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## Research Forum on Cuba

# Chronicle on Cuba January 2008

### HIGHLIGHTS

**Domestic Affairs:** The Cuban Catholic Church is making preparations for the visit of the Vatican Secretary of State to the island, in February. Fidel Castro is re-elected delegate to the National Assembly. Raul Castro obtains the highest number of votes in national elections. Opposition leaders denounce the increase of repression and physical violence against the dissident movement. Cuban workers protest recent government decision to make them pay income tax on hard currency bonuses.

**Economy:** Cuban service exports increased dramatically for the third consecutive year in 2007. For the first time, the Cuban nickel industry surpasses tourism as the country's top foreign exchange earner. Several articles in the official press criticize low agricultural production. Brazil and Cuba sign 10 agreements covering oil exploration, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals and agriculture. Cienfuegos refinery begins processing crude oil. Cuba participates in the inauguration of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas Bank.

**Exile Community:** Supporters of Luis Posada Carriles confront protesters demanding the arrest of the anti-Castro militant. Raul Rivero and Hector Palacio present in Madrid the last report by the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation.

**Foreign Affairs:** The president of India's Lower House, Somnath Chatterjee, visits the island. The number of Cuban illegal immigrants arriving in Honduras increases. Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva visits Cuba and meets Fidel and Raul Castro. Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage attends the 6th Summit of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas in Caracas. Fidel Castro writes four articles on his meeting with the Brazilian President. A major Cuban art exhibition opens in Montreal.

**Security:** Cuba's Eastern and Central armies begin military exercises.

**Terrorism:** Cuban Ambassador to Venezuela participates as a guarantor during the release of hostages held by the Colombian Revolutionary Army Forces.

US-Cuba Relations: The President of the Cuban Parliament says that systematic US threats against the island is one of the main reasons to vote for the slate of candidates in national elections. The US remains Cuba's main supplier of food and farm products. President Bush receives the wife of Cuban political prisoner Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet in the White House. The mother of Cuban political prisoner Normando Hernandez joins Laura Bush during the president's State of the Union address. In one of his Reflections, Fidel Castro harshly criticizes President Bush's State of the Union address.

## **LO MÁS RELEVANTE**

**Asuntos domésticos:** La Iglesia Católica de Cuba se encuentra en los preparativos para la visita en febrero del Secretario de Estado del Vaticano a la isla. Fidel Castro es reelegido delegado a la Asamblea Nacional. Raúl Castro obtiene el mayor número de votos en las elecciones nacionales. Líderes de la oposición denuncian el incremento de la represión y la violencia física contra el movimiento disidente. Trabajadores cubanos protestan la reciente decisión gubernamental de hacerlos pagar impuestos sobre gratificaciones en moneda convertible.

**Economía:** Las exportaciones por servicios aumentaron dramáticamente por tercer año consecutivo en 2007. Por primera vez, la producción de níquel supera al turismo en el ingreso de divisas. Brasil y Cuba firman 10 acuerdos sobre exploración petrolera, biotecnología, farmacéuticos y agricultura. Varios artículos en la prensa oficial critican la producción agrícola. La refinería de Cienfuegos inicia el procesamiento de crudo. Cuba participa en la inauguración del Banco de la Alternativa Bolivariana para las Américas.

**Comunidad de exiliados:** Seguidores de Luis Posada Carriles hacen abortar una demostración en favor de la encarcelación del militante anti castrista. Raúl Rivero y Héctor Palacio presentan en Madrid el último informe de la Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional.

**Asuntos exteriores:** El presidente de la Cámara Baja de la India, Somnath Chatterjee, visita la isla. Aumenta el número de cubanos inmigrantes ilegales que llegan a Honduras. El presidente de Brasil Luis Inacio Lula da Silva visita Cuba y se reúne con Fidel y con Raúl Castro. El vicepresidente cubano Carlos Lage asiste a la 6ta Cumbre de los Países de la Alternativa Bolivariana para las Américas en Caracas. Fidel Castro escribe cuatro artículos acerca de su reunión con el Presidente de Brasil. Una importante exposición de arte cubano queda abierta en Montreal.

**Seguridad:** Los ejércitos Oriental y Central de Cuba inician ejercicios militares.

**Terrorismo:** El embajador de Cuba ante Venezuela participa como garante de la liberación de dos rehenes a manos de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia.

Relaciones Cuba- Estados Unidos: El presidente del parlamento cubano dice que una de las razones principales para ejercer el voto unido en las elecciones generales son las

constantes amenazas de Estados Unidos hacia Cuba. EEUU se mantiene como el principal proveedor de alimentos y productos agrícolas a Cuba. El presidente Bush recibe en la Casa Blanca a la esposa del prisionero político cubano, Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet. La madre del prisionero político cubano Normando Hernández acompaña a Laura Bush durante el discurso presidencial acerca del Estado de la Unión. En una de sus Reflexiones, Fidel Castro critica duramente el discurso del Estado de la Unión del Presidente Bush.



## DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

**January 1:** Sergio Corrieri, president of the organizing committee of the Congress of the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC), said that "like all Cubans, I am also anxiously in need of information that may reveal or predict what the future has in store for us." In a recent letter to the members of UNEAC, Corrieri referred to the current political situation as "delicate" and "historical," and claims to keep very much in mind the speech Raúl Castro delivered in Parliament in December, 2007. [[Carta de Sergio Corrieri](#)] (*El País*, 21/1/08)

**January 1:** Cuban Cardinal Jaime Ortega y Alamino, archbishop of Havana, described the recognition by "the highest authorities" of the "need for changes" in Cuba as "a promising step that has created expectations." Ortega said that last year "Cubans from all walks of life" voiced "criticism, complaints and encouraging proposals based on the need for changes, still of the structural kind, in the organization and development of the national life." [[Homilía pronunciada por el Cardenal Jaime Ortega](#)] (*EER*, 2/1/08)

**January 1:** According to dissident leader Martha Beatriz Roque, seven opposition activists who were demanding the "unconditional release" of political prisoners were detained in the city of Santa Clara. The arrests took place as some 18 oppositionists carried out a protest "demanding the unconditional release of political prisoners," Roque declared. They were all subsequently released. (*AFP*, 2/1/08)

**January 2:** The book "One Hundred Hours with Fidel" was highly sought by readers during 2007 after its presentation in 19 book fairs in Latin America, Europe and Asia, noted the local press. The book was the result of an interview of the Cuban leader by Spanish-French writer and journalist Ignacio Ramonet and has been reedited several times, as well as corrected and enriched by Castro himself. Mirta Gonzalez, president of the Cuban Book Chamber told the press that 2007 marked an outstanding difference of Cuba's participation in international book fairs. Cuba officially announced that the 17th Havana Book Fair will be inaugurated on February 14. (*Prensa Latina*, 2/1/08)

**January 2:** Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage Davila visited the Hermanos Ameijeiras Hospital, which underwent a major renovation. Lage was accompanied by Pedro Saez

Montejo, first secretary of the Communist Party in the City of Havana, and Juan Contino Aslan, president of the Havana Province Parliament. Lage also spoke with workers at the Abdala Daycare Center, which just reopened. Juan Contino highlighted the progress made in daycare facilities since the year 2003, when some 100 centers had to be closed for repairs in Havana alone. During a visit to an apartment building, Lage insisted that the quality of the construction work should always be a priority, a problem he said lies in the training of the workforce and control mechanisms. During a visit to the Ministry of Sugar's vegetable farms, Lage was told that the amount of acreage planted would increase in 2008. In a visit to La Victora Cooperative dedicated to goat milk production, Pedro Saez praised the efforts of workers who, along with those on 25 other farms in the area, produce milk for children who suffer from certain kind of allergies. The Cuban Vice President also visited the "Toledo 2" work and study center, where some 300 inmates receive training. (*AIN*, 2/1/08)

**January 2:** Priests offering New Year's prophecies from Cuba's Afro-Cuban religion gave few hints on the future of convalescing leader Fidel Castro and instead warned about dangerous climate change and epidemics. Many Cubans eagerly await annual predictions from the Santeria religion, which is practiced by 3 million people in Cuba and uses animal sacrifices to contact Yoruba deities originally worshiped by slaves brought from Africa. Santeria priests, known as babalawos, steered clear of politics in this year's prophecies, instead warning about an environmental crisis, disease and crime. They noted an improving economy and said they planned sacrifices to better the lives of the majority of Cubans. "The challenge at this historic moment is not a political challenge (...) It is not a social challenge, but the challenge of nature," Victor Betancourt, a Havana priest, said at a news conference. (*Reuters*, 2/1/08)

**January 3:** After a New Year's recess, Cubans are getting ready for the legislative elections on January 20. All 1,815 candidates for the People's Power National Assembly and 14 provincial assemblies will continue to participate in rallies in the communities, municipalities and districts where they were nominated. In addition, they will visit work centers and schools in those territories until January 15. The candidates' photos and biographies are on display in public places and have been publicized on local media and television. More than 200,000 citizens who will be directly involved in the elections as officials from the grassroots to the national levels will take seminars and update courses to guarantee the success of the elections. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/1/08)

**January 4:** Cuba reported Latin America's lowest infant mortality rate in 2007, with 5.3 children under one year dead out of every 1,000 live births, official sources revealed. According to the UN Report on the State of the World's Children 2007, the world infant mortality rate was 52 deaths for each 1,000 live births, and Latin America's was 26. In western Africa, the figure was 108. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/1/08)

**January 3:** The President of the Cuban Language Academy, and national literature award winner, Lisandro Otero, passed away. He was 76. Otero's life was marked by a long and relevant career both as a writer and a journalist. He was one of the founders of Cuba's Artists and Writers Union (UNEAC). In 1963, he received the Casa de Las

Americas Award in the category of novel for his book “La situación” (The Situation), which won him a place among the cultural elite of the time. He was awarded the literary critics award in 1983 for “Temporada de ángeles” (Angels’ Season) and in 1992 for “Árbol de vida” (Life Tree). His remarkable work as a journalist also won him the national cultural journalism award. Otero contributed to publications especially related with cultural matters in Cuba, France and Mexico, where he was also awarded with the national journalism decoration granted by the Mexican Journalists Club. The Cuban writer was cultural attaché of the Cuban embassy to Chile and Great Britain. (ACN, 4/1/08)

**January 4:** According to an online article published in Granma, the list of candidates to be voted on in the January 20 general elections in Cuba, show an increase in the number of young people standing for election. Of the 614 candidates for the parliament, 374 (60.91 percent) were born after the triumph of the Revolution in 1959. Another 134 (21.82 percent) were under the age of ten. Only 106 candidates (17.25 percent) experienced capitalism in Cuba. In terms of continuity and renewal, 36.78 percent of the candidates (224) are incumbents in the current 609-member legislature. Therefore, a little over 63.22 percent (385 legislators) will be newcomers in the new legislature of 614 members with the additional 5 members reflecting population growth. The number of candidates speaks for itself in terms of equality: 42.16 percent of the candidates (265) are women, 118 of the candidates are black and 101 are “mestizos”. The majority (481) of candidates have university level education (78.34 percent) and 127 (20.68) have a high school and/or technical degrees. (RHC-ACN, 5/1/08)

**January 5:** The first two commemorative plaques for the 280th anniversary of the University of Havana were sent to Fidel and Raul Castro. Upon reading the dedication of the plaques, the rector of the educational center, Ruben Zardoya, said that Fidel and Raul - first as students and later as political leaders - are living examples of the worship of knowledge and ideas. "The perseverance and strength of these two leaders, who have faced innumerable challenges and dangers, summarize the premise of the education at the University of Havana: to transform the everyday reality in the interests of the nation," he added. (ACN, 7/1/08)

**January 6:** Eleven-year-old Rocio de Jesus Viso Bello, whose independent journalist father has been jailed by the government, donned a red-and-white suit and handed out dolls, toy cars, school supplies and DVD players to about 40 children of imprisoned dissidents. Held in the cramped living room of Laura Pollan, wife of political prisoner Hector Maseda, the event was sponsored by the Cuban American National Foundation, a Miami exile group dedicated to undermining the Castro government. "Today is a day of happiness for children who have to stand so much suffering the other 365 days of the year," Pollan said. (AP, 7/1/08)

**January 8:** Fidel Castro stressed the importance of voting for the slate of candidates at the upcoming January 20th general elections. In a message sent to the prime-time TV show 'The Round Table', Castro noted that all Cuban citizens have the right to vote for the candidates of their preference, but he stressed that voting for the entire list of

candidates expresses the Cuban people's unity of action. He also underscored in his message the 49th anniversary of the victorious arrival of the rebel army in Havana. He recalled the rally held back in 1959, at the Columbia Military Camp and the presence there of the late Commander Camilo Cienfuegos as well as other details about this important date in Cuban history. [[Fidel Castro's Letter to the Round Table](#)] (ACN, 9/1/08)

**January 8:** With fireworks, outdoor speeches and a message from their ailing iconic leader, Cubans celebrated Fidel Castro's triumphal entry into Havana 49 years ago at the head of his revolution. Thousands of revellers gathered at the La Punta square opposite the Tres Reyes del Morro castle to see the sky lit up by fireworks and attend cultural events on "Illuminated by Victory" night organized by the Union of Communist Youths (UJC). As expected, the celebrations did not include an appearance by Castro, who has only been seen on television since he underwent gastrointestinal surgery in July 2006 and handed over power "temporarily" to his brother Raul, 76. A power boat criss-crossed Havana Bay pulling a huge lighted sign bearing "Viva Fidel," on one side, and "Viva Raul" on the other. "Cuba's youth makes a gift of this event to all Cuba. We'll light up the city like (Castro's) victory lit up our people forever 49 years ago," UJC chief Cesar Hernandez. (AFP, 8/1/08)

**January 8:** Venerable Jose Olallo Valdes, a priest from the Brothers of St. John of God, may become Cuba's second person to be proclaimed a blessed in November 2008, sources from the Cuban Archdiocese of Camaguey said. Archbishop Juan de la Caridad García Rodríguez recently led a pilgrimage to the church of St. John of God, where the remains of the Venerable are buried. At the end of the pilgrimage, which included a cultural and artistic festival, Archbishop García described Brother Olallo Valdes as "an accomplished example of the identity and tradition of our city and Archdiocese". The Archbishop also encouraged the artists participating at the cultural festival in honor of the future Blessed to "use your art to highlight the personality of this humble religious." Born from unknown parents, Jose Olallo Valdes was born on February 12, 1820 and a month later was left at the Orphanage of San Jose in Havana. Br. Olallo Valdes joined the Order of St. John of God at a very young age and was soon moved to Camaguey to assist the victims of the 1835 cholera epidemic as a nurse. After 54 years of devoted service to the sick and the poor, which included times of both famine and war, Br. Olallo Valdes passed away on March 7 1889. His death so moved Camaguey's citizens, that a vast multitude attended his funeral and mourned his passing. (Catholic News Agency, 8/1/08)

**January 9:** In an extensive interview with the magazine "Espacio Laical," published by the Archdiocese of Havana, Cardinal Jaime Lucas Ortega said the Church in Cuba is "alive and united with her people." Speaking with reporter Lenier Gonzalez Mederos on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of John Paul II's visit to Cuba, the cardinal noted that during the first few years after the Castro revolution, the Church experienced a drop in the number of priests and personnel and a lack of resources to carry out her mission. The focus was mainly on internal Church affairs, the sacraments and the spiritual, moral and material support of the Catholic communities, he explained. "The Catholic faithful," he added, "has progressively understood that the Church has an irreplaceable mission to

carry out here, and the State has also progressively accepted and understood the mission of the Church, which is not limited just to worship.” Ortega acknowledged that the concept of “national reconciliation” is “a term that many times cannot be used in Cuba,” because it is often a politically charged idea that “refers to the possibility of reconciling ideologies.” However, “people can be reconciled. I believe that we can reach that kind of fraternity through personal dialogue. We’re not talking about dialogue between Church and State leaders, but rather dialogue between the diverse political sectors,” the cardinal stated. [[Entrevista al Cardenal Jaime Ortega](#)] (*AFP*, 9/1/08)

**January 9:** Cuban scientists will soon begin the phase of clinical study of a potential vaccine against the HIV virus, a scientific source announced. Speaking with local reporters in a press conference, Eduardo Martinez, Director of Technological Development at the Center of Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering (CIGB), said that the product "is still under research, but it should be on the phase of clinical study next year." According to *Juventud Rebelde* newspaper, Martinez added that the safety of the product has already been tested "in animal models with very encouraging results." (*CAN*, 10/1/08)

**January 10:** Fidel Castro leads the Cuban authorities’ intense campaign to promote an “all-in-one vote” in the elections of January 20. This formula allows voting in block for all the candidates on the ballot, and it is tacitly understood as a show of support for the socialist government of the island. (*EFE*, 10/1/08)

