

U.S. pressure forces Sherritt to withdraw from Cuba



Sherritt's headquarters in the Canadian province of Alberta (Source: [Nut Graf/Commons/CC-BY-SA 3.0](#))

On May 7, 2026, the Canadian mining company Sherritt International ceased its direct involvement in joint venture activities in Cuba, effective immediately. The company, which has been one of the most important and longest-standing major foreign investors on the island since entering the market in 1994, was responding to an [Executive Order](#) signed by U.S. President Donald Trump on May 1, 2026, which significantly expands U.S. sanctions against Cuba.

Sherritt stated in a [statement](#) that while the company had not yet been formally designated under the executive order, such a designation could occur at any time. The mere existence of the order, it said, created conditions that fundamentally altered business operations under normal circumstances. The company is now initiating the repatriation of its employees working in Cuba and has asked its Cuban partners to withdraw their personnel stationed in Canada as well. At the same time, three members of the board of directors resigned effective immediately.

The refinery in Fort Saskatchewan, Canada, is not immediately affected by the withdrawal for the time being. Nickel and cobalt production there will continue. However, according to the company, existing raw material stocks will only last until around mid-June.

Cuba has one of the largest nickel deposits in the world. [Estimates](#) put nickel reserves at around 5.5 million tons, which corresponds to just under 6 percent of global reserves. The raw material is primarily used in stainless steel production, in high-strength alloys, in batteries for electric vehicles, and in anti-corrosion coatings.

What the new U.S. sanctions mean

The Executive Order of May 1 marked the starting point of the latest escalation. According to the published text of the order, the sanctions can apply to “any foreign person” operating in Cuba’s energy, defense, raw materials, mining, financial services, or security sectors. In addition, so-called secondary sanctions—that is, punitive measures against banks and financial service providers worldwide—threaten those who process transactions with the affected individuals.

On May 7, [the Trump administration followed up](#): The U.S. Treasury Department added the Cuban military conglomerate Grupo de Administración Empresarial S.A. ([GAESA](#)) and the nickel joint venture Moa Nickel S.A.—in which Sherritt holds a stake—to the list of “Specially Designated Nationals,” the so-called SDN list. This is the first concrete measure resulting directly from the May 1 order.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated that GAESA controls at least 40 percent of the Cuban economy. He accused the Cuban government of facilitating intelligence operations by states hostile to the U.S.—a charge Havana rejects. “Today’s sanctions show that the Trump administration will not stand idly by while Cuba’s communist regime threatens our national security in our hemisphere,” [Rubio wrote](#) on the X platform. Further measures will be taken until the government implements the necessary political and economic reforms.

The sanctions against Moa Nickel strike a sensitive nerve in Cuba: the joint venture is one of the country’s most important sources of foreign exchange revenue. Paolo Spadoni, an expert on the Cuban economy at Augusta University, [told](#) the Canadian broadcaster *CBC*: “With the suspension of Sherritt’s activities, the U.S. has now effectively targeted all of Cuba’s major sources of foreign exchange.”

The sanctions are part of a series of further pressure measures: The Trump administration has severely restricted U.S. travel to Cuba and remittances to the island, attempted to dissuade regional allies from employing Cuban doctors, and blocked all fuel exports to Cuba since the abduction of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro on January 3. The latter has further exacerbated the island’s already severe energy crisis. On May 7, UN experts described the fuel boycott as “energy starvation” with grave consequences for development and human rights in Cuba.

Shortly before the sanctions were announced, Rubio held talks with military officers from U.S. Southern Command in Florida, which is responsible for U.S. operations in the Caribbean region. Prior to that, he held talks at the Vatican with Pope Leo, who had expressed concern about the growing tensions between the U.S. and Cuba and called for dialogue.

Havana: “Reckless economic aggression”

Cuba’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs [condemned](#) the measures in a May 7 statement in strong terms as “an act of reckless economic aggression” and a violation of international law and the principles of free trade.

The ministry warned of the extraterritorial effects of the sanctions, which could also affect foreign companies, banks, and institutions, even if they have no business ties to the U.S.

The measures were aimed at forcing Cuba out of the international economic and financial system. The international community was called upon to “counter this dangerous escalation in the U.S. quest for dominance and control over Cuba’s destiny.”

President Miguel Díaz-Canel [also spoke out](#) forcefully. “Our people already know the cruelty behind the actions of the U.S. government and the tenacity with which it is capable of attacking us,” he said. The sanctions, he said, are “a unilateral act of aggression against a nation and a people whose sole ambition is to live in peace, to be masters of their own destiny, and to do so without the harmful interference of U.S. imperialism.” ” Díaz-Canel also emphasized: “These measures exacerbate the already difficult situation in our country, just as much as they strengthen our resolve to defend the homeland, the Revolution, and socialism.” ([Cubaheute](#))