

# Obama renews Cuba trade embargo

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US President Barack Obama has extended the 47-year-old trade embargo against Cuba for another year.

In a statement, Mr Obama said that it was in the US national interest to extend the Trading With The Enemy Act which covers the trade embargo.

It is largely a symbolic step because the final decision rests with Congress.

Under legislation from 1996, the Helms-Burton Act, the embargo can only be lifted when Cuba is deemed to have begun a democratic transition.

Cuba has been under a financial, trade and travel ban since 1962 - one of the last surviving remnants of the Cold War.

Critics see it as a missed opportunity to signal a further willingness to ease relations between the two countries.

Mr Obama has lifted some of the restrictions allowing Cuban-Americans to visit relatives whenever they want and send money home.

The two sides are once again holding direct talks on immigration and later this week US officials travel to Cuba to discuss resuming direct mail services.

The Cuban authorities have described these changes as little more than a cosmetic coat of paint, but the US administration continues to demand that Cuba must first show signs of reform before lifting the embargo.