**January 10:** Bureaucracy, inertia and ineffectiveness are some of the evils besetting many Cuban official cultural institutions, denounced the newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*. The official newspaper points out that “time has demonstrated the need for a structural overhaul of many of our country’s cultural institutions,” since most of them were designed decades ago under quite different circumstances. (*EFE*, 11/1/08)

**January 10:** Several dissidents were arrested in Havana, as they were ready to distribute flyers commemorating the first anniversary of the death of human rights activist Miguel Valdés Tamayo. They were later released. (*Radio Martí*, 10/1/08)

**January 10:** Three-time Olympic champion Teofilo Stevenson said two Cuban boxers deserved a second chance after they deserted their team during the Pan American Games and were barred from fighting for their country by Fidel Castro. "They are great figures and they should be given another opportunity," Stevenson, vice president of the Cuban Boxing Federation, told the press. Cuba's Guillermo Rigondeaux won two Olympic golds and still hopes to try for a third title this summer in Beijing. But he and 2005 amateur welterweight world champion Erislandy Lara disappeared in July during the Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro. Both were later arrested for overstaying their visas and sent back to the island. Castro wrote in an essay shortly after their return to Cuba that the pair "had reached the point of no return" with the national boxing team. But the 55-year-old Stevenson said it would not surprise him if both compete again, saying they would have to "climb back in the ring and win." He quickly added, however, that reinstatement to the national team was not up to him. (*USA Today*, 10/1/08)

**January 12:** Cubans saw one of their greatest baseball players, Orlando "El Duque" Hernandez, on television for the first time since he defected to the United States a decade ago. In an unprecedented step, Cuba's state-run television broadcast a sports documentary that included interviews with baseball players who left to play in the US major leagues, and are considered traitors by Cuba's communist authorities. The film on Cuba's most popular baseball team, Industriales of Havana, was made in 2003 but had been censored due to the interviews with former stars who defected. "I'm an Industrialista. I am not a traitor to the Industriales," Hernandez said in the documentary "Fuera de Liga" (Outstanding) by Ian Padron. "I've had the opportunity to play for the two best teams in the world: Industriales and the Yankees," said the pitcher, who earns \$5 million a year playing for the New York Mets, though he was with the Yankees at the time of the interview. First baseman Kendry Morales, now playing for the Los Angeles Angels, was interviewed before he defected on a speedboat to Miami in 2004. (*Reuters*, 13/1/08)

**January 12:** Two members of the illegal opposition group Cuban Human Rights Foundation were detained by the police for several hours. Both were later released. (*Cubanet*, 17/1/08)

**January 13:** In the easternmost province of Guantanamo a group of Cuban artists began a tour around penitentiaries across the island, as part of an initiative to promote cultural activities. The Cuban Parliament approved the initiative last June in order to systematize the presence of diverse cultural expressions in these centers to favor the inmates' rehabilitation and to strengthen the cultural movement. The group of artists is led by singer-songwriter Silvio Rodriguez. It includes troubadours Amaury Perez, Vicente Feliu and Augusto Blanca; the Sexto Sentido (Sixth Sense) quartet, Alexis Diaz Pimienta and Havana Historian Eusebio Leal. The group also includes painter Ernesto Rancaño, who will be in charge of a traveling exhibition and also of capturing moments of their visits in paintings. (*ACN*, 14/1/08)

**January 13:** The Cuban electoral authorities conducted a dry run to test communication systems and logistics prior to the parliamentary elections scheduled to take place on January 20. The authorities are expecting 8.3 million Cubans to cast their votes in order to elect 1,201 lawmakers to 14 provincial assemblies and 614 MPs to the national parliament. Ricardo Alarcon, head of the national assembly, expressed his support for the "unified vote" system, whereby Cubans vote for all candidates on a single ballot, instead of voting for each legislative body independently. The unified vote system has been used in Cuba since 1992 when parliamentary elections first took place. (*Global Insight Daily Analysis*, 14/1/08)

**January 13:** The president of Cuba's parliament, Ricardo Alarcón, declared that, "real democracy is a synonym for utopia". Alarcón's declaration to the daily *Juventud Rebelde* came a week before Cubans go to the ballot box to choose members of congress, who will in turn pick the next Cuban cabinet and the country's president. Alarcón went on to claim that Cuba's "[democratic] system has a series of virtues and advantages". However, he also recognised that "like all human endeavours, it has flaws". According to Alarcón,

"it would be a sign of lack of culture to say that the democratic exercise has reached its final form" and that this form can be "exported". For him, Cuba's system is "getting closer to democracy" and faces "the challenge of all political systems, which is to be representative". (*Latin News Daily*, 14/1/08)

**January 13:** More than 50 people have been hospitalised and nearly 5,000 people evacuated after an ammonia gas leakage in Havana, officials have said. The incident occurred when about three tonnes of ammonia leaked from a meat processing plant in the Berroa free trade zone on the outskirts of the Cuban capital, said Bienvenido Rafoso, the head of the Cuban Fire Fighter Corps. "The situation has been brought under control and there is no danger for the public now," he said. "We received a call around 6 a.m. local time and the entire Civil Defence system was activated immediately," Rafoso said. He said that experts were conducting an investigation to determine the cause of the leak of the potentially deadly gas, which formed a toxic cloud and forced authorities to evacuate "between 4,000 and 5,000 people" from the Alamar neighbourhood, one of Havana's most heavily populated zones. (*EFE, EER*, 14/1/08)

**January 14:** Father Jose Felix Perez, executive secretary of the Bishops' Conference of Cuba, announced that Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, will celebrate several masses, inaugurate a monument and meet with government officials during his visit to Cuba, February 20-26, 2008. Cardinal Bertone, who will travel to Cuba to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the visit to the country by Pope John Paul II in 1998, will celebrate mass at the Cathedral of Havana. Later he will travel to Santa Clara to inaugurate a monument to Pope John Paul II in the place where the late pontiff celebrated mass during his historic visit to the country. On February 23, Cardinal Bertone will travel to Santiago de Cuba where he will visit the shrine to Our Lady of Charity, the patroness of Cuba. Bishop Wilfredo Pino Estevez of Guantanamo-Baracoa invited the faithful to participate in an open-air mass celebrated by Cardinal Bertone. During the "We all give thanks to God for this event and we hope that you will accompany us in this joy. If you will be able to come, please let us know. We pray God will allow you to attend," the bishop said in his open invitation. February 25 and 26 will be set aside for "high-level" talks with Cuban officials. At the moment there are no plans for a meeting with the ailing Fidel Castro. (*AFP*, 15/1/08)

**January 15:** Sex education, clinical sexology, health and sexual diversity are central issues in the Sixth Cuban Congress on Education, Direction and Sexual Therapy starting in Havana. Also on the list are transexuality, homosexuality, intersexuality, vulnerability and HIV/AIDS, which will be analyzed by Cuban and foreign experts until January 18, at Havana's Conference Center. Parallel to the Congress is the First Symposium "Transexuality in Cuba," the Third Methodological Workshop of Sexology Departments and Sex Education, the First Symposium on Clinic Sexology and the First Symposium on Sexual Health, Vulnerabilities and HIV/AIDS, the organizing committee presided over by Mariela Castro reported. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/1/08)

**January 15:** After opening the 4<sup>th</sup> Congress on Sexual Therapy, Orientation and Education, sexologist Mariela Castro, daughter of Cuban Vice-president Raúl Castro and

director of the Cuban Center for Sexual Education (CENESEX), revealed that the Cuban government is set to pass legislation allowing sex change surgery. Mariela indicated that a team of surgeons is already training for the future surgeries. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 15/1/08)

**January 15:** Opposition activist Yanci Ruiz Martínez was released after serving out a one-year prison term. He received charges of posing "a dangerous threat (to society)," after being accused by the police and the State Security service. (*Cubanet*, 25/1/08)

**January 15:** Cuba's double Olympic boxing champion Mario Kindelan is to officially retire, the Cuban Boxing Federation announced. Kindelan won the lightweight gold medals at Sydney in 2000 and Athens four years later, defeating Britain's Amir Khan in the final. Khan gained revenge in a bout staged the following year and Kindelan has not fought since then. He will officially retire at the Cuban National Championship, which will be held in his hometown of Holguin on January 26. (*AFP*, 16/1/08)

**January 15:** Fidel Castro looked frail but more alert in video images broadcast on Cuban television of a meeting he had with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. The video showed the two men playfully taking photographs of each other. Castro, standing in a corridor, gave Lula a big hug when he left, saying: "I have felt very well." Castro wore a tracksuit top over his pajamas, as in other video appearances during his long convalescence, and engaged in lively conversation with Lula. It was the first video clip of Castro since a meeting three months ago with his main ally, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. [[Fidel Castro and Lula da Silva, video](#)] (*Reuters*, 16/1/08)

**January 16:** Cuban leader Fidel Castro said he is not strong enough to speak in public more than 17 months after stomach surgery forced him to hand over power to his brother. Castro's long illness -- he last appeared in public on July 26, 2006-- has raised speculation about his possible retirement when Cuba's legislature, the National Assembly, sits in March. "I am not physically able to speak directly to the citizens of the municipality where I was nominated for our elections next Sunday," Castro said in an essay published by Cuba's state-run newspapers. "I do what I can: I write," he said in his essay titled "An Epiphany Gift". "For me, this is a new experience: writing is not the same as speaking," he wrote. [[An Epiphany Gift](#)] (*Reuters*, 16/1/08)

**January 16:** Cuban Ambassador to Jamaica, Gisela Garcia Rivera, told the press that Fidel Castro could be returned as Cuba's president, once the new national assembly is confirmed. Cubans will vote for 614 candidates vying for a place in the national assembly on January 20. The president of the state of Cuba is chosen from among the members of the national assembly and Mr. Castro is a nominee. The ambassador said Mr. Castro, who handed the reins of power to his brother Raul in July 2006 due to ill health, is recovering well. (*Radio Jamaica*, 16/1/08)

**January 16:** During the inauguration of two meteorological stations in the eastern province of Granma, acting Minister of Science, Technology and Environment, Fernando Gonzalez Bermudez, said that the development of scientific research centers is part of Cuba's integral strategy to guarantee a prominent future of scientific and academic

achievements. The opening of both centers and the reopening of a vegetal biology lab were part of Cuban Science Day in the province, "Granma" newspaper reported. The structures of the meteorological stations of Veguitas and Cabo Cruz, in Yara and Niquero municipalities, are part of a national program to improve both unities and increase its effectiveness. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/1/08)

**January 16:** The number of Cubans in prison for political reasons dropped in 2007 but Communist authorities continue to arrest people arbitrarily and deny basic civil rights, the country's main rights watchdog said. There were 234 political prisoners in Cuba at the end of 2007, down from 283 a year earlier, the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation said. However, it reported no improvement in Cuba's human rights record since ailing leader Fidel Castro handed over power to his brother Raul due to illness in July 2006. "This sort of provisional government has done nothing to change the very bad situation of civil, political and economic rights that has existed in Cuba for more than four decades," the commission said, adding that authorities still deny freedom of expression, assembly and travel. Sanchez's group said there were at least 325 political arrests in Cuba last year and most of the detainees were released after a few hours or days without charges. Headed by veteran rights activist Elizardo Sanchez, the group is illegal but is tolerated by the government. (*The New York Times*, 16/1/08)

**January 16:** The President of the Cuban Parliament Ricardo Alarcón said that the full slate vote guarantees a comprehensive representation of Cuban society in the assemblies of people's power. Alarcon participated, along with other Cuban electoral authorities, in the prime time TV show "The Roundtable", which was dedicated to the upcoming January 20 general elections on the island, in which the Cuban people will elect delegates to provincial assemblies and the deputies to the National Parliament. The full slate vote is a strategy that guarantees the inclusion in all government bodies of political leaders, representatives of social, religious organizations as well as academics, artists, workers, students, housewives, retired people, men and women in general, blacks and whites, he said. (*ACN*, 16/1/08)

**January 18:** Infant mortality rate continues to drop in Cuba, which now shares with Canada the best result in this regard in the Americas, both with 5.3 deaths per every 1000 live births. Six out of the country's 14 provinces finished 2007 with a rate below the national average while in 21 of the island's 169 municipalities the infant mortality rate was zero, Granma reported. (*CAN*, 18/1/08)

**January 18:** A ballet troupe featuring overweight performers has leapt into prominence in Cuba. The group has been so successful that even thin people are turning up for auditions. They are big, they are beautiful and they can dance. For over a decade in Cuba, the "Danza Voluminosa" troupe has been captivating audiences with its exuberant ballet and contemporary dance performances. Director Juan Miguel Mas, who also struggles with obesity, formed the group eleven years ago. Director Juan Miguel Mas, said, "I decided on the project to give other obese people an opportunity, so that they could express themselves through dance. So I called up some of the members that are my old schoolmates and I knew they wanted to dance and that they were fat. Some of the others

were people that I got to know through other people and were told, 'Look, they are dancing and they are doing this'. And all of these people came in to it like that." (*CCTV.com*, 18/1/08)

**January 18:** According to a report released on January 16, by the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN), at least 325 people were arbitrarily arrested-- most of them were held by the authorities for some hours or a few days. Manuel Cuesta Morúa, spokesman for the Arco Progresista dissident coalition, said that such "warnings" from the authorities are on the increase. "The limit still appears to be the street. The authorities are determined not to allow any public demonstration that might get out of hand," he told the press. According to CCDHRN, "if the government were to apply, without discrimination on ideological grounds, the provisions of Article 58, sections 1 and 2 of the current criminal code which establishes the right to conditional release, nearly a hundred political prisoners could be freed from prison immediately." The general prison population, estimated at 80,000 in the absence of official figures, could also be reduced by applying this provision. "Every time we see someone convicted of 'dangerousness' we know they are technically innocent because they have committed no crime," Elizardo Sánchez said. "Dangerousness" means someone is suspected to have the potential to commit a crime. It is a category that covers thousands of men and women who have been arrested. (*IPS*, 18/1/08)

**January 18:** Cuba's ambassador to Canada, Ernesto Senti Darias, was drawn into an unprecedented discussion about a normally taboo topic among Cuban diplomats: life after Castro, whose successor is to be named in March by the Cuban Council of State. Senti Darias speculated on what role the fragile 81-year-old leader might play in the twilight of his 49 years of ruling the Caribbean island nation. "Some day he won't be there, physically, but his heritage and his contribution to our nation is so big that with great pride we can say that he will stay forever. Why? Because he has been not only our leader, he has been one of us," Senti Darias told a small public gathering of students and foreign diplomats at the Cuban Embassy. "He is consulted about many things, maybe the main ones. The result for our nation for our people, for the revolution is that we have a stable country; that we are in a capacity to go ahead." Senti Darias said that somebody would be receiving "the baton" to "continue the run" as Cuba's president. "It is not a matter, as the media sometimes try to show, a matter of transition. It is a matter of continuation," he explained. "We are very confident in our country because we have been fighting so hard, first against the attempts of our common neighbours - and not the people - the US administrations." (*Ottawa Citizen*, 19/1/08)

**January 20:** Over 8 million 132 thousand people or 95% of those eligible to vote went to the polls, according to the National Electoral Commission which made the announcement as of 5pm. The President of the National Electoral Commission, Maria Esther Reus highlighted the efforts of the population in exercising their right to vote, despite the bad weather conditions in the western part of the island. The result is a foregone conclusion, with only one candidate for each seat. For weeks, authorities have urged the 8.4 million voters to go and vote to show support for Cuba's one-party system. Most Cubans, whether they back the government or not, were expected to vote. Failure to do so is

frowned upon. "Those who fail to vote should be punished as severely as one who surrenders his gun to the enemy," the Communist Youth newspaper, *Juventud Rebelde*, said on its front-page. Commented one housewife in central Havana as she went to vote: "This is an election with no choice. There is only one party here. They should let us vote directly for president." (*Radio Habana Cuba, Reuters, 20/1/08*)

**January 20:** Fidel Castro cast his ballot in an envelope sent from his convalescence quarters. He applauded Cuban voters for taking part in parliamentary elections. "I have done my duty," he announced, adding: "I did not get wet though." He hailed the number of voters who had turned out "despite the bad weather conditions", reported the state newspaper *Granma*. "I was helped by the visit of a member of the voting table of the station I'm registered at. In his message, Fidel said Cubans in the western part of the island will be showing the world their awareness and their care for the elections by going to vote as the weather permits, protecting themselves against the rain and observing the 6:00 PM deadline." [[A los compatriotas de Occidente](#)] (*Reuters, Prensa Latina, BBC, 20/1/08*)

