

Cuba wants hearing

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UNITED NATIONS (AP) -
Claiming it cannot receive a fair hearing before the U.N. Security Council, Cuba asked Wednesday to defend its downing of two American-owned planes before the General Assembly.

Under U.S. pressure, the Security Council approved a statement before dawn Tuesday strongly deploring the Cuban attack and ordering an investigation by the International Civil Aviation Organization in Montreal.

The move, hours before Cuban Foreign Minister Roberto Robaina arrived in New York, prompted Mr. Robaina to claim his country had been prevented from stating its case.

"We came to the United Nations with the idea to speak to the Security Council, but as you already know, the Security Council did not want to wait for us," Mr. Robaina told reporters.

"Therefore, as we do not care at all ... what is thought, said and done by that 'Insecurity' Council, we have requested" a hearing before the full General Assembly, he said.

The 15-member Security Council

can pass legally binding resolutions and wields more power than the General Assembly, which includes all U.N. member states.

But the General Assembly has voted overwhelmingly for four years in a row to urge the United States to lift its 30-year economic embargo against the Caribbean nation.

Mr. Robaina made a formal request to address the General Assembly during a meeting Tuesday with assembly president Diogo Freitas do Amaral of Portugal. His spokeswoman, Leona Forman, said Mr. Freitas do Amaral would consult with the council and leaders of regional blocs before making a decision.

In Havana, the Cuban Foreign Ministry claimed the United States delayed issuing a visa to Robaina so that he would be unable to address the council in time.

"The U.S. State Department delayed as much as it could," the statement said. "The council approved a declaration at 3:30 a.m. on Tuesday and Robaina received a visa at 4:30, one hour afterward."

But U.S. spokesman James Rubin said Mr. Robaina, who broke off a European tour Monday to head for New York, could have received a visa in time had he flown directly to the United States.

Mr. Rubin said Mr. Robaina decided instead to travel through Mexico City.

Council diplomats said the Americans pushed for a council decision early Tuesday despite the fact some members wanted to wait for Robaina.