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Obama: We are here to extend a hand of friendship

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"We are here to extend a hand of friendship to the Cuban people," said Barack Obama, President of the United States, during a speech broadcasted live on Cuban TV from the Alicia Alonso Grand Theater of Havana.

The US president addressed the Cuban civil society with the presence of his Cuban counterpart Raul Castro, along First Vice-President Miguel Diaz-Canel, Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez and several other Cuban top officials.

Obama started his speech by citing in perfect Spanish a verse of Cuba's National Hero Jose Marti, "cultivo una rosa blanca" which he use to offer a peace greeting to Cubans.

We are here to bury the last vestige of the Cold War, of that era of conflicts between the US and Cuba, said Obama when acknowledging the contradictions between the two countries for over 50 years.

"Our differences are real and important," he said before listing the cultural values between shared by the two societies, and common points in History, religion and sports

We are like brothers that have been estranged for a long time though we share the same blood, he said.

It is time to lift the embargo, was his plead to the US Congress, because it is an obsolete burden to the Cuban people

He said that isolation policy doesn't make any sense in the 21st century, while adding that the US "doesn't have either the capacity or the intention to impose changes in Cuba"

He encouraged Cubans to work hard, put their talents into it, to build a better future for their children. He added that broader access to internet will enable Cubans to take full advantage of the technological potential the web offers

We should not fear change, but embrace it, he said when stressing the importance of the process towards the normalization of relations between Cuba and the US, and reiterated his willingness to look into the future "with hope and respecting differences"

He praised the quality of the health and education systems as well as the changes taking place in Cuba as part of its process of updating its economic model.

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