**January 20:** After attending the oath taken by the members of his polling station and checking his name in the electors list, at District No.1, in Plaza de la Revolución Municipality, the First Vice President of the Council of State, Raul Castro exercised his right to vote. In statements to the press, Raul stressed the significance of this suffrage, which he called "an important step", taking into account that this parliamentary elections occurs in a complex moment of big decisions for the country. Likewise, the also Minister of the Armed Forces (FAR) informed that the Parliament will officially be constituted on February 24th, the date in which Cuba celebrates the beginning of its 1895 independence war. After elections, Parliament members will elect 31 members for the Council of State. During their first meeting, they will choose the president, first vice president, five vice presidents and a secretary of the Cuban National Assembly of People's Power. Only then will it become apparent whether 81-year-old Fidel Castro intends to remain as head of state or retire and continue in his current role of elder statesman. [[Declaraciones de Raúl Castro a la prensa, video](#)] (*Radio Cadena Agramonte, BBC, 21/1/08*)

**January 20:** Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said the new Cuban Parliament will be faithful to the people, and will work to strengthen the Cuban Revolution and socialism. In statements to the press shortly after voting in the general elections, Perez Roque said the new Cuban Parliament will face adoption of legislation to strengthen socialism in Cuba. (*Prensa Latina, 20/1/08*)

**January 21:** Cuban leader Fidel Castro was re-elected as a deputy to the National Assembly of the People's Power, the head of the National Election Commission said. After announcing that over 8,230,000 Cuban voters, 96 percent of the total, cast their vote at the general elections throughout the island, the President of the National Electoral Commission, Maria Esther Reus, described the vote as very successful. In the preliminary report, which was announced during the prime-time TV show "The Roundtable", Reus explained that all 614 deputies to the National Parliament and all 1,201 delegates to the provincial assemblies were elected as a result of the massive vote. As in past elections in

the one-party state, nobody lost. There were 614 candidates and the same number of seats being chosen in the National Assembly. (*Tehran Times, ACN, The New York Times, 22/1/08*)

**January 21:** The president of the Christian Liberation Movement, Oswaldo Paya Sardinias, has issued a statement denouncing Cuba's elections to the National Assembly as illegitimate and insisting on the need for changes to the Cuban electoral system to make it authentically democratic. "For many years we have called for changes in the laws to ensure greater respect for the rights of citizens. We have especially insisted on a new electoral law, because it is fundamental for people's exercise of their sovereignty," Paya said in his statement. He said the electoral process in Cuba is flawed from the outset because only official government bodies can nominate candidates. "Those who can be elected are not average Cuban citizens but rather only those designated by these Candidacy Commissions," Paya said. He called the Cuban electoral process a "joke" and a "violation of the Constitution." "Politically speaking it is a grave violation of popular sovereignty, and in terms of ethics it harms the dignity of persons and the right of our people to define their lives and their future," he added. (*Catholic News Agency, 21/1/08*)

**January 21:** In Warsaw, leading Cuban dissident Hector Palacios Ruiz termed Cuba's election a "farce" and said he believed "change will come soon" in his communist homeland ruled by Fidel Castro. "Everyone knows Fidel Castro is the greatest impediment to democratic change in Cuba -- everyone also knows he almost no longer exists," Palacios Ruiz said at a press conference in the Polish capital launching a petition for the release of Cuban political prisoners. "Every Cuban who lives at least a year will see a free Cuba," he said, insisting the time was ripe for democratic change in his Caribbean-island homeland. "Cuban society is ready for change and there are people among our dissidents who are ready to take power," he said. (*AFP, 22/1/08*)

**January 21:** Yoruba gods protect ailing Fidel Castro from witchcraft and want to see him continue leading Cuba, the first priest of the Santeria religion to be elected to parliament said. "Olodumare says he is the one that should be there and so he is untouchable," said Antonio Castaneda, a babalawo (priest) in the religion slaves brought to colonial Cuba from Nigeria. Hurricanes may batter Cuba this year, but Castro's health will not break, according to the orishas (deities), he said. (*Reuters, 21/1/08*)

**January 21:** Chilean poet Gonzalo Rojas will chair the jury that will look at 500 works from 24 countries competing for the coveted Casa de las Americas 2008 Literature Awards. The jury features 21 writers and scholars from Latin America and the Caribbean who will analyze the 216 books of poems, 144 short stories and 59 historic and social essays. The Casa de Las Americas Literary Award was founded 49 years ago and is considered one of the most prestigious literature contests in Latin America. (*ACN, 21/1/08*)

**January 21:** The members of the 15th contingent of the South American Brigade in Solidarity with Cuba paid tribute to Cuban anti-imperialist leader Julio Antonio Mella in the first day of their stay on the island. The 15th contingent of the South American

Brigade in Solidarity with Cuba includes people from Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Argentina and Bolivia. During their stay on the island they will do agricultural work and will meet with social and youth leaders. They will also visit places of economic, social and historic interest. (ACN, 21/1/08)

**January 22:** Fidel Castro paid tribute to outstanding Cuban writer Iris Davila, who passed away on January 18. In a brief note entitled "Iris Davila Has Left Us," the leader of the Cuban Revolution textually wrote: "She did not vote in the elections last Sunday. She was registered in the same municipality: Plaza de la Revolucion. She passed away silently on Friday; we didn't expect she would so soon. She lived in the same house she got thanks to her intellectual work before the Revolution. I visited that house many times; she occupied a little space in it, and was always writing. She never protested or complained about anything. It was her last will that her remains be cremated and scattered at the Botanical Garden, among flowers selected by her, thus avoiding the cold and silent marble". The note was signed "Fidel Castro Ruz, January 21, 2008". (*Prensa Latina*, 22/1/08)

**January 23:** Ricardo Alarcón, the National Assembly president, said in an interview that he expected Fidel Castro to be nominated for president on February 24 when the new Parliament meets, but expressed uncertainty over whether he would accept the post again. "It's obvious that he has been very successful in the recovery process, but he has the right to say yes or no," Mr. Alarcón said. (*The New York Times*, 23/1/08)

**January 23:** The president of the Christian Liberation Movement, Oswaldo Paya Sardinas, said that outside of Cuba, the true work that the Church does for the Cuban people is unknown. "The Church is playing a key role in the evangelization and in aid to the poor, not only economically but also in a human and moral plane as well. I would like to clarify that, as a Catholic, I can only speak of the Church in third person. Our local Church has suffered persecutions and de-Christianization in very difficult circumstances, but she has always been faithful to the Gospel, to the Church and to the Cuban people. This is a reality that is often ignored by international public opinion," Paya told the Italian daily L'Opinione. (*CAN*, 23/1/08)

**January 23:** The new leadership of the Association of Writers and Artists from Cuba (UNEAC) in the province of Santiago de Cuba was elected in an assembly of members of the association. Almost 150 members of the Association who attended the meeting evaluated the provincial work of UNEAC over the last five years. The meeting is the ninth taking place in all 14 Cuban provinces before the VII UNEAC Congress. (*Sierra Maestra*, 23/1/08)

**January 23:** Over 51 million doses of a Cuban vaccine against brain and spinal meningitis have been applied in dozens of countries since it was discovered by Cuban doctors, nearly 20 years ago. Dr. Concepcion Campa Huergo, director of the Carlos J. Finlay Pharmaceutical Institute, said the medicine called Va-Mengoc-BC is the only one of its type in the world used to counteract the effects of all forms of brain and spinal cord meningitis, a highly deadly disease that develops in the form of rashes. Campa Huergo

discussed the impact of the vaccine with close to 900 experts from several countries at a conference in Havana. (ACN, 23/1/08)

**January 24:** Fidel Castro revealed that he thought he was dying when he fell ill in July 2006, and hastily made plans to give up power as doctors fought to save his life. "When I fell gravely ill the night of the 26th and dawn of the 27th of July, I thought that would be the end," the ailing 81-year-old wrote in an essay titled "Lula", published on the front page of state newspapers. "And while the doctors fought for my life, the head aide of the Council of State read at my urging the text and I dictated the necessary arrangements," he wrote. The lengthy essay, dated January 22, mentioned a two and a half hour meeting with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. Castro wrote that Silva, who describes Castro as his friend, decided to visit Cuba on the spur of the moment, even though "my health didn't guarantee him a meeting with me." When Silva "commented that he was very impressed with my health, I responded that I was dedicating myself to thinking and writing," Castro wrote. "Never in my life have I thought so much." [[Lula](#)] (AP, 24/1/08)

**January 24:** Cuban singer and songwriter Silvio Rodriguez performed in Camaguey province as part of his tours through the island's penitentiaries. Rodriguez said that "life improves with culture, even behind bars", after performing at Kilo 7 penitentiary. "I have learnt about the improvement of penitentiaries in Cuba", he added. "Our Revolution is each day closer to achieve true justice", Rodriguez said. Amaury Perez, Vicente Feliú and Alexis Diaz Pimienta are among some of the participants of the project proposed by Silvio Rodriguez and supported by the Cuban parliament. (*Juventud Rebelde, RHC, AIN*, 24/1/08)

**January 24:** The authorities from the Combinado prison in Guantánamo forced the inmates to see a concert by singer-songwriter Silvio Rodríguez, but some refused and were punished, opposition activists denounced. Among the political prisoners who refused was Alexander González Quintana, who was placed in solitary confinement. (*Cubanet*, 24/1/08)

**January 24:** The construction of Cuba's first wooden zoo began in the eastern city of Bayamo, the capital of Granma province. By masterfully turning wood into animal shapes, the author, Roberto Fabret, has been transforming falling trees of oak and Honduran mahogany that were both destroying the sidewalk pavement and dangerously leaning over apartment buildings of the Jesus Menendez district in Bayamo, reported Granma daily. (ACN, 24/1/08)

**January 25:** Fidel Castro said that solutions to Cuba's problems are not easy, "not even in dreams". "Not even in dreams, solutions to our problems are easy, or are at the turn of the corner", Castro said in a new article published in Cuban official Granma. This is the second essay by Castro about the recent visit of Brazilian President, Luis Inacio Lula Da Silva, to the island. [[Lula, second part](#)] (EFE, 25/1/08)

**January 26:** The National Commission of Candidates (CCN) assessed merits of the 614 Cuban deputies to the parliament to nominate those who will hold the main leading posts

of that legislative organ. As announced by First Vice President Raul Castro, the parliamentarians elected by valid vote of 95.24 percent will establish the new National Assembly on February 24. On that day, the CCN will submit proposals for the posts of President, Vice president and Parliament Secretary as well as the candidates to the Council of State, the highest representation of the country between periods of the National Assembly. According to article 74 of the Cuban Constitution the Council of State will be made up of a President (Government and State chief), first Vice President, five Vice Presidents, a secretary and 23 other members. Alberto Marchante, member of the National Candidature Commission, said that the Provincial Candidature Commissions have interviewed 982 delegates as part of the consultation process prior to drafting the candidate's lists for the election of the president and vice president of the People's Power bodies, which will take place on February 2 in the constituent provincial assemblies. (*Granma, Prensa Latina, 26/1/08*)

**January 26:** Members of the illegal opposition group Latin-American Federation of Rural Women (FLAMUR) boasted wide support for their campaign "In the Same Coin," (Con la Misma Moneda) that seeks to eliminate double currency circulation in Cuba. According to the group's president, Maura Iset González, of 7,825 individuals polled across the island by her organization, 99 % "want a single currency in Cuba." Following the public release of the nation-wide poll results, Maura Iset and her husband were on their way back from Havana when they were arrested at the Santiago de Cuba airport. (*Diario Las Americas, Cubanet, 26,29/1/08*)

**January 27:** There are 35 political prisoners in Cuba in very poor health, and authorities now have a novel way of taking dissidents out of circulation for a short time, a leading human rights group said in a report. Out of a total of 290 dissidents and prisoners of conscience in Cuba at the close of 2007, 35 "are in a deplorable state of health inside prisons," the National Coordinator of Current and Former Political Prisoners (CNPP) said in a report issued in Havana. The rights group said there were "315 known prisons (in Cuba), including 56 maximum security facilities, 182 forced-labor camps, 46 minimum security prisons, 18 juvenile detention centers and 13 prisons for women". The report also mentioned "a new method to prevent opposition members from reaching meeting places or diplomatic missions is taking them to a police station for one or two days and then returning them (...) back to their home towns." (*News.Com Australia, 27/1/08*)

**January 27:** Cuba's First Vice President Raúl Castro led a march in Havana to commemorate the 155th anniversary of the birth of Cuban National Hero José Martí. The traditional march -- known as "March of Torches" -- was first carried out 55 years ago by young people who a few months later rose up in arms against Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship and for the definite independence of Cuba. Thousands carrying lighted torches in the march from the University of Havana to the Fragua Martiana (Martí's Forge), a former quarry in the Cuban capital, turned into a monument commemorating Martí's political imprisonment in the 19th century. They were accompanied by leaders of the Cuban Communist Party and by Julio Martínez, First Secretary of the Young Communist League (UJC). Also present were student leaders and participants in the first torchlight march in 1953. (*RHC-CAN, 28/1/08*)

**January 27:** Cuba Parliament President, Ricardo Alarcon, said his country has shown evidence of stability and institutional harmony, and criticized those who "try not to see the Revolution has a strong popular support". In an interview with Spanish newspaper "Público", Alarcon stressed the continuity of the Cuban Revolution, and said Fidel Castro "has entered history as a winner a long time ago". Fidel Castro is an extraordinary person, with outstanding merits, but the revolutionary process is beyond him, Alarcon noted. The National Assembly president also referred to Cuba First Vice President Raul Castro, and said Raul and Fidel are two personalities with different styles, but no difference in thoughts. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/1/08)

**January 28:** UNESCO general assistant director Pierre Sane opened in Havana the Second International Conference for World Equilibrium, with the participation of over 350 academics, politicians and scientists from 35 countries. The opening was also attended by Alvaro Marchesi, General Secretary of the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture, and Casa de las Americas president Roberto Fernandez Retamar. Participants in the event will analyze for three days at Havana's Conference Center the relevance of Cuban independence leader Jose Marti, on occasion of his 155th birthday anniversary. (*ACN*, 28/1/08)

**January 29:** On the occasion of Jose Marti's 155th birthday anniversary, Fidel Castro paid tribute to Cuba's National Hero. In a letter published by the official press, Castro also greeted hundreds of academics and thinkers attending in Havana the International Conference for World Equilibrium to honor Marti. The press also reproduced Castro's speech at the closing of the International Conference for World Equilibrium, held in 2003. [[A tribute to Marti](#)] (*Prensa Latina, Trabajadores*, 29/1/08)

**January 28:** A sculpture by Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer symbolizing the Cubans' struggle against US hegemony was erected at the Information Sciences University, on the outskirts of this capital. "I dedicate this monument to Cuba in its struggle against the imperialist monster," stated Niemeyer in a message sent for the opening ceremony and read in the activity. For Brazilian Dominican friar and outstanding academic Frei Betto, the occasion was used to honor a man "we all admire and revere," because to be a contemporary of him is a gift and privilege. Niemeyer is a man who has never betrayed his convictions of fighting for a world without oppression, said Frei Betto, one of the special participants in the gala along with others attending the Second International Conference for World Equilibrium. The sculpture symbolizes the Cuban struggles against Washington hostility, and the island's independence and sovereignty, noted Melchor Gil, rector of the higher educational center. The sculpture represents a Cuban man with a flag facing a monster with its mouth open. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/1/08)

**January 28:** The Cuban catholic journal "Espacio Laical" called upon the European Union (EU) and the United States not to condition their dialogue or cooperation with Cuba. However, it also asked for Havana's "political will" in this endeavor. In its editorial "Let us break the isolation," the magazine echoes the Papal request that Cuba open up to the world and the world to Cuba, and says that all the conditions imposed by

the EU and Washington only serve to “generate susceptibility and stagnation.” The government must also have “the will and capacity” to give the people the possibility of determining “what changes are required and how they should be implemented.” [[Rompamos el silencio](#)] (*EER*, 29/1/08)

**January 28:** The Ibero-American literacy Congress will be held in Cuba next June as it was announced by Alvaro Marchesi, General Secretary for Education, Science and Culture, of the Organization of Ibero-American States (OIS). Speaking with reporters, Marchesi praised the Cuban experience with the literacy program "Yo sí puedo" (Yes, I Can), which has been successfully used in several countries, and said that the event in June will be an opportunity to discuss the results of this initiative and to analyze the possibility of extending it to other nations. (*ACN*, 29/1/08)

**January 29:** A group of artists and intellectuals recently concluded a series of performances in Cuban penitentiaries as part of what was called the Expedition Project. Havana City Historian Eusebio Leal, a participant in the project, defined it as an expedition to spirit, to the best of human beings, precisely on the day that Cubans celebrated the 155th anniversary of the birth of the Cuban National Hero. This is an effort inspired by Martí, he said. Renown singer-songwriter Silvio Rodríguez, who shares that opinion, recalled at the Guamajal prison in central Villa Clara province, the thought of the Cuban patriot: Being educated is the only way to be free. With the presentation in Santa Clara, the Expedition Project “an initiative of Silvio” ended its performances in prisons located in the eastern and central parts of the island, which began on January 13. (*ACN*, 29/1/08)

