April 1, 2013

The Honorable John F. Kerry
U.S. Secretary of State

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing on behalf of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) to request your support to resolve the difficulties in obtaining U.S. visas that are faced by Cuban scholars whom we have invited to our upcoming International Congress, to be held in Washington, DC, May 29-June 1, 2013.

LASA is the largest association of Latinamericanists in the United States, with over 8,000 members. Our members are principally scholars who teach in colleges and universities across the country. LASA also has many members from across Latin America as well as Europe and East Asia. As has been the case for past LASA Congresses, we expect that thousands of LASA members from across the world will be participating in our meeting.

For many years, LASA has also included members from Cuba. When the Bush administration decided on a blanket denial of visas to all Cubans, regardless of their individual circumstances, LASA felt ethically compelled to move its Congresses to Canadian or Latin American cities. One year ago, we held the LASA Congress once again in the United States but, to our dismay, a significant number of our Cuban colleagues were denied U.S. visas. As it turns out, some of the best known Cuban scholars were denied a visa.

We are writing in advance of this May’s LASA Congress in the hope that you would be able to make a difference this time. The Cuban scholars who wish to participate in the LASA Congress demonstrate, by that very fact, their interest in engaging with their counterparts in the United States. They expect to participate in a LASA Congress marked by vigorous debate and widespread engagement. In this respect, LASA’s welcoming attitude toward our Cuban colleagues to join such an event is very consistent with the values of open debate, democratic contestation, and participation that you have supported publicly during your career in public service. As Secretary of State, we hope you will support our endeavor to include our Cuban colleagues in democratic and scholarly debates.

The denial of visas to many Cuban scholars, we wish to emphasize, also violates the freedoms of the U.S. citizens who are our members and who participate in our Congresses. We hope that the U.S. State Department, under your leadership, will set an example in demonstrating to our members, including our Cuban members, that the U.S.
government promotes and defends academic freedom and thus will not deny visas to prevent the exercise of such freedoms by U.S. or Cuban citizens.

We are prepared to work with you, with State Department officials, and with others in the administration to address any concerns that may arise.

Sincerely,

Evelyne Huber
LASA President
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Merilee Grindle
LASA Vice President
Harvard University

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