue residency in the U.S.; and end anti-government radio and television transmissions into the island.

Lifting of the half-century blockade would represent a historic moment for Cubans, 77 percent of whom were born under the harsh economic conditions resulting from it.