**January 30:** Cuba's banned Assembly to Promote Civil Society reported that several dissidents were beaten and arrested by police in the central province of Santa Clara. Marta Beatriz Roque, leader of the organization, told the press that agents of State Security repressed with beatings a group of seven people trying to pay homage to the hero of Cuban independence, Jose Martí, in Santa Clara city. According to Roque, the opposition's Jorge Luis Garcia, known as "Antunez," and his wife, Iris Perez, who were among the group of dissidents, were arrested and later taken to their home where they remain confined. He added that both were told they will face charges for resisting authorities. According to Roque, the dissident Yansi Ruiz, freed several weeks ago after a year in prison, is still under arrest at a police station for the same incident. Roque said that in January there were almost 30 cases of "arbitrary arrests - arrests lasting several hours - some of them massive, of seven people all at once, or five, six, or three." "The tendency is towards arbitrary arrests lasting a few hours. In this case (the Santa Clara incident) that tendency went one step further, to beatings," the dissident said. (*EFE*, 30/1/08)

**January 30:** Elizardo Sanchez, who heads the illegal Cuban Commission for Human Rights, told the press that there's a new style by the police that tends to repress public activities, and in that sense "they are drawing a line between the dissident behind closed doors and the one who takes to the streets." Referring to a recent violent repression against dissidents in the city of Santa Clara, Sanchez said that when the authorities "start

in with beatings, it means there's a certain degree of tension and worry among them," although he believed that this was a purely local phenomenon. Cuba's Communist Party government dismisses the dissidents as "mercenaries" on the payroll of Washington, though some of the regime's opponents criticize the US economic embargo against the island. (*EFE*, 30/1/08)

**January 30:** Acting President Raul Castro — not his older brother Fidel — was the top vote-getter in Cuban parliamentary elections, according to official results. The 76-year-old Raul received 99,372 percent of votes cast in the family's base of Santiago in eastern Cuba — a percentage point more than Fidel got (98,268). Both brothers easily won reelection to the rubber-stamp legislature known as the National Assembly of Popular Power, as did all of the 614 candidates presented to the island's 8.4 million voters on January 20. The unopposed candidates needed to get at least half the votes cast in their districts and none came close to losing. The lowest figure — 73 percent — went to Barbaro Osmani Lago, from the western province of Pinar del Rio. Officials said that 95 percent of eligible voters went to the polls, though about 4.5 percent of those turned in blank or invalid ballots. While voting is not mandatory, failing to do so can draw unwanted attention from pro-government neighborhood watch organizations. (*AP, Prensa Latina*, 30/1/08)

**January 30:** According to official results of the January 20 elections, five provincial secretaries of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) head the list of candidates with the fewest votes in their territories. Some of the elected representatives to the new National Assembly only show a support base close to 70 %, as opposed to 90 % for the rest. The First Secretary of the PCC in Isla de la Juventud, Elizabeth Cámara, raised only 70.2 % support, while Misael Enamorado, a Politburo member and PCC Secretary in Santiago de Cuba, received just 74.78 % of the votes in his riding. In Holguín, the representative with the fewest votes was First Secretary Miguel Mario Díaz-Canel, with 86.7 %. The First Secretary of the Communist Party in Guantánamo, Luis Torres Iribar, and the one for Sancti Spíritus, Miguel Acevo Cortiñas, saw similar outcomes, with 92 % and 87.2 % votes each. (*EFE*, 30/1/08)

**January 31:** The first Cuban catalogue of fossil footprints is now available on digital format and can be consulted at the information center of the National Museum of Natural History in Havana. "It took the museum paleontologists three long years of work to compile the information", said museum director Reinaldo Rojas as reported by Granma newspaper. "The research was financed by the Environmental Agency of the Cuban Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment, and constitutes an important scientific contribution to data on the country's biological past", remarked Rojas. (*ACN*, 31/1/08)

**January 31:** Well-known Cuban activist, Jorge Luis Garcia Perez (Antunez) told the press he will not acknowledge the home arrest sanction imposed on him by Cuban authorities. The activist denounced an increase of physical violence on the part of the authorities against the dissident movement. "I am challenging that home arrest warrant

because I do not obey laws that try to limit individual freedoms”, he said. “I haven’t committed any crime”, he added. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 1/2/08)

**January 31:** The director of the National Sexual Education Center, Mariela Castro, acknowledged Thursday that there is still a lack of political will in Cuba regarding the release of data on sensitive subjects, including the sexual abuse of minors. "In our country there is, in my opinion, fear of talking about this publicly" because "everything that is unknown or poorly known frightens people”, the daughter of acting President Raul Castro and niece of ailing leader Fidel told a press conference. Mariela Castro, a psychologist by training, made the observation after reporters inquired about the figures that authorities of the communist-ruled island have cited with regard to child sexual abuse. Mariela Castro expressed hope that the time will come when "the fears are overcome and we can talk about this," adding that she is "working to that end." Mariela presided over the Regional Child Protection Conference, held in Havana, and organized by the British Embassy in Havana, the Cuban Interior Ministry and the British Charity, “Child Protection Development Trust”. The objectives of the conference were to share practical experiences on how to treat cases of child sex abuse, to debate, to analyze and to exchange experiences in order to overcome current obstacles in this field, and to learn about advances made by Cuba in child protection. (*EFE, Love FM.Com*, 1/2/08)

**January 31:** Germany's Reinhold Fanz has accepted an offer to coach the Cuban national team. Fanz, 57, told the German Football Association's Web site that he had agreed a contract running until July 2010. "The goal will obviously be to qualify for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa," said Fanz, who has had experiences coaching at Hanover 96 and Eintracht Frankfurt but has never before coached a national team. (*Reuters*, 31/1/08)

**January 31:** A tower, a bell, a cross and a statue of John Paul II make up the new monument dedicated to the late Pontiff who visited Cuba a decade ago and that will be inaugurated on February 23 by Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Vatican Secretary of State. The monument, which will be erected in the city of Santa Clara, where the Pope celebrated his first Mass on Cuban soil, is the first one ever on public lands, that is, on land that is not the property of the Church. The project was developed by the construction office of the Diocese of Santa Clara and was designed by architect Luis Orlando Fernandez Squitin. Flanked by the flags of Cuba and the Holy See, it consists of a tower with a bell, crowned by a cross, with a statue of John Paul II in front. Behind the tower is a thirteen-panel mural with an image of Our Lady of Charity with her mantle extended as a sign of protection. On one of the panels is written the phrase by John Paul II: “Be not afraid, open the doors to Christ.” (*CNA*, 31/1/08)

**January 31:** Bishop Jose Felix Perez, executive secretary of the Cuban bishops, told the press that during the ten years since the papal visit to the island, “some things have changed for Catholics.” “The pastoral dynamism of the Church has changed positively, as well as the missionary spirit, but there is a lack of access to the media and to a wider social action of the Church,” he said. (*CNA*, 31/1/08)

**January 31:** Cubans working for foreign companies and embassies are expressing anger at a recent government decision to make them pay income tax on their hard currency bonuses. A circular distributed by Cubalse, the state employment agency that provides embassies with staff, postponed a deadline for registering at the tax office by one month until April 1. The delay came in response to a rare outburst of dissent at a meeting of the ACOREC employment agency where card-carrying Communists who work for foreign companies expressed opposition to the tax decision. A video of the meeting showed workers winning applause by demanding that the government first legalize hard currency salaries before taxing their earnings. Foreign companies cannot hire workers directly but go through two state agencies which pocket the hard currency and pay the workers in local pesos, worth 24 times less. Most companies pay their employees under-the-table salaries that are not legally allowed but tolerated under the euphemism of "gratificaciones" or bonuses. (*Reuters*, 31/1/08)

**January 31:** The provincial assemblies of the Peoples' Power will be established on February 2 with 1,201 delegates elected by 96.89 percent of Cubans who voted on January 20. According to electoral law, those bodies must meet 15 days after elections, to elect presidents, vice presidents and secretaries. Authorities from the National Candidatures Commission, composed of representatives from the country's grassroots organizations, have the task of rigorously evaluating members of the provincial assemblies to promote the most suitable for leadership posts. In each territory, those working groups have until February 2 to make suggestions to the assembly. The Provincial Assembly is the highest authority in each province and exercises state functions supported by committees, peoples' and administration councils, as well as through initiatives and participation of the people in coordination with grassroots and social organizations. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/1/08)



## ECONOMY

**January 2:** According to an official report, Cuba, whose yearly food imports regularly average 1.5 billion USD, had to spend an additional 286 million USD in 2007 to meet rising international market prices. "The increase in the price of approximately the same volume of imports implied the additional expenditure of 286 million USD in the current year. Prices will continue to rise in 2008," warned in a televised speech Osvaldo Martínez, president of the Cuban Parliament's Economic Commission. [[Discurso de Osvaldo Martínez](#)] (*AFP*, 2/1/08)

**January 2:** Cuba ended 2007 with 18 of the 52 sugar mills that will operate during the 2007-2008 harvest running at 70 percent capacity, Communist Party daily Granma reported. The newspaper said, however, that the success of the harvest "will depend on the output of the 20 mills from (the eastern provinces of) Las Tunas to Guantanamo that will operate this harvest." The roads in that area were badly affected by rains associated with Tropical Storm Noel in November. "If they can repair the roads to ensure the supply

of sugarcane and (the cane that) arrives is high quality, the industry will have the backing it needs and will have overcome the challenge," it said. Cuban authorities estimate that 52 mills will be involved in the 2007-2008 harvest, which began on December 10 in the eastern province of Granma; authorities said at that time they were expecting a "difficult milling season" because of October and November rains. (*EFE*, 2/1/08)

**January 3:** Cuba will begin building a new eolian park in the central region, with capacity to generate ten megawatts, local press informed. After intense wind studies by the ministry of science, technology, and environment, and Cuba's Electrical Union, it was decided to build the park in the municipality of Corralillo, in Villa Clara province. This new work will add to another two already built on Turiguano Island, in the central province of Ciego de Avila, and in the special municipality of Isla de la Juventud, as well as another under construction in Gibara, eastern province of Holguin. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/1/08)

**January 3:** Suchel Camacho S.A., Cuba's major perfumes and cosmetic company, contributed with 60 million pesos to the domestic economy in 2007, by producing twice their target for the period. The company manager, Sonia Gomez, told the press that a new line of toiletries will be produced in 2008 under the name "Las cosas de mi botica" (My Pharmacy Stuff). The new products will focus on the traditional pharmacopoeia and will be made up only from natural raw materials. (*ACN*, 3/1/08)

**January 4:** Private farmers will be paid more as part of a plan to reduce imports of powdered milk, meat, beans and other staple foods, said the president of the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), Orlando Lugo Fonte. "The government will import 20,000 tons of milk less, so that balance will have to be produced domestically. To that effect, they have approved the payment of 0.02 USD per liter of milk to dairy farmers," Lugo Fonte told farmers in Santiago de Cuba. (*EER*, 7/1/08)

**January 5:** Almost half a thousand Venezuelan experts in agriculture graduated from the Cuban Institute of Animal Science as part of agreements signed by Cuba and Venezuela within the framework of the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean (ALBA). The participants became qualified on integrated handling of plagues in agricultural cultivations, technologies for milk production, photo sanitary labs and agro productive projects, the director of the scientific institution Omelio Borroto said. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/1/08)

**January 5:** Cuba will produce more than 1,000 megawatts in 2008 using fuel oil, Vice President Carlos Lage said. As this process is taking place, the same amount will be replaced in inefficient power plants, Lage said during a visit to the construction site where fuel oil generators will be installed at Mariel's power plant, in the province of Havana. Lage, who is also the secretary of the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers, pointed out that it was the biggest, most important and most complex work of the country's new power generation system using gas and fuel oil, according to the newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*. So far, 77 million, of a 91-million-peso budget, have been invested in the project, whose magnitude can be measured by its generation capacity of

142.2 megawatts. As part of Cuba's Energy Revolution, aimed at saving fuel, the second group of fuel oil generators was inaugurated in the Havana municipality of Güira de Melena. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/108)

**January 6:** Cuban tourism authorities want to increase the number of hotel rooms in Havana, which annually hosts half of the more than 2 million tourists who visit the island, local media reported. The representative of the Tourism Ministry in the Cuban capital, Ramon Zamora, said that the proposal is to be able to receive more tourists in the capital, which has very specific attractions that draw people from all over the world. Havana brings in 33 percent of the country's tourism income by hosting 50 percent of Cuba's foreign visitors, and it has 12,325 rooms spread among 62 hotels, that is to say 27 percent of the country's hotel rooms, according to official data. Zamora said that in 2007, 1.3 million visitors from Spain, Mexico, Italy, France, the United Kingdom, Canada and Germany, the main tourist-sending nations to Cuba, visited Havana, as per a report by the state-run Prensa Latina news agency. (*EFE*, 6/1/08)

**January 7:** Cuban farmers have a suggestion for how the government can put millions of acres of fallow land to work and put more food on everyone's table. Give state-owned lands to them, and allow a bit of capitalism. "We are all hoping for some change -- a new system that allows you to have a better life and do some business," said Elena, a small farmer from the Santiago de Cuba area. "Here, you are not even the boss of what's yours." Interim president Raúl Castro has made it clear as he grapples with the illness of his brother Fidel that one of the chief troubles the country faces is how to put more food on the dinner table without compromising the 49-year-old revolution's socialist doctrine. Cuba's government owns 85 percent of the arable land and controls all supplies like seeds, herbicides, feed and fuel. Private farmers who own the other 15 percent produce 60 percent of the island's food, the government has acknowledged. Experts estimate there are up to 225,000 private farmers in Cuba, as well as another 350,000 farmers working on cooperatives that own their own land, within a system that has long been dominated by Soviet-style, state-owned collective farms. Orlando Lugo, head of the National Small Growers Association, told *Bohemia* magazine there were places last year that didn't plant potatoes, because farmers did not have the materials needed to prepare the soil. With the proper resources, growers in Havana could double or triple output, he added. "We need more resources," Lugo said. "We lack tractors, and there's barely enough machinery and a shortage of fuel." (*The Miami Herald*, 7/1/08)

**January 7:** Cubans who work for foreign companies and receive bonuses will have to declare them as income and pay taxes on them, according to an official ruling by the Finance and Prices Ministry. The ruling affects workers hired through state agencies to work for foreign companies or institutions, embassies, consulates, local offices of international organizations and the foreign press, among others. The hiring agency collects the workers' wages from the companies and in turn pays the employees, after taking out applicable deductions. With the official monthly salary at around \$15, foreign employers have long paid their locally hired workers bonuses in hard currency or in the Cuban convertible peso, or CUC, which is worth \$1.08, compared with 4 cents for the ordinary peso. According to the new ruling, Cuban workers who receive such bonuses

must file with the tax office in the first sixty days of the year and declare their income in CUC or foreign currencies. Foreign companies must also record the payment of any bonuses "separately in their accounting records," which will be compared to the sworn declarations filed by their employees with the tax office. (*EFE*, 7/1/08)

**January 8:** Cuba plans to build 30 new hotels starting this year in order to add more than 10,000 additional hotel rooms to the island's tourism infrastructure, the state-controlled financial weekly *Opciones* reported. The Tourism Ministry delegate in Havana, Ramon Zamora, told the publication that almost 1,000 of the new rooms would be in the capital, which together with the seaside resort of Varadero accounts for 70 percent of revenues from the sector. According to Zamora, plans for developing tourism up to the year 2010 call for boosting expansion through the building of new facilities, the promotion of the new Hoteles E chain, and investment in renovating existing facilities. (*EFE*, 8/1/08)

**January 9:** The first of seven direct Santiago-Havana flights of a Cubana IL-96 will take 230 Chilean tourists in January and February to Havana, Chile Havanatur director Rafael Alcala announced. Alcala told *Prensa Latina* that these direct flights are destined to increase tourism from Chile and to reposition Cubana de Aviacion Airline in Chile. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/1/08)

**January 10:** Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will visit Cuba offering investments, Marcelo Baumbach, presidential spokesman, told a news conference. The Brazilian government wants to increase credit lines to Cuba for food imports as well as investments in industrial, agriculture and infrastructure projects, including the modernization of its hotel industry. Also on the agenda is a framework agreement for cooperation with Brazil's state-controlled oil company Petrobras, including the construction of a lubricants plant and oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, Baumbach said. Petrobras is expected to train Cuban personnel and offer aid in refining and research. Lula, who will be accompanied by several ministers as well as the head of Petrobras, is due to arrive on January 14 and spend 24 hours on the Caribbean island. (*Reuters*, 10/1/08)

