

# John Kerry urges Miami college students to embrace diversity

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Secretary of State encourages students at Miami Dade Honors College to have faith in the American dream

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Earlier in the day Kerry met with Cuban-American leaders

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He denounced Cuba for discriminating against Cuban Americans in Carnival's proposed cruise service to the island

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Secretary of State John Kerry exhorted Miami Dade Honors College students to pursue an inclusive American dream that includes “what our country stands for internationally.”

To encourage freedom, he said, the United States wants to help “the Cuban people to begin a new chapter in their history.” He acknowledged that there are critics who believe Cuba has done nothing to deserve a new relationship with the United States, but said the policy of engagement and resumption of diplomatic ties with Cuba is the correct one.

“It’s hard to think of a weaker diplomatic tool than a closed embassy,” he said. Kerry said President Barack Obama’s recent trip to Cuba where he stood side by side with Cuban leader Raúl Castro and answered tough questions about human rights, political prisoners and what freedom means was of great value.

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Try watching this video on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), or enable JavaScript if it is disabled in your browser.

The secretary spoke at a special medallion awards ceremony for Miami Dade Honors College students prior to the college’s April 30 commencement. The Honors College at Miami Dade College, which

emphasizes rigorous academics and a global perspective, has been recognized as a stepping stone to prestigious colleges and universities around the world.

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The crowd of 750 people, which included 244 freshmen and 187 second-year students, gave Kerry a standing ovation as he made his way to the stage. Many held their cell phones up snapping photos and recording most of his half-hour speech.

Kerry said he had one request of the students: “Don’t let anyone undermine your faith in the American dream.” And he added that the dream begins with diversity. The secretary of state said Miami Dade College, with students from 199 countries who speak 88 languages represented in the student body, is emblematic of that diversity.

“The real American dream is about a lot more than money and jobs. It’s also about our responsibility to one another,” Kerry said.

“Everyone needs to be considered a shareholder in the American dream.”

Kerry’s speech to the students at the Freedom Tower, which he called the “Ellis Island of the South,” wasn’t billed as being political. But playing to a Miami audience, he couldn’t help but touch on Cuba and

the politics of exclusion being espoused by some Republican presidential hopefuls.

“It’s almost impossible to be angry when focusing on helping someone else,” said Kerry, who encouraged students to consider careers in public service and at the State Department. “Your country really does need you,” he said.

Earlier in the day, Kerry waded into the controversy surrounding Carnival Corp.’s plans to begin trips to Cuba aboard its Fathom line on May 1.

Fathom has declined to book passengers born in Cuba on the inaugural trip because of a Cuban restriction against people born in Cuba arriving in or departing from the island in a vessel.

“The United States government will never support, never condone discrimination. And the Cuban government should not have the right to enforce on us a policy of discrimination against people who have the right to travel,” Kerry said during an interview with the Miami Herald and CNN en Español.

“American citizens, Cuban-Americans, have a right to travel, and we should not be in a situation where the Cuban government is forcing its discrimination policy on us,” he said.

Earlier in the day, Kerry stopped by the U.S. Passport Office in Miami for a meeting with local U.S. State Department personnel. It was followed by a meeting with Cuban-American leaders, including healthcare executive Mike Fernandez, Miami Dade College President Eduardo Padron, developer Jorge Perez and Felice Gorordo, co-founder of Roots of Hope, among others.

Kerry didn’t take any media questions during his stop at Miami Dade College, but on Wednesday he did comment on Cuba after the State Department released its 2015 *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. The report on Cuba noted its “abridgement of the ability of

citizens to choose their government; the use of government threats, physical assault, intimidation, and violent government-organized counter protests against peaceful dissent” as well as harassment and detentions to prevent free expression and peaceful assembly.

In remarks Wednesday, Kerry noted that Cuba is one of the countries where “our backing for human rights and democratic principle is a focus of our diplomacy.” He also included the Central Asia state and Egypt.

During trips to Cuba, Kerry said that both he and President Obama had urged Cuban authorities to allow more political openness and online access.

“There is no question in my mind that most Cubans are far more interested in plugging into the world economy than in recycling arguments left over from the Cold War. The only question is how long it will take for the officials in Havana to catch up with the population.”

He went on to point that not every conversation the United States has on human rights bears fruit but “steady effort, we have seen again and again, can foster progress and make a difference.”

*Miami Herald Staff Writers Andres Oppenheimer and Carli Teproff contributed to this report.*