

Publication: Miami Herald; Date: Dec 12, 2014; Section: Front Page; Page: 1A



FUTURE OF THE AMERICAS

Freeing Alan Gross key to better Cuba ties, Clinton says

■ In an interview with the Miami Herald, former President Bill Clinton said it 'is really foolish to allow what is clearly a questionable incarceration' to derail U.S.-Cuba ties.

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Former President Bill Clinton said the United States might be "well on its way" to ending the Cuban embargo, and that there were multiple areas where the two foes could cooperate, if the island would release USAID sub-contractor Alan Gross.

In an interview with the Miami Herald on Thursday, Clinton said that his wife, Hillary Clinton, had come out in favor of ending the half-century embargo in her recent book about her time as secretary of state.

"I think we would be well on our way to doing it [ending the blockade] if they released Alan Gross," he said of the contractor who has served five years of a 15-year sentence. "It is really foolish to allow what is clearly a



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AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI: President Bill Clinton addresses regional leaders.

• **TURN TO CLINTON, BA**

FUTURE OF THE AMERICAS

Clinton calls on Cuba to free Gross

CLINTON, FROM 1A

questionable incarceration to imperil the whole future of U.S.-Cuban relations, but that's not my call to make."

But Clinton also welcomed the more "nuanced" view of Cuba that was emerging — one where the communist island could be recognized for its role in Haiti's earthquake response or responding to the Ebola outbreak in Africa.

"We can't turn a blind eye when we think you're wrongly oppressing... We can't pretend what happened hasn't happened," he said of Cuba's human rights violations. "But there may be a way for us to work together going forward."

Clinton made the comments on the sidelines of the "Future of the Americas" summit that his foundation hosted Thursday at the University of Miami.

The meeting brought together business and political leaders from around the region to plot the coming decades and pass recommendations along to the 2015 Summit of the Americas in Panama.

On Wednesday, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry indicated that Washington will not stand in the way if Cuba attends the event for the first time. That same day, however, Congress potentially added another obstacle to regional integration when it approved a bill that would freeze assets and deny visas to Venezuelan authorities who cracked down on anti-government rallies earlier this year.

On Thursday, the White House said President Barack Obama will sign the bill into law.

Clinton said the sanctions were merited, but he also questioned their effectiveness. He noted that the Nicolás Maduro administration in Venezuela is adept at blaming its problems on the United States and that the sanctions may give Caracas ammunition.

"The main thing we ought to be working on is getting Venezuela back into the community of nations with a normal relationship and a normal political system with reasonable elections where some-



TACKLING REGION'S WOES: From left, former President Bill Clinton talks with Juan Manuel Santos, president of Colombia; Susan Fonseca, founder/CEO of Woman@TheFrontier; and Carlos Slim, the world's second-richest man, at the University of Miami. PEDRO PORTAL/EL NUEVO HERALD

times your crowd wins and sometimes it doesn't," he said.

Thursday's event was focused on tackling regional problems by engaging some of the region's most influential thinkers. Among the attendees were Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, the world's second-richest man Carlos Slim, Inter American Development Bank President Luis Alberto Moreno, and Susan Fonseca, the founder and CEO of Woman@TheFrontier.

During the day-long meeting, delegates addressed issues such as energy, employment and chronic disease that could hold sway in the decades to come.

The meeting fell on the 20th anniversary of the first Summit of the Americas that then-President Clinton organized in Miami. It was the first time that all the regions' leaders — except Cuba's Fi-

del Castro — had met in almost three decades.

At that time, there was a consensus that free trade could pull the region out of poverty. The flagship initiative of the conference was the creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas. That agreement never materialized, but commerce boomed nonetheless and the region prospered.

If commercial power helped define the last few decades, the democratization of power may be the theme of years to come, Clinton said.

"There is a much greater understanding now that power is more dispersed for good and ill," he said, speculating that governments may play a more limited, goal-setting role in the future as business and non-governmental organizations fill in the gaps.

But the last 20 years have also

brought surprises, Clinton said.

"The climate change problem is much more severe than we thought 20 years ago," he said, "and it's bearing down on us."

The problem also may hold the seeds of the next economic surge: Overhauling the \$6 trillion energy sector could create jobs as it saves the environment.

"This whole energy thing may play out in a very interesting and dramatic way in the Americas over the next 20 years," he said.

These challenges come amid shifts in regional politics. Just a few decades ago, the United States was the undisputed power in the hemisphere and what happened in Washington rippled through Patagonia.

But the field is increasingly crowded, as the likes of Brazil, China, India and Europe play a larger role in the area. China, for

one, has become a major trading partner in Latin America and is slated to break ground on a \$50 billion trans-oceanic canal through Nicaragua later this month.

"I used to say all the time when I was in office ... that I was trying to build a world that I would like for our children and grandchildren to live in when we are no longer the only big dog on the block," Clinton said.

The rise of these nations in no way "means the decline of America. Whether we go into decline or not is up to us," he said.

"We should welcome other people's prosperity," he said. "I just think it's a terrible mistake to be rooting against somebody. We should be rooting for them and get them to become part of a cooperative rather than a competitive world."