**January 10:** Cuban service exports increased dramatically for the third consecutive year in 2007 to \$8.36 billion, more than twice the level reported in 2004, the government said. The mounting service income, mainly from leftist ally Venezuela, has enabled Cuba to more or less balance its external finances despite a huge trade deficit, pay debts contracted since 1991 and register strong growth after years of crisis that followed the demise of the Soviet Union. The National Statistics Office, in preliminary figures posted on its Web site ([www.one.cu](http://www.one.cu)), reported the 21.5 percent, or \$1.5 billion, jump in service exports was not related to tourism revenues, which stagnated at \$2.2 billion. Cuba does not specify what it includes within the service export category, though on various occasions officials have said tourism and related revenues, the export of medical and other technical services and donations fall within it. (*Reuters*, 10/1/08)

**January 10:** Cuba's National Statistics Office (ONE) informed that, in 2007, rice production was 208,000 tons, slightly lower than the previous year. Cuba consumes a minimum of 700,000 tons of rice every year. (*Reuters*, 10/1/08)

**January 10:** India will soon cancel a debt for 64 million USD incurred by Cuba, and will seek to strengthen cooperation with the island in the areas of energy production, civil aviation and tourism, declared in Havana, Somnath Chatterjee, president of the Indian Parliament's Lower House. The Hindu parliamentarian concluded a four-day official visit to the island. (*AFP*, 11/1/08)

**January 15:** The Cuban nickel industry surpassed tourism as the country's top foreign exchange earner for the first time in 2007, an economic commentator said on state-run television. "Cuba's production of between 75,000 and 76,000 tonnes meant revenues of around \$2.7 billion, while tourism earned around \$2.1 to \$2.2 billion," Ariel Terrero, considered the best-informed economic commentator on state-run television, said. Cuban officials have said nickel output was up 2.2 percent last year over a 2006 output of around 74,000 tonnes. Terrero confirmed unrefined nickel plus cobalt production should reach a record 80,000 tonnes this year. "There are plans to increase production at the Pedro Soto Alba plant, a joint venture with Canada, by 4,000 tonnes, an investment that began some time ago and which should come on line beginning this year," he said. Joint venture partner Sherritt International has announced plans to add 16,000 tonnes to the plant's capacity, 4,000 tonnes in 2008, another 9,000 tonnes in 2009 and a final 3,000 tonnes in 2011. Sherritt partner, state-run Cubaniquel, operates two older plants in eastern Holguin province where the joint venture is located, exporting the product mainly to Europe and China. The three plants have operated at capacity for a number of years. (*Reuters*, 15/1/08)

**January 15:** Brazil and Cuba signed 10 agreements covering oil exploration, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, and agriculture during Brazilian President Luiz Inacio da Silva's official visit to Cuba. At a ceremony at the Palace of the Revolution in Havana, Lula signed for his nation while Raul Castro, who has been acting president since July 2006, signed for Cuba. Other important agreements include a memorandum of understanding allowing Brazilian state-owned energy company Petrobras to explore and produce oil and gas in Cuban-owned Gulf of Mexico waters. Petrobras joins companies from Spain, Canada, India and Malaysia in exploring this area. A second memorandum agreed to set up a feasibility study on a possible joint venture to produce and sell lubricants in Cuba. In another document, Brazil's Financing and Export Guarantee Committee (Cofig) approves a credit for food purchases, the expansion of Cuba's Ernesto Guevara Nickel Plant, and the purchase of fish farming equipment. Cofig also agreed to look at a series of projects, from hotels to pharmaceuticals. Brazilian Foreign Ministry said food credits might be worth as much as 100 million US dollars. [[Acuerdos suscritos entre Cuba y Brasil](#)] (*Xinhua, Sun Sentinel*, 16/1/08)

**January 17:** The Camilo Cienfuegos refinery, in the Cuban central province of Cienfuegos, began processing crude oil in accordance with its implementation plan after its recent re-inauguration. Executives of this industry told reporters that the plant is

refining its first 65,000 barrels of crude oil to obtain fuel oil, diesel, naphta, gasoline and turbo fuel. The technical staff of the refinery has also worked in the enlargement of storage tanks and they concluded the assembly of a geodesic dome in the third tank, with a capacity of 50,000 cubic meters. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/1/08)

**January 17:** The Venezuela-Cuba relationship has been the driving force for Latin American integration, said Martha Lomas, minister of foreign investment and economic cooperation, speaking in Caracas at the signing ceremony for the 8th Joint Commission of the Integrated Cooperation Agreement between the two countries. In a statement to the press, Minister Lomas reported that, as part of the growing exchange, 26 joint enterprises have been created and another 10 are in the final stages of negotiation. On this occasion, 76 projects were presented, mostly related to the sugar agribusiness and its derivatives, representing an amount of over \$1.355 billion, to be administered by 18 Venezuelan and 21 Cuban ministries, with the participation of more than 60 institutions in the two countries. (*Granma International*, 17/1/08)

**January 18:** Chinese and Cuban companies signed a contract to sell the Caribbean island six air-generators of 750 kilowatts each destined to the second Gibara eolian wind energy park. Located in north Holguin, this site will have a 1,500-kilowatt power. The document was inked during a ceremony at the Cuban embassy in Beijing, by Wu Gang, president of the Chinese Company GoldWind, and Lazaro Hernandez, trade director of the Cuban Company EnergoImport. GoldWind Science and Technology Corporation, manufacturer of the top-technology equipment, is the leading company in China in this renewable energies sector, and controls about 34 percent of the domestic market. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/1/08)

**January 18:** Cuba has a new "special corps" of government inspectors to prevent pilfering of fuels and ensure that electricity is not wasted, state-run media reported. The press cited Vice President Carlos Lage as saying the inspectors have "all the authority to continuously monitor how electricity, fuels and lubricants are being used" on the communist-ruled island. Lage commented at the swearing-in of the first 65 members of the new corps, whose ranks are set to swell by 200 during the course of this month. Reports from the inspectors "should suggest control measures, sanctions for those who irresponsibly fail to comply and technical solutions to promote efficiency," the official said. (*EFE*, 18/1/08)

**January 21:** Cuban sugar mills have opened more or less on time so far this year, with 52 state-run mills scheduled to be grinding by early February when yields rise, official media reports indicated. The government said there was 12 percent more cane than last year when plans to produce 1.5 million to 1.6 million tonnes of raw sugar fell short and output was 1.2 million tonnes. According to sources close to the industry and provincial plans reported by local media, Reuters estimates that Cuba plans to produce a minimum 1.6 million tonnes this harvest. Some 40 mills were open, according to various media reports, compared with just 20 a year ago when late start-ups contributed to a dismal performance. Mill openings averaged more than one per day in January and 13 mills ground in December, compared to just one mill in December 2006. Weather conditions

have also proven favorable, with milling and cane yields more or less what would be expected. But chronic organizational and management problems still exist and could still threaten this year's output. (*Reuters*, 21/1/08)

**January 21:** The alcohol distillery functioning within the Antonio Guterias sugar factory, in eastern Las Tunas province, has increased its production capacity. After a 23-year period of no renovations, repair works began in the second semester of 2007. Once repairs are completed, production should increase from 850 to 1,000 hectolitres of alcohol every day. The greater part of the alcohol obtained is devoted to produce rum and other beverages, plus the elaboration of drugs in the pharmaceutical industry, and its use in other economic branches. (*ACN*, 21/1/08)

**January 22:** Cuba has banned the hunting of marine turtles endangered in the Caribbean by the illegal trade in shells used to make combs, an official said. The decision was applauded by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) as a lifeline to all turtle species hatching on beaches throughout the Caribbean, but above all the critically endangered hawksbill turtle. The ban already took effect, said the Cuban Fisheries Ministry's director of regulations, Elisa Garcia. She said it would remain in effect "until it is scientifically proven that the species is recovering." "This far-sighted decision represents an outstanding outcome for Cuba, for the wider Caribbean and for conservation," said the WWF species program director, Dr. Susan Lieberman. Two fishing communities that still hunt turtles, Nuevitas, in Camaguey province, and Cocodrilo, in the Isle of Youth, will get funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to find alternative sources of income and modernize their fishing fleets. (*Reuters*, 22/1/08)

**January 23:** Seizing on its proximity to Canada, Cuba has partnered with Choice Medical Services to attract medical tourists. Cuba has also partnered with similar firms in Germany and Spain, cracking into the Western market by highlighting its excellent health-care system and low cost of care. According to Choice Medical Services, a hip replacement in Cuba costs about \$10,000, compared with \$39,000 in the US. In 2007, the Caribbean nation hosted nearly 20,000 medical tourists, according to Cubanacan Tourism and Health, the umbrella organization that promotes Cuba's health tourism facilities. (*The Globe & Mail*, 23/1/08)

**January 23:** Feasibility studies are underway with a view to opening gold and zinc-copper mines in the Cuban province of Villa Clara in 2009. The study is part of a cooperation program between Cuba and Venezuela. "Our aim is to extend existing reserves and to start mining underground deposits by next year", said company director Argelio Abad. The studies, being carried out by the Central Geo Mining Company, have an increased importance because of the rise in the price of gold and the demand for copper and zinc in the international market. The Central Geo Mining Company had a commercial production of more than 14 million pesos in 2007. (*RHC, AIN*, 24/1/08)

**January 24:** Amid the turbulent state of international finances, the ALBA Bank will provide stability and sustainability, said Francisco Soberon Valdes, minister-president of the Central Bank of Cuba at a work session preceding the official founding of the new

bank set for January 26. Soberon told the press covering the Sixth Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) Summit in the Venezuelan capital that the new banking institution comes at a time when capitalism is more than ever showing its weaknesses. Soberon led Cuba's delegation at the minister level commission that met to review the ALBA Bank founding documents. In praising the idea, he called it "very well designed" and highlighted its importance to finance projects of social impact generally not assumed by commercial banks because of their long payback period. "The ALBA Bank can fill that void," he added. (*Prensa Latina*, 24/1/08)

**January 26:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and three of his closest allies teamed up to create a regional development bank intended to strengthen their alliance and promote independence from US-backed lenders like the World Bank. The bank was launched as Chavez hosts a summit with leaders from Nicaragua, Bolivia and Cuba -- members of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, or ALBA. The ALBA Bank will be started with \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion of capital, Venezuelan Finance Minister Rafael Isea said, according to the state-run Bolivarian News Agency. (*AP*, 26/1/08)

**January 28:** Insufficient production and the high prices of agricultural goods are forcing Cubans to "work wonders" in order to be able to feed themselves, according to a report published in the official newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*. Commercialization issues are barely "the tip of the iceberg" of "an agricultural model beset by many shortcomings that prevent the improvement of productive levels," indicates the article. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 28/1/08)

**January 28:** Virtually every square foot of Havana is owned by the socialist state, which would seem sure to put a damper on the buying and selling of property. But the people of Havana, it turns out, are obsessed with real estate and have dreams of more elbow room, not to mention the desire for hot water, their own toilets and roofs that do not let the rain seep indoors. There is a bustling underground market in homes and apartments, which has given rise to agents (illegal ones), speculators (they are illegal, too) and scams (which range from praising a dive as a dream house to backing out of a deal at the closing and pocketing the cash). The whole enterprise is quintessentially Cuban, socialist on its face but really a black market involving equal parts drama and dinero, sometimes as much as \$50,000 or more. These days, insiders say, prices are on the rise as people try to get their hands on historic homes in anticipation of a time when private property may return to Cuba. (*The New York Times*, 28/1/08)

**January 29:** Cuba has purchased 550 cargo wagons and 200 railway passenger cars from Iran, Transport Minister Jorge Luis Sierra said. The equipment will arrive in Cuba gradually and will allow the country to re-establish daily train service between Havana and the island's other provinces, the minister said in a statement released by state agency *Prensa Latina*. Sierra did not indicate the cost of the transaction, which furthers the nations' cooperation in that sector. Iran in November 2007 granted Cuba a 200-million-euro (\$295 million) loan to finance imports from the South Asian nation, while the Cuban government has signed contracts worth more than \$2 billion in the transport sector. (*EFE*, 29/1/08)

**January 29:** With 39 mills up and working, and good weather to boot, Cuba is achieving higher sugar output than at the same stage of the previous harvest, Sugar Minister Ulises Rosales del Toro said. "The harvest is going well," Rosales del Toro told the state news agency Prensa Latina. The minister said another 13 mills will start grinding sugar cane by next month and the raw sugar output will be on target when the harvest ends in April. He gave no figures. According to sources close to the industry and provincial plans reported by local media, Reuters estimates that Cuba plans to produce a minimum 1.6 million tonnes this harvest. Officials said there is 12 percent more cane than last year when plans to produce between 1.5 and 1.6 million tonnes of raw sugar fell short and output was 1.2 million tonnes. That dismal performance, among the lowest output levels in a century, was caused by late start-ups and other equipment problems. (*Reuters*, 29/1/08)

**January 29:** More than 2,200 new jobs will be created in the central Cuban province of Ciego de Avila as a result of a cooperation agreement between Cuba and Venezuela. The program, called Center for Endogenous Development, is one of the more than 300 projects that are underway on the island as part of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA). For this project, which will conclude in 2010, Venezuela will contribute \$14 million while Cuba will give 44 million Cuban pesos. According to Elio Castillo, an official at the Cuban Ministry for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation (MINVEC), the new jobs will be created in the fields of agriculture, cattle raising, fishing and construction, among others. Part of the investment will be earmarked to the repair and maintenance of roads and the construction of new houses in the area. (*PrensaLatina*,29/1/08)

**January 30:** Cuba First Vice President Raul Castro has recently urged on the need to consolidate the programs set for the development of urban agriculture (AU) in the island in order to increase the production of foodstuffs. The also second secretary of the Cuban Communist Party sent a letter to the attendees to a meeting held in the island's central province of Sancti Spiritus in which he praised the great efforts of the over 300,000 producers engaged in urban agriculture who managed to get over one million tons of products last year. (*Escambray*, 30/1/08)

**January 30:** Brazil's state-owned Petroleo Brasileiro SA (Petrobras) signed agreements with Cuba's Compania Cubana de Petroleo (Cupet) for cooperation in oil and gas exploration and production, research and development, and human resource cooperation. Studies also will be undertaken for agreements concerning facilities maintenance. The agreements give Brazil a foot in Cuba's energy door that Venezuela has, until recently, partially blocked. Petrobras, which has expertise in deepwater exploration and production, said the agreement "foresees the assessment of the offshore blocks in the Cuban sector of the Gulf of Mexico, as well as technical and economic analyses for the construction of a lubricant factory in Havana." Cuba hopes its exploration in the deepwater Gulf of Mexico will result in discoveries enabling the country to become self-sufficient in oil production. (*Penn Energy*, 30/1/08)

**January 31:** Cuba and Algeria agreed to strengthen cooperation in health, agriculture, fishing, education and other matters at the signing of an agreement in the recently concluded 15th Session of the Mixed Inter-governmental Commission. For the Cuban part the documents were signed by Foreign Trade Minister Raul de la Nuez and for Algeria they were signed by the Minister of Health, Population and Hospital Reform, Amar Tou. The meeting ended with important agreements on bilateral cooperation in the maternal-infant program and technology transfer, for which Cuba will supply vaccines, blood derivatives and other products of the pharmaceutical-medical industry. Another topic of cooperation was the development of higher education, sports and, for the first time, physical planning. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/1/08)

**January 31:** The Vice President of the Republic of Guatemala, Rafael Espada, is to officially visit Cuba, invited by the island's government. Espada will arrive accompanied by Energy and Mining Minister Carlos Meanny Valerio, Culture and Sports Minister Jeronimo Lancerio, and Juan Aguilar, chief of the Presidential Secretariat on Food Security. Also on the list are the Rector of San Carlos University, Estuardo Galvez, and the Dean of the Medicine Faculty, Jesus Oliva. This visit is an expression of Cuba and Guatemala's will to develop and deepen current bilateral relations, Granma newspaper reported. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/1/08)

**January 31:** Cuban Tourism Minister Manuel Marrero is heading a large Cuban delegation to Spain's International Tourism Fair, FITUR 2008, one of the most important of its type in the world. FITUR has 12 pavilions and is one of the main travel fairs in the world, second only to Berlin's. The Fair will run until February 3. Representatives of the tourist system: agencies, hotels, receptors and associates are part of the delegation. (*ACN*, 31/1/08)



