

# *First Vice President Miguel Díaz-Canel Leads Delegation to Inauguration of Panama Canal Expansion*

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Cocolí, June 27 (RHC)-- First Vice President Miguel Díaz-Canel led the Cuban delegation to the official inauguration Sunday of the Panama Canal Expansion. After more than \$5 billion and close to a decade of construction, Panama opened the long awaited expansion of its storied waterway.

Fireworks exploded as the huge Chinese-owned Cosco Shipping Panama container ship made an inaugural passage through the newly expanded Panama Canal on Sunday, formally launching the Central American nation's multi billion-dollar bet on a bright economic future despite tough times for global shipping.

"This is an achievement that all of us Panamanians should be proud of," President Juan Carlos Varela said at the ceremony attended by more than 2,000 guests from 62 countries, including several regional heads of state, among them Michelle Bachelet (Chile), Luis Guillermo Solís (Costa Rica), Danilo Medina (Dominican Republic), Juan Orlando Hernández (Honduras), and Horacio Cartes (Paraguay).

President Varela added: "Today marks a historic moment for Panama, for our hemisphere and the world."

The waterway's capacity has doubled with the new locks, and authorities said that 85 percent of the 166 reserved crossings scheduled for the next three months are for container ships. Container cargo accounts for nearly 50 percent of the canal's overall income.

Other members of the Cuban delegation to Panama included Deputy Foreign Minister Ana Teresita González Fraga and the country's ambassador to Panama, Antonio Miguel Pardo Sánchez.

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