

Cuba's Foreign Minister Thanks Switzerland for Bridging Ties with Washington



Havana, August 14 (RHC-Xinhua) -- Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez has thanked the Swiss government for bridging ties between Havana and Washington in the decades-long standoff between the countries.

Rodriguez expressed gratitude while meeting his Swiss counterpart, Didier Burkhalter, in the Cuban capital Havana Thursday. Burkhalter is the highest-ranking Swiss official visiting the Caribbean nation in decades.

Rodriguez said Burkhalter's visit indicates a positive sign of improving the bilateral ties, eyeing cooperation in culture, science, trade and other sectors. "We have a particular potential for development in renewable energy, biotechnology and agriculture," said the Cuban foreign minister.

For his part, Burkhalter, whose visit in Cuba was the first on behalf of the Swiss government, said it's an honor to contribute to the dialogue between Havana and Washington. He also congratulated Cuba on entering a new era following the resumption of diplomatic relations with Washington.

The top Swiss diplomat held talks with Cuba's Vice President Ricardo Cabrisas on Thursday.

Invited by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, Burkhalter attended Friday's flag-raising ceremony for the new U.S. embassy.

Switzerland has long played an intermediary role amid five-decades of isolation and enmity between Washington and Cuba. Since the two countries cut off ties in 1961, Switzerland had represented the U.S. interests in Cuba and Czechoslovakia did the same for Havana.

Since the end of the Cold War, Switzerland had replaced Czechoslovakia to represent Cuba.

In 1977, the United States and Cuba dispatched diplomatic missions, called "Interests Sections," which were technically operated as part of Switzerland's embassies in Washington and Havana.

The U.S. and Cuba announced a historic thaw in December 2014 and reopened embassies in Washington and Havana in July.

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