## EXILE COMMUNITY

**January 1:** Cuban ballet master and choreographer Alberto Julio Rayneri Alonso has died. He was 90. Alonso died of heart failure at North Florida Regional Medical Center, said an official at Santa Fe Community College, where he was the master artist in residence. Mr. Alonso had lived in Gainesville since receiving political asylum in the United States in 1993. He joined Santa Fe Community College in Gainesville as master artist in residence and resident choreographer for the Dance Theater of Santa Fe. He was best known for his 1967 work "Carmen Suite," the only Bolshoi Ballet ever commissioned by a non-Russian. Born in 1917 in Havana, Alonso gained international acclaim in 1935 when he emerged as the first notable Cuban male dancer while performing for the Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo. After touring the world as principal dancer, he returned to Cuba in 1940 to begin his career as a choreographer and co-director of the National Ballet of Cuba, together with his brother, Cuban maitre and choreographer Fernando. In September 2007, Santa Fe Community College produced "Dance of My Heart," a documentary chronicling Mr. Alonso's career and contributions

as a solo artist, choreographer and instructor. The documentary was shown in Gainesville and at the Edmonton International Film Festival in Canada. Mr. Alonso was married first to the Ballets Russes dancer Alexandra Denisova; then to Elena del Cueto, a Cuban dancer. He is survived by his wife for 44 years, the Cuban dancer and actress Sonia Calero, his children and grandchildren. (*Sun Sentinel, The New York Times, Juventud Rebelde*, 2,7/1/08)

**January 1:** After more than a decade of painstaking research by two Cuban exiles with the non-profit group Cuba Archive, for the first time their results are available in a searchable database on the Web. The Truth and Memory Project database was launched on January 1, thanks to a \$52,000 grant from Freedom House, an advocacy organization founded by Eleanor Roosevelt. "This is one more way to shed light on something a lot of people do not know about," said Jorge A. García Mas, who arrived in the United States from Cuba in 1999. "The first thing I did was to look for my family's names. How is it not going to hurt to see their names on there?" García lost several members of his family in July 1994, when the tugboat "13 de Marzo", loaded with would-be refugees, was rammed and sank. The database includes García's son, four in-laws, five nieces and nephews, and three cousins. It also chronicles the deaths of people shot by firing squad, killed in prison, drowned at sea, killed by terrorist bombs and other causes. "The nature of the crimes is horrifying," said Maria Werlau, executive director of Cuba Archive. "You don't need to say anything. You don't need to editorialize. Here it is. It's like that news network that says: 'We report it. You decide.'" (*The Miami Herald*, 4/1/08)

**January 3:** The new president of Texas A&M University is the first woman and first Hispanic to hold the job. Elsa Murano, a former A&M administrator who fled Cuba as a child, was the only finalist for the post and named by the A&M system's Board of Regents. "I am grateful to live in a country that has provided so many opportunities, including the great honor to serve as president of Texas A&M University," she said. Murano was the vice chancellor and dean of A&M's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Before that, she was undersecretary for food safety at the US Department of Agriculture from 2001 to 2004. Murano, 48, fled Cuba with her family in the early 1960s. Born in Havana, she and her family lived in several Latin American countries before moving to Miami. (*AP*, 3/1/08)

**January 6:** Former Cuban General Rafael del Pino wrote a pair of articles in Spanish-language newspapers in Miami calling for a thaw in US-Cuba relations. That prompted a hostile backlash from prominent members of Miami's Cuban exile community, known for its virulent hatred of Castro. Del Pino has responded with a federal lawsuit seeking thousands of dollars in damages for what he claims is a campaign by Little Havana notables to silence him by using popular Spanish-language television and radio stations to unjustly criticize him. Del Pino even claims he was threatened with a mob lynching on one radio program. The targets of the lawsuit, including leaders of the Bay of Pigs Veterans Association and Spanish-language network Univision Communications Inc., say the claims of threats are overstated and that they have a free-speech right to criticize del Pino's views. When Del Pino defected to the US in 1987 by flying a twin-engine Cessna to Key West, it was hailed by US President Ronald Reagan's administration as one of the

greatest intelligence coups in the long Cold War against Fidel Castro. At the time, del Pino was the highest-ranking Cuban military officer to defect to the US -- following a career as a fighter pilot he had been deputy chief of staff of Cuba's armed forces, and had been awarded as a Bay of Pigs Hero. (*AP*, 6/1/08)

**January 7:** In 1999, a Cuban family fled to the United States on a vintage Antonov-2 Colt biplane, landing safely in Key West. Cuban American artist Xavier Cortada donated that Antonov-2 Colt biplane to Florida International University. Cortada painted a representation of freedom on half of the biplane and purposely left the other half in the same condition as when it arrived in Miami. One of the main reasons Cortada donated the plane is because of the large number of Cuban students and faculty at FIU. Cortada hopes that Cuban students look at the plane and reflect on their history and non-Cuban students look at the plane and learn something. "I created this exhibit in order for my parents, grandparents and all other Cuban exiles to not fade from memory," Cortada said on his Web site. Cortada is known for his philanthropic endeavors involving the Cuban community. He received the prestigious Millennium International Volunteer Award from the US Department of State and *USA Today* in 2000. In February of 2000 Cortada was invited to meet Pope John Paul II in Rome. (*The Beacon*, 1/7/08)

**January 8:** Cuban essayist, teacher and historian Luis Aguilar León was remembered by diverse personalities of the Cuban exile community as an intellectual who helped educate the new generations of academicians in the United States. Aguilar León, also known as Lundi, died on January 5. Born in Manzanillo, he founded in 1959 the Christian Democratic Movement (MDC), which was immediately banned by Fidel Castro's government. On May 13, 1960, he published in the newspaper *Prensa Libre* his article "The time for unanimity," a biting and visionary critique of the totalitarianism threatening to take over Cuba. The next day, a revolutionary committee asked for the arrest and execution by firing squad of the article's author and the newspaper was closed down. Aguilar León went into exile that same year. (*EER*, 8/1/08)

**January 11:** In Madrid a two-day discussion took place on homosexuality in Cuba and the repression that sexual minorities had undergone because of the island's communist regime. Posters for the conference bore Che Guevara's well-known picture along with the rainbow colours of the gay Pride flag. Writer Zoe Valdes believes this "would have greatly irritated" Che. "Che and his ideal of the new man was the ideal of the macho man, which rejects everything that has gathered us here," Valdes said. "In explaining Cuba's recent history it is important to remember that behind a political issue there's a sexual issue," Valdes said, including the repressed homosexuality of regime leaders. Raul Castro, Fidel's younger brother, who has been Cuba's acting president since Fidel fell ill in July 2006, has been accused of being a closeted homosexual. Poet Leon de la Hoz said that many people on the island refer to him as "the little Chinese man with the sad eyes," a reference to his supposed repressed homosexuality. The two-day discussion began with presentations about Cuban poet Jose Mario, an important 20th Century figure in the country, who suffered in Cuban labour camps as Castro's regime 're-educated' homosexuals. Gays were incarcerated in Military Units to Aid Production (UMAPs) between 1965 and 1968. (*Pink News*, 11/1/08)

**January 12:** Protesters demanding the arrest of Luis Posada Carriles called off a planned demonstration in the Little Havana neighborhood after they were confronted by supporters of the anti-Castro Cuban militant. A group of women from the anti-war group CODEPINK had planned to discuss with reporters their campaign against Posada, who is free after a judge dismissed the government's charges that he lied to investigators in a bid to become a naturalized US citizen. About 15 CODEPINK activists were met in front of a Little Havana restaurant by some 200 supporters of Posada, who is wanted by the Cuban and Venezuelan government on charges that he plotted the deadly 1976 bombing of a Cuban jetliner while in Caracas. Several of the Posada supporters charged at the activists' truck, which carried a photo of Posada and a sign reading "Wanted by the FBI: Luis Posada Carriles for terrorism." Some people tried to tear down the poster, while others shouted insults. Supporters of Posada say he is a hero for his fight against communism and Cuban President Fidel Castro "Posada Carriles is no terrorist. The terrorist is Fidel Castro," said Rene Vidal. (*The Miami Herald*, 14/1/08)

**January 12:** The tears welled in his eyes as "Minnie" Miñoso leaned against a rail in the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum and talked about an honor that he was to receive later in the night. It was a few hours before Orestes "Minnie" Miñoso was to step onto the stage across the street inside The Gem Theater to accept The Jackie Robinson Legacy Award, a tribute to Miñoso's lifetime of work on behalf of baseball. "This is something beautiful," he said. "I wanna thank everyone who was involved in making this kind of decision." Miñoso was appreciative that people had thought enough of him and his work to give him an honor that bore the name of the man who had, 61 years earlier, opened doors to the Major Leagues for blacks and Latinos to enter. The Robinson Legacy Award celebrates Miñoso's lifetime of promoting baseball. In that role, Miñoso joined Yogi Berra, the late Buck O'Neil and Bob Feller, iconic figures whose ties to the game stretched back into the 1940s, as an ambassador for the game. He learned the game on the rock-hard, unmanicured fields in pre-Castro Cuba. He then fled Cuba to cast his lot in America. (*MLB.Com*, 12/1/08)

**January 15:** Florestan Ors fled to South Florida seven months after Fidel Castro seized power in Cuba. But unlike many of Cuba's early refugees who are now prosperous citizens, Ors is virtually penniless at 71. And, oddly, undocumented Ors is among a growing number of immigrants who, despite having worked for decades in the United States and paid taxes, are shut out of Social Security and other benefits because they are undocumented. Many are homeless. "I led a relatively normal life before 9/11," Ors said. "But 9/11 ended all that. My life changed radically. Before I was able to work, I had my efficiency and then I became homeless." Ors is among 40 Cubans and Haitians getting help from the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center because they lack immigration papers and can't unlock their Social Security benefits. "I never felt the desire to stay here permanently," Ors explained. "Maybe that's why I never thought about getting a green card. I always tended to see the United States as a temporary place, that eventually I would be returning to Cuba either to fight Fidel Castro or because he had been overthrown and we would be free to go back." (*The Miami Herald*, 15/1/08)

**January 16:** Martha Flores, a popular Spanish-language radio host, will not have to respond to a lawsuit filed in federal court in Miami charging she violated the rights of a former Cuban general exiled in Miami. US District Judge Ursula Ungaro dismissed the case against Flores filed on behalf of Rafael del Pino. The former general, 67, dramatically defected to the United States with his family in a stolen Cessna in 1987. Del Pino, who is embroiled in a bitter feud with some exiles over his views on negotiating with Cuba, sued Flores and others for "the harm he has suffered from a series of violent threats and intimidation" by local television and radio personalities and Bay of Pigs veterans, all with the "intent of chilling" his First Amendment Rights, his suit claimed. The judge's 13-page order said Flores expressed an opinion about Del Pino on the air but did not take any action against him. (*The Miami Herald*, 16/1/08)

**January 16:** Poet and journalist Raúl Rivero and sociologist Héctor Palacios denounced in Madrid the serious predicament of many Cuban political prisoners. Rivero and Palacios, both members of the group of 75 dissidents imprisoned in 2003, attended at the Madrid Press Association head office the presentation of the latest report of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Conciliation (CCDHRN). [[Presentación del Informe de la CCDHRN por Raúl Rivero, video](#)] (*EER*, 17/1/08)

**January 19:** A collection of black-and-white photographs of glamorous showgirls, modernist architecture and the revolution are what collector Ramiro Fernandez used for his new book "I Was Cuba." "The book has a reflection of the past, but it also has an optimistic window or viewpoint toward the future," said Fernandez, 56. "I wanted to deal with the revolution but also put that in the past." Fernandez, who moved to Miami from Cuba with his family in 1960, spoke to more than two dozen attendees at a lecture and book signing at the Museum of Arts and Sciences as part of the museum's week of "Great Masters of Cuban Art: 1800-1958." The lecture included a slide show with photos from his book. (*Daytona Beach News*, 19/1/08)

**January 24:** At a press conference, the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) launched the "Cuban American Voter Guide-Elections 2008". A CANF press release said "the CANF has been working with all major Presidential campaigns over the course of the last several months to allow Cuban American voters the opportunity to get to know where the candidates stand on Cuba policy". "All campaigns were provided with a questionnaire and asked to submit a statement reflecting what Cuba policy would look like under their respective Administrations", the statement added. The guide includes responses, in alphabetical order, from Hillary Clinton, Rudy Giuliani, Mike Huckabee, John McCain, Barack Obama, Mitt Romney, and Fred Thompson. [[Cuban American Voter Guide](#)] (*EER, CANF*, 24,24/1/08)

**January 25:** While likely to irk those on either extreme — expats and conservatives who equate Castro with Hitler, or those who consider Cuba the embattled last socialist utopia — "Shoot Down" does an admirably evenhanded job examining circumstances that led to two US civilian planes being shot down by Cuban military aircraft 11 years ago. Cristina Khuly's documentary merits exposure, particularly while its hot-button issues have again been warmed to boiling point by Castro's failing health. Four Miami men died in the two

planes shot down on February 24, 1996. Three were first-generation Cuban-Americans. Another was a refugee who owed his life to Brothers to the Rescue, for which they all volunteered. (*Sun Sentinel*, 25/1/08)

**January 29:** It has become a highly stylized ritual: US political candidates drop by the Versailles restaurant in Little Havana, slurp a “cafecito”, condemn Fidel Castro and loudly affirm, “ Viva Cuba libre!” The Republican primary in Florida this year was no different. But as iconic as those moments at the Versailles have become, their symbolism may have been lost in a presidential election campaign less about the Cuban past than this nation's present, with a new generation of Cubans providing the decisive edge. Dario Moreno, a professor at Florida International University and an expert in Cuban American politics, said that, “Cuban Americans are voting on the same issues that other Floridians are voting on.” “There is a lot of middle-class angst.” “They always come and say ‘Viva Cuba libre!’ ” and ‘next year,’ ” said Jorge Chao, 51, a dry-cleaning manager who came to Miami from Cuba in 1980. “But it's been 51 years, and nothing has changed.” “I live here, not in Cuba,” said Caridad Calzadilla, 53, a real estate agent. “The most important issue is the economy.” For Calzadilla and her husband, the top issues are taxes, home insurance and health coverage. Many Cuban Americans, particularly those most recently arrived, say that the trade and travel bans, though aimed at Castro, have hurt others instead. “It's the people who suffer from the embargo,” said Jose Canavaciolo, 31, a painting contractor who left Cuba in 1994. “Castro -- he was fine.” (*The Washington Post*, 30/1/08)



## FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**January 1:** On the occasion of the anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, Party General Secretary Nong Duc Manh, State President Nguyen Minh Triet and Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung extended their congratulations to Fidel Castro Ruz, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba (CPC) Central Committee and President of the State Council and the Council of Ministers of Cuba. Raul Castro Ruz, Second Secretary of the CPC and First Vice President of the State Council and the Council of Ministers of Cuba also received congratulatory messages from the Vietnamese leaders. (*VietNamNet Bridge*, 1/1/08)

**January 1:** Iran President Mahmud Ahmadinejad expressed felicitations to Raul Castro, first vice president of Cuba's Council of State, on the country's national day. In his message, Ahmadinejad expressed hope that Tehran-Havana relations would develop in the future through strengthened bilateral cooperation. (*IRNA*, 8/1/08)

**January 2:** Former Argentine President Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) is considering a trip to Cuba in March to mediate in the case of Cuban doctor Hilda Molina, who has unsuccessfully tried for years to visit her family in Buenos Aires. Cuban authorities

haven't allowed Molina to leave the country. The trip falls within the framework of ongoing talks between Kirchner and the Cuban government. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 2/1/08)

**January 3:** The most senior official in the Vatican after the Pope said he hopes to meet Cuba's acting president Raul Castro during a February visit to the communist-run island. Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Vatican secretary of state, said his trip was at least partly related to commemorations of the 10th anniversary of late Pope John Paul II's landmark trip to Cuba in 1998. "I am preparing a trip to Cuba in the month of February. I hope to meet the brother of Fidel Castro, who now leads the country," Bertone told the prominent Italian Catholic magazine, "Famiglia Cristiana". His interview was released to media before publication in the January 6 edition. (*Reuters*, 3/1/08)

**January 3:** A visit to Cuba by Paraguayan President Nicanor Duarte, originally scheduled for January 7, was postponed for the second half of January. According to official sources, the leader decided to delay his trip "until the outcome of the Partido Colorado internal elections is known." (*EFE*, 3/1/08)

**January 3:** A clash between Cuban and Central American immigrants at the Tapachula Migratory Station, Chiapas, forced the deployment of dozens of police to contain the protests. The Cubans complain about ill treatment, bad living conditions and police corruption in the migratory centres where they are taken after being picked up off the Mexican shores. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 4/1/08)

