

Cuba (re)establishes diplomatic relations with South Korea



Former imperial palace in Seoul (Source: [Commons](#))

Cuba and South Korea have re-established diplomatic relations after more than 60 years. As the Cuban Foreign Ministry [announced](#) on Wednesday, the establishment of diplomatic and consular relations was agreed as part of an exchange between the two delegations at the United Nations.

Cuba and South Korea first established interstate relations in 1949, which were interrupted in 1960. According to the AFP news agency, citing diplomatic circles, Havana has so far refused to resume relations out of consideration for its ties with North Korea.

Cuba has maintained friendly relations with North Korea since the revolution in 1959 and has an embassy in Pyongyang. Both countries regard each other as socialist brother states, and relations were particularly close during the Cold War. They reached their peak after North Korea joined the Non-Aligned Movement in 1975, of which Cuba is also a member. The relationship later cooled. Regular consultations at party level, which take place with other socialist countries like China, Vietnam and Laos, do not take place with North Korea. Following the death of Fidel Castro in 2016, North Korea declared three days of national mourning. Most recently, Cuba's President Miguel Díaz-Canel paid a visit to North Korea as part of an extended trip to Asia in 2018. It was the first state visit to Korea since Fidel Castro's visit in 1986.

Initial attempts to revive relations between South Korea and Cuba came to nothing in 2015. In the context of the recent rhetorical escalation on the Korean peninsula, South Korea made a new attempt, which was crowned with success this time. A high-ranking South Korean presidential official said that the establishment of diplomatic relations between Seoul and

Havana would "inevitably deal a significant political and psychological blow" to Pyongyang. "The establishment of diplomatic relations (with Cuba) is a culmination of our efforts to expand our diplomacy to countries that were part of the socialist bloc, including countries that were friendly to North Korea," the South Korean official said.

South Korea is now one of Cuba's most important trading partners in the Asian region after China and Vietnam, particularly when it comes to imports of electronics and vehicles: brands such as Samsung, Hyundai and Kia can be found all over the island. In 2017, Samsung was allowed to open its own store in the state shopping center "3ra y 70" in Havana, something that only a few foreign companies have managed to accomplish in Cuba so far.

In 2022, the volume of trade between Cuba and South Korea amounted to 96 million US dollars, while goods worth just under two million US dollars were exchanged with North Korea in the same year. By establishing diplomatic relations with Cuba, South Korea hopes to "open up new business opportunities for South Korean companies and facilitate consular services for its nationals," a spokesperson for the South Korean foreign ministry told AFP. ([Cubaheute](#))