**January 4:** A Slovak human rights activist said that she was barred from entering Cuba by immigration officials despite being given a visa earlier. "They told me I have to leave Cuba immediately, that I am on a list of unwanted persons," Ivana Kullova, of the human rights organisation People in Peril, told the press. She was forced to leave on the first plane after arriving in Cuba on January 2, she added. Kullova had been due to talk to intellectuals and teachers and provide them with literature and information about a pluralistic education system. Two months ago, another Slovak activist Peter Novotny was thrown out of Cuba after meeting with Cuban dissidents. (*AFP*, 5/1/08)

**January 4:** At least 20 health facilities, including hospitals, education centers and polyclinic-faculties are in operation in Jaguey Grande, Matanzas province, as part of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA). A report from the health department in Matanzas, 55 miles east of Havana, says that about 5,000 students from 14 countries benefit from these programs, designed to train physicians and nursing staff free of charge. This large mass of students, the text adds, come from Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Pakistan, Timor Leste and Peru. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/1/08)

**January 7:** During his address to the diplomatic corps for the traditional exchange of New Year's Greetings, Pope Benedicto XVI expressed his hope for a better future for Cuba. "Pope John Paul II was received with affection by the authorities and by the people, and he encouraged all Cubans to work together for a better future. I should like to

reiterate this message of hope, which has lost none of its relevance," he added. (AP, 7/1/08)

**January 7:** The president of India's Lower House, Somnath Chatterjee, arrived in Havana accompanied by several parliamentarians on an official visit until January 10. Chatterjee affirmed their visit repays the excellent one made by a delegation of the Cuban People's Power National Assembly to India last year, headed by its Vice President Jaime Crombet. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/1/08)

**January 7:** Sixteen Cubans arrived in two groups at two locations of the Honduran Atlantic coast. The Cubans had set out from Manzanillo on December 20, with a stopover in Grand Cayman Island, where they stocked up on water and food. (AP, 7/1/08)

**January 7:** An Orthodox Cathedral is under construction in central Havana. Cuban architect Sanchez believes it's all done with the hope of re-pointing the cement in the Cuban-Russian relationship. "For so many years Cuba and the Soviet Union were together, of course now the relationship has changed, but who says that old friends can't become new friends again?" he asks. The whole project has the support of Fidel Castro. Recently a Greek Orthodox Church was built, and Castro's improved relationship with religious leaders was immortalized in mosaic. So with the Greek Church built and the Russian one coming along, who will be the congregation? There are an estimated 8,000 Orthodox Christians living in Havana and after years of religious drought, enthusiasm for the old faith is growing. The Cubans are expecting a delivery of onion-shaped domes and Russian bells by the end of the month. (*Russia Today*, 7/1/08)

**January 7:** Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage received the President of India's Lower House Speaker Somnath Chatterjee, during the official visit of the parliamentary delegation to the island. Chatterjee explained that India, with about 1.2 billion inhabitants, has a 545-member Lok Sabha, or Lower House, and a 250-member Upper House or State Council. Also the Indian leader met with Cuban National Assembly of the People's Power President Ricardo Alarcon, to whom he expressed his interest in learning and exchanging on Cuban experiences. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/1/08)

**January 8:** The recuperating Fidel Castro praised the benefits of rehabilitation through physical therapy and the work in that field of Chilean specialist Elena Pedraza, whom he hailed as "an example of communist conduct." In the latest of his "reflections" published in the official press, Castro said that "rehabilitation takes on a special and novel significance related to life" because it makes human beings "happy to look after themselves until the end." The 81-year-old Castro emphasized that in Cuba the service of rehabilitation through physical therapy "benefits all the inhabitants of the country, where today (...) there is a life expectancy of 77 years, which continues to increase." The Cuban leader praised Chilean specialist Pedraza, 97, who after the South American country's 1973 military coup moved to Cuba, where she conducted research and developed a training program for physical therapists. [[An Example of Good Communist Behaviour](#)] (*EFE, Prensa Latina*, 8/1/08)

**January 8:** Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque met with a delegation from the Lower Chamber of India's parliament headed by Somnath Chatterjee, president of this legislative body. Chatterjee praised the island's achievements in terms of healthcare, an area he said is an essential aspect in a developing country. The Indian leader also made reference to the achievements in terms of sports and said he looks forward to visiting the Cerro Pelado school for the training of high performance athletes in Havana. The visiting delegation was received on Monday by the President of the Cuban Parliament Ricardo Alarcon and by Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage Davila. (ACN, 8/1/08)

**January 8:** The Cuban Ambassador to Angola, Pedro Ross Leal, considered January 8 as a special day for Angola and Cuba, because it marks Angola's National Culture and the triumphant entrance of Fidel Castro in Havana in 1959. The diplomat made a speech at a ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. Ross Leal highlighted Cuba's contribution to the Angolan liberation struggle, and made references to the Cubans who died in the battles of Ebo, Kifangondo and in the mountains of Quibala. (ANGOP, 9/1/08)

**January 8:** Three collaborators of former Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso will be brought to trial for the illegal release from prison of Luis Posada Carriles, mastermind of the mid-air bombing of a Cubana airliner that killed 73 people in 1976. Those who will be standing trial as of next Monday are the former Panamanian Minister of Government and Justice, Arnulfo Escalona; the former Director of the National Police, Carlos Bares; and Javier Tapia, former Deputy Director of Migration. Attorney Javier Viques explained that these former officials of the Moscoso Administration will be tried on a charge of abuse of authority and that they will probably receive minimum sentences. However, he said, this will prevent them from holding public office. (ACN, 8/1/08)

**January 9:** A group of 13 Cubans who arrived on Honduras' coast after spending 17 days at sea said they hoped to continue on to the US. "We hope to continue our trip to Miami," said Pablo Manuel Leiva, the group's 49-year-old leader. At a news conference, Leiva said he had traveled with seven men and five women, ranging in age from 20 to 39. "We sailed without problems for about six days, but then we met with strong winds and huge waves," Leiva said. "We were left without water and fuel and had to row with our arms and hands. In the past two years, more than 600 Cubans have arrived in Honduras, and most are granted temporary 15- or 30-day visas. The majority of Cuban immigrants immediately leave for the US. A boat with five Cuban immigrants arrived on January 5 at a small island off the mainland, and 11 others followed the next day. (AP, 10/1/08)

**January 10:** Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will visit Cuba, but Fidel Castro's health makes a meeting between the two uncertain, Lula's spokesman said. Both leaders intend to meet, but because of Castro's health the encounter could not be confirmed, Marcelo Baumbach, presidential spokesman, told a news conference. "It is very likely that the meeting will happen, everybody wants it to happen (...) but at this moment it's necessary to hear the opinion of the physicians," Baumbach said. He described Lula as a close friend of Castro. Some of Lula's closest allies were exiled in Cuba during Brazil's 1964-1985 military dictatorships. Last November, Lula postponed

the visit he was going to make to Cuba, alleging that he needed more time to analyse a series of requests submitted by the Cuban government during the Ibero-American Summit, held in Chile the same month. (*Reuters, Agencia Brasil, 10/1/08*)

**January 10:** Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega told legislators the country would be "among the most democratic in the world" if they adopt a parliamentary-style system and fund citizen groups modeled after those in Cuba. Ortega said his proposals for the legislative system and increasing funds for Cuban-inspired groups known as Councils of Citizens' Power would return power to the people. (*Bloomberg, 10/1/08*)

**January 11:** German human rights advocates warned about the deteriorating health of Cuban political prisoner José Luis García Paneque and passed along his family's request that the international community demand his immediate release. As the German NGO International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) indicated, the Cuban doctor and political prisoner's condition "is most alarming" and his life is in danger. (*EFE, 11/1/08*)

**January 11:** More than a million people have been operated on 31 countries up to the end of 2007 as part of the Operation Miracle program sponsored since 2004 by Cuba and Venezuela with the goal of restoring the eyesight of 6 million patients by the year 2016, the local media reported. A total of 1,003,238 patients have already been operated on three continents, according to information disseminated at National Scientific Ophthalmology Day held at the mariscal Antonio Jose de Sucre Hospital in the Cuban town of Jagüey Grande in the western province of Matanzas. Attending the conference were some 500 ophthalmology specialists and directors of centers in countries participating in Operation Milagro, including coordinators of the program in Ecuador and Argentina, the daily Granma reported. (*EFE, 12/1/08*)

**January 12:** A Canadian Senate committee has found it necessary to conduct an eight-day fact-finding trip in sunny Cuba. The trip is touted as a fact-finding trip on Cuba's maternal health and early childhood development programs. It is part of the committee's study of the Canadian health-care system. The committee, the Senate subcommittee on population health, is in Cuba at the invitation of the Cuban ambassador to Canada, Ernesto Antonio Senti. On the trip are Ottawa Senator Wilbert Keon, former Prince Edward Island Liberal premier Catherine Callbeck, Quebec's Lucie Pepin, Newfoundland and Labrador's Joan Cook and Ottawa's Jim Munson, a former director of communications for Jean Chretien. Three or four Senate researchers are accompanying the team. (*Montreal Gazette, 12/1/08*)

**January 12:** In a bid to further strengthen relations between both Caribbean territories, particularly in the areas of health and education, Cuban Ambassador to Jamaica Gisela Garcia Rivera said her embassy is hoping to send more Jamaican students to Cuba to pursue studies in medicine and other areas of scholarship. Speaking with the press at the Cuban embassy in Kingston, Ambassador Garcia pointed out that presently there are approximately 27,500 students from 120 countries studying in Cuba. Of that number, more than 400 are from Jamaica. "Last year, we received 290 applications for scholarships to study medicine, but we could only offer 17 scholarships for medicine and

nine for other specialties. So this year, if it's possible, we are hoping to send more students to Cuba and also send some of that 290 that were not successful last year," Garcia told the press. "This month, we will start receiving applications for next year." (*Jamaica Observer*, 14/1/08)

**January 13:** Cuba's Minister of Health Jose Ramon Balaguer extolled the work of the Cuban doctors in Guatemala, for which they were awarded the Human Rights National Prize in Ciudad Guatemala. "This distinction shows that you have fulfilled with the mission entrusted by President Fidel Castro," said Balaguer at the closing ceremony of the sixth scientific conference of the Cuban Medical Brigade. The Health minister is leading his country's delegation to the inauguration of President Alvaro Colom. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/1/08)

**January 14:** A Canadian professor from the University of Manitoba was granted the category of Guest Professor at the Higher Institute of Medicine of Havana (ISCMH). Annette Gupton, a doctorate in Science, works in the development of a joint project between the University of Manitoba and ISCMH that began in 2003. The project seeks to strengthen the nursing profession in Cuba through training and research and offers courses within a postgraduate program leading to a doctorate degree in the field. With a 44-year career, Dr. Gupton has passed on her knowledge to Cuban professors and has contributed with papers on nursing to the school. (*ACN*, 14/1/08)

**January 14:** Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti and Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer were granted the Literature and Arts awards of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) in their first edition. Thus, the ALBA Cultural Fund, created by Cuba and Venezuela in 2006, recognizes the lifetime work of these two artists and their legacy to the literary and artistic heritage of Latin America and the Caribbean. Cultural organizations, entities and universities from the region had nominated 31 candidates for the award that was finally granted to Benedetti and Niemeyer by a jury comprised of Venezuelans Carmen Bohorquez, Vivian Rivas and Miguel Marquez as well as Cubans Jorge Fornet and Graziella Pagolotti. The award, which consists of a statuette and \$75,000, contributes to recognize the work of creators from the South who are often ignored by the big mercantilist and discriminatory machinery of the rich North. (*ACN*, 15/1/08)

**January 14:** Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva met with acting Cuban President Raul Castro during a one-day visit to offer communist-run Cuba credit and technology. Lula dined with Raul Castro after arriving in Havana at Havana's José Martí International Airport, where he was welcomed by Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque. Da Silva was accompanied by a broad delegation, made up of Celso Amorin, minister of foreign affairs; Miguel Jorge, minister of development, trade and industry; Fernando Haddad, minister of education; José Gómez Temorao, minister of health; and José Sergio Gabrielli de Azevedo, president of Petrobras, which is considering off-shore exploration in Cuba's Gulf of Mexico. Brazilian diplomats said Brazil is interested in engaging Cuba at a critical moment of its history and offering

financial and technological support for the island nation to modernize. (*Reuters, Granma International*, 14/1/08)

**January 15:** Official talks between Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Cuban first Vice President Raul Castro took place at Havana's Palace of the Revolution. The official welcome ceremony was also attended by Vice President Carlos Lage, Basic Industry Minister Yadira Garcia, and Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. The Brazilian side was represented by the ministers of Foreign Affairs, Celso Amorim, Development, Trade, and Industries, Miguel Jorge, Education, Fernando Haddad, and Health, Jose Gomes Temporal, as well as Petrobras president Jose Sergio Gabrielli de Azevedo. Lula da Silva had previously placed a wreath at the monument of Cuban National Hero Jose Marti, accompanied by Perez Roque. Lula's agenda includes a tour of the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center on the outskirts of Havana and a meeting with the nearly 500 Brazilian students studying at the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM). This is Lula's second official Cuba visit as president since September 2003. Brazil is Cuba's second commercial partner in the region, and eighth in total exchange, local diplomatic sources revealed. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/1/08)

**January 15:** Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva met with ailing Fidel Castro and said he was "incredibly lucid" and healthy enough to resume his political role in Cuba. "I think Fidel is ready to assume his political role in Cuba and the role he has in history," Lula said at the end of a one-day visit. Lula met for two and a half hours with the 81-year-old revolutionary, who has not appeared in public since undergoing stomach surgery that forced him to hand over power temporarily to his brother Raul in July 2006. "He has incredible lucidity and impeccable health (...) He's as lucid as in his best moments." "Fidel spoke for two hours and I for half an hour," Lula joked in remarks to reporters before heading home to Brasilia. Lula invited Fidel Castro's brother, acting President Raul Castro, to visit Brazil. [[Statements to the press by the Brazilian President, video in Portuguese](#)] (*Reuters, BBC*, 16/1/08)

**January 15:** Brazilian officials cast the Brazilian President's trip to Cuba as an opportunity to engage communist-run Cuba with increased trade and investment. Brasilia has the economic resources, technology and diplomatic clout to help Cuba as it approaches a crucial moment of its history without Fidel Castro at the helm and under pressure from the United States to open up to multiparty democracy, a Brazilian foreign ministry official said. "We want to see Cuba back in the fold and can provide the Cubans with a level of comfort in the transition ahead by not being confrontational like the United States," he said. The influential Estado de Sao Paulo newspaper praised the credit splurge for Cuba in an editorial, saying it would clear the way for Brazilian companies to take part in Cuba's necessary modernization and reform process. (*Reuters*, 16/1/08)

**January 15:** The World Trade Union Federation and African workers' leaders thanked Cuba for its support and solidarity with the peoples of Africa in the areas of health, education and training of professionals during the Second Presidential Council of this international organization that concluded in Khartoum, Sudan. Participating in the event were the vice presidents of this world trade union body as well as the top representatives

of its secretariats in all continents. During his speech, Salvador Valdes Mesa, General Secretary of the Cuban Workers' Confederation (CTC), said that CTC members as well as the Cuban people and Revolution have many reasons to continue supporting the African people. (ACN, 15/1/08)

**January 15:** The president of the Cuban National Assembly (Parliament), Ricardo Alarcon, met in Havana with a visiting delegation of the Uruguayan ruling coalition, Frente Amplio. According to Granma, the official news daily, the representatives of the Frente Amplio reiterated their gratitude to the Cuban people and government for the donation of the equipment for a modern ophthalmic hospital recently inaugurated in Uruguay, and for the contribution made by Cuban doctors, which has allowed thousands of Uruguayans to recover their sight thanks to the Operation Miracle free eye-surgery program, promoted by Cuba and Venezuela. Invited by the Central Committee of Cuba's Communist Party, this is the largest delegation of the Frente Amplio that visits the island. (ACN, 16/1/08)

**January 16:** Cuban Ambassador to Slovakia David Paulovich justified the expulsion of Slovak civic activist Peter Novotny from Cuba in October last year, and a rejection to grant the permission to enter the country to Slovak Ivana Kulova in early January. Cuban authorities accused Kulova of carrying out anti-Cuban activities, in favour of US interests. At the same time, Paulovich rejected the protests of Slovak diplomacy and Foreign Affairs Minister Jan Kubis. "We will deport everybody who come to Cuba to push for American interests regardless of whether Mr. Kubis likes it or not," said the diplomat to the press. Novotny from the organization Civic Eye was in Cuba as an observer of municipal elections. Cuba rejected to grant the permission of entry to Kulova, activist of civic association Clovek v Ohrozeni (People in Peril). (*Sktoday.com*, 16/1/08)

**January 16:** Representatives of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) and the Party for Democracy (PPC) of Chile met in Havana to exchange ideas about the reality of both countries and to discuss ways to increase bilateral ties. Fernando Ramirez de Estenoz, head of the Foreign Relations Department at the PCC's Central Committee, said that the PPD, of the Chilean ruling alliance, has made history in the fight against the former dictatorship of Pinochet and in favor of democracy. For his part, Guido Girardi, the PPD President, said they hope that these bilateral relations will increase. He is also the President of the Health Commission of the Chilean Senate. (ACN, 16/1/08)

**January 17:** The Quebec Human Rights Commission will reveal that Bell Helicopter Textron Canada Ltd. reached an out-of-court settlement with a dual Haitian-Canadian citizen who was denied an internship with the defence company because of tough US security regulations. The commission will also appeal to other dual nationals or foreign-born Canadians to come forward if they feel they have been impacted by the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR). "This will send incredible shock waves throughout the [military] industry," an industry source said. Under ITAR, employees from about two dozen countries, including China, Vietnam, Cuba and Haiti, cannot work U.S. defence contracts in Canadian facilities. (*Globe & Mail*, 17/1/08)

**January 18:** The more than 200 political prisoners being held in Cuba received the support of the Spanish association Cuba in Transition, which together with Reporters Without Borders analyzed the state of human rights on the island at a recent conference. During the event, Hector Palacios, one of the main dissident leaders released in 2006 after three years in prison, said the situation facing political prisoners and prisoners of conscience remains “dramatic.” He warned that 34 of the 234 political prisoners will die in prison if they are not released. “If there were a minimum of justice, there would be no political prisoners in Cuba and most of the others would be freed,” Palacios said, stressing that, political prisoners in Cuba or anywhere else “should be granted freedom.” He called on Spain to collaborate because “to speak about Cuba and Spain is to speak about distinct lands that share the same blood.” Regarding the changes that need to happen in Cuba, Palacios said they are essential and that “the policy that has been imposed at gunpoint upon such a kind and hardworking nation should be radically changed.” (*Catholic News Agency*, 18/1/08)

**January 18:** Cuba will continue to support Zimbabwe in its fight against illegal sanctions imposed by Western governments led by Britain and the United States. Addressing journalists at the belated 49th Anniversary of the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution commemorations, Cuban Ambassador to Zimbabwe Mr Cosme Torres Espinoza said the Zimbabwean situation resembled that of Cuba, since the US always imposes sanctions on whoever does not toe its line of thinking. "I can see similar trends in the way America deals with Cuba and Zimbabwe. The economic blockade has resulted in Cuba being prejudiced of over US\$86 billion through loss of trade and exports, but in spite of these sanctions the revolution has progressed. "We are therefore prepared to work with Zimbabwe in its quest for economic, social and political freedom". "Cuba enjoys cordial relations with Zimbabwe that has seen it set up a joint commission to look at ways of co-operation. This co-operation has also seen exchange programmes like the Bindura University of Science Education and the Bio Lavidicin Malaria Control Programme launched recently," he said. (*The Herald*, 19/1/08)

**January 19:** Bundestag President Norbert Lammert criticized the upcoming elections in Cuba as a farce, noting the lack of any opposition candidates on the election slate. "With only 614 candidates for the 614 slots in the National Assembly, the point is driven home," Lammert said in an interview with the press. The German parliamentarian said it was the height of cynicism that the Cuban government defends the system as one that spares voters the need to decide between candidates whom they don't know. Lammert also criticized Cuba's refusal to allow international election observers. (*DPA*, 19/1/08)

**January 21:** The Moroccan Sahara Association (ASM) denounced the abuse of Saharan children in Cuba. According to Reda Taoujni, president of the pro-government ASM, the POLISARIO Front (PF) must stop sending minors to Cuba. Taoujni accused the pro-independence PF of using that form of “deportation” as a way of “ensuring” the children’s parents stay in the refugee camps. He also claimed that it constitutes a “method of indoctrination” whereby, during the 8-10 years that these children remain on the island, “they lose all Moslem values” and are subject to labor and sexual exploitation. The president of the Sahrawi Association of Victims of Grave Human Rights Violations

Committed by the Moroccan State, Ibrahim Dahane, rejected the accusations. (*EFE*, 22/1/08)

**January 21:** Dissidents Héctor Palacios and his wife, Gisela Delgado, received in Warsaw the support of former Polish President Lech Walesa and gave assurance that the end of the Castro regime is very near. “Castro and the Revolution are on their final days, and changes in the mentality of the Cuban population are taking place with ever-increasing momentum,” declared Palacios, who was invited to deliver a lecture by the Lech Walesa foundation and FOR (Forum Obywatelskiego Rozwoju). (*EFE*, 22/1/08)

**January 22:** The Mexican Foreign Secretary’s Office officially announced that Felipe Pérez Roque and Patricia Espinosa, foreign ministers of Cuba and Mexico respectively, will hold an official bilateral meeting in March, when they preside in Havana over the sessions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Political Consultation and Information-sharing Mechanism between both countries. (*EFE*, 22/1/08)

**January 22:** A group of Cuban doctors working in Guinea Bissau were acknowledged for their efforts by government authorities after concluding their mission in the African country. The ceremony was held at the Malaika Hotel, in the Guinean capital, with the presence of the country’s Health Minister Eugenia Saldaña, Cuban Ambassador to Guinea Bissau Pedro Dona Santana, and Daniel Kertesz, representative of the World Health Organization (WHO). Also present were Camilo Simoes, director of the National School of Medicine, and regional health officials. (*ACN*, 23/1/08)

**January 22:** Susan McDade, resident representative of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), praised the actions taken by Cuba towards sustainable development and thanked the Cuban government for the support in the second stage of the Sabana Camaguey Project. The UN resident coordinator attended the premiere of the book “Ecosistema Sabana Camaguey, Estado actual (Sabana Camaguey Ecosystem, the current situation) at the National Aquarium in Havana. The book addresses the achievements and challenges involved in the preservation and sustainability of biodiversity. (*ACN*, 23/1/08)

**January 22:** The General Secretary of the London-based International Maritime Organization (IMO), Efthimios E. Mitropoulos, arrived in Cuba for a visit at the invitation of the island’s Transportation Minister, Jorge Luis Sierra Cruz. According to Granma news daily, the visit of the IMO leader will run until January 24th. Cuba is a member state of the IMO since 1966. Since then, the island has been elected twice as a member of its Council. (*ACN*, 23/1/08)

**January 23:** Cuban Ambassador to Nigeria, Mr. Elio Savon, has called for urgent restructuring of the United Nations so as to have a more fair representation that could also guarantee an equal voice for the world community. The ambassador, who spoke exclusively to “Leadership” insisted that the UN, particularly, its powerful organ, such as the Security Council, must be urgently reformed. He said this would be in line with the current reality of a world that strongly believes in democracy as the only and best system of governance, as anything to the contrary would defeat the essence of the body. Mr.

Savon further noted that democracy must be brought into the UN system, especially now that the West is at the forefront of promoting democracy across the world. "The principles of democracy must be allowed to apply at the UN, especially at the Security Council" he noted. (*AllAfrica*, 23/1/08)

**January 23:** Canada has withdrawn its support for a UN anti-racism conference slated to take place in South Africa next year, the federal government announced. The so-called Durban II conference "has gone completely off the rails" and Canada wants no part of it, said Jason Kenney, secretary of state for multiculturalism and Canadian identity. "Canada is interested in combatting racism, not promoting it," Mr. Kenney told the press. "We'll attend any conference that is opposed to racism and intolerance, not those that actually promote racism and intolerance. With Libya elected to chair the next gathering, Cuba appointed vice-chair and rapporteur, and anti-Israel rhetoric and actions building, Mr. Kenney said his government was left with no choice but to abandon the preparatory process for the follow up meeting. (*Canadian Press*, 23/1/08)

**January 24:** The Cuban government called on Israel to "immediately stop the inhuman blockade against the Gaza Strip" and respect the "inalienable rights" of the Palestinians. In a statement, the Cuban Foreign Ministry described the blockade as an "inadmissible and criminal" campaign which is "aimed at wiping out the Palestinian people, or bringing them to surrender through suffering, hunger and thirst." The ministry urged Israel to immediately end the siege while pointing out that the intensification of aggressive action against the Gaza Strip has killed and injured many people. [[Cuban Foreign Ministry Statement](#)] (*Xinhua*, 24/1/08)

**January 24:** Representatives of the Christian Democrat parties of Latin America met in Miami to put together a contingency plan to deal with a possible regime change in Cuba, said the president of the Organization of Christian Democrats of America (OCDA), Manuel Espino. The participants issued a call to all parties and governments of Latin America to join in solidarity with the Cuban people and develop a common agenda to democratize and emancipate the Cuban nation, without engaging the current government in confrontation. He clarified that the organization, which includes emblematic Cuban exile figures like Marcelino Miyares, would not endorse a US-backed Cuban regime either. Espino added that the "alternative, democratizing" project for Cuba will be carried out in coordination with the Mexican government. (*AFP*, 24/1/08)

**January 24:** Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque will attend the 13th Ordinary Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) that will take place in Panama. According to Granma news daily, participants in the meeting will analyze topics of regional interest such as tourism, prevention measures in case of natural disasters, trade and transportation, among others. (*ACN*, 24/1/08)

**January 25:** An educational delegation led by Yemen's deputy Education Minister Abdul-Aziz Bin Habtoor left for Cuba on an official visit. In a statement to the press, Habtoor said that the delegation would hold talks with Cuban officials on bilateral

relations in education, illiteracy eradication, adult education and school health areas. (*Saba*, 25/1/08)

**January 25:** Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage heads the Cuban delegation to the 6th Summit of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) that takes place in Caracas. According to Granma news daily, the sessions at the highest level of this Summit of the Peoples' Trade Agreement (ALBA-TCP) will take place on January 26 at the ALBA Caracas hotel in the Venezuelan capital. During this summit, representatives from the four members of the organization - Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua and Bolivia - will analyze several cooperation projects and the creation of the Bank of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas. They will also discuss the ALBA Cultural Strategic Plan. The permanent venue of this multilateral mechanism will be officially inaugurated in Caracas. (*ACN*, 25/1/08)

**January 25:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez welcomed the Cuban delegation to the Sixth Summit of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) that is taking place in Caracas. The dignitary received Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage at the Miraflores Presidential Palace, where both leaders talked about issues of common interest for the two nations, particularly Cuba-Venezuela relations. Members of the island's delegation to the ALBA Summit also include Ministers Yadira Garcia (Basic Industry), Abel Prieto (Culture), Martha Lomas (Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration), Ramiro Valdes (Informatics and Communication), the President of Cuba's Central Bank Francisco Soberon, Deputy Foreign Minister Alejandro Gonzalez and the Cuban Ambassador to Venezuela German Sanchez. (*RHC*, 26/1/08)

**January 25:** Hilda Morejón Serantes, mother of Cuban neuro-surgeon Hilda Molina, asked the president of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, to intercede before the Cuban government so that her daughter can travel to Argentina. The neuro-surgeon has been asking for over a decade, without success, that Havana allow her to visit her son, Roberto Quiñones, and her grandchildren, who reside in Buenos Aires. (*EER*, 25/1/08)

**January 25:** Fidel Castro said that during the brief meeting with his Brazilian counterpart Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, in his recent visit to Cuba, he had wanted to summarize in some minutes almost 28 years since he knew him in Nicaragua. In his article entitled "Lula" (Part Two), the Cuban Revolution leader stresses, "Now he is the leader of a huge country, whose luck, however, depends on several aspects common for all peoples living in this planet." Lula warmly reminded me of the first time he visited our country in 1985 to take part in a meeting organized by Cuba to analyze the overwhelming problem of the foreign debt; participants representing a wide spectrum of political, religious, cultural and social tendencies presented and discussed their opinions, concerned about the asphyxiating drama, Castro wrote. [[Lula, second part](#)] (*Prensa Latina*, 26/1/08)

**January 27:** Without mentioning their debate on ethanol production, Fidel Castro wrote a lengthy article about details of his conversation with Brazilian president Luis Inacio Lula da Silva in his recent visit to Cuba. Castro reviewed his conversation with Lula and

criticized the United States for presenting obstacles to Brazil's exports of ethanol. The Cuban leader said that he spoke at his meeting with the Brazilian President about his nostalgia for the Soviet Union, whose disappearance was - for him - "as if the sun had stopped shining." It was "a devastating blow," Castro added. [[Lula, third part](#)] (*La Jornada, EFE, 28/1/08*)

**January 27:** Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage termed the recently concluded Sixth Summit of the Bolivarian Alternative for Our America (ALBA) positive. "The meeting has been positive due to results, analysis, and discussions, like that of the Bank of the ALBA," Lage told the Cuban reporters shortly before returning Havana. A part of those integration mechanisms are also bilateral accords, stated the Cuban official, who stressed such mechanisms are based on solidarity and not in the competition of market rules. It's something for the future, and we have to work hard on that, he added. (*Prensa Latina, 27/1/08*)

**January 29:** Senators, parliamentarians and leaders of the Mexican Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) met with Fernando Ramirez de Estenoz, head of the Foreign Relations Department at the Central Committee of Cuba's Communist Party (CCPCC). During the meeting, the visitors reaffirmed their solidarity with the island, and praised Cuba's achievements in sectors such as education, health and sports. They also lauded the island's efforts towards regional integration. Yeidckol Polevnsky, vice president of the Directive Board of the Mexican Senate, thanked De Estenoz for the warm welcome and said that their visit expresses their love for and solidarity with the Cuban people. Meanwhile, Rodolfo Solis Vargas, Mexican federal deputy and secretary of the Foreign Relations Commission and of the Cuba-Mexico Solidarity Group, noted that their visit shows the willingness of the Mexican Congress to normalize relations between the two peoples. The Mexican delegation is taking part in the international conference "For World Equilibrium" that is underway in Havana. (*ACN, 30/1/08*)

**January 29:** A major exhibition of Cuban art opens at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts on January 31. ¡Cuba! Art and History from 1868 to Today, is an ambitious, multidisciplinary project that gathers together approximately 100 paintings, 200 photographs and documents, 100 pre- and post-1959 revolution posters, sculptures, installations, videos, film excerpts and music. The exhibition was organized over three years by the MMFA and the Havana-based Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (MNBA) and the Fototeca de Cuba. The exhibition also includes works selected from different collectors and museums in the United States, including New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), and Europe. MMFA director Nathalie Bondil said that although many Canadians might be familiar with the sun, beaches and music of Cuba, its art history is more obscure. "Art is not decoration," Bondil said. "This is an exhibition that has touched me profoundly. It is multi-layered and complex. Take time to reflect on it." The exhibition includes the Collective Mural of the Salon de Mai 1967, created in Havana, the night of July 17, during an important international visual arts event. It is the first time it has been exhibited outside Cuba, since 1968. "It was a dream of mine to have an exhibit like this in the Americas," Cuban MNBA associate director Luz Merino Acosta said. (*The Gazette, 30/1/08*)

**January 30:** Mexican migration authorities are able to deport only 30 percent of all undocumented Cuban immigrants arriving in Mexico, an official from the National Institute for Migration (INM) said. “We would deport them if they were accepted, but Cuba doesn’t receive them”, the coordinator for delegations at the INM, Antonio Diaz Lara said in Cancun to the press. Cancun is the spot where most frequently Cubans arrive, in their way to cross the Mexican border to the United States. (*AFP*, 30/1/08)

**January 30:** The Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) country members Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Dominica have outlined a strategic cultural plan involving 65 projects. “This is the first time that several countries join together to promote a cultural strategy. It’s unprecedented in the history of our continent,” said Venezuelan Minister of Culture Francisco Sesto in Caracas, as reported by the Bolivarian News Agency (ABN). Among the projects are a Latin American and Caribbean Festival of Culture, a traveling ALBA Theater brigade, the Latin American and Caribbean Book Workshop, ALBA courses, a Latin American and Caribbean Literature Encyclopedia, an Alternative Publisher’s Network, a Network of Alternative Production Companies, ALBA publishing houses and print shops, a recording label, and the expansion of the Librerias del Sur (Bookstores of the South) throughout Latin America. (*ACN*, 30/1/08)

**January 31:** Guinea Bissau Minister of Education and Higher Education Alfredo Gomes praised the Cuban literacy method "Yo si puedo," which led to generalized good results in his country last year. The minister met with Cuban ambassador to that African nation Pedro Dona Santana, and they spoke about the excellent bilateral relations, especially in the area of basic and higher education. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/1/08)

**January 31:** Visiting Guatemalan Vice President Rafael Espada met with his Cuban counterpart Carlos Lage Davila to analyze the development of bilateral cooperation relations. “The ties between the two countries have significantly deepened over the past years and we hope that they will continue to strengthen during the current administration of President Alvaro Colom,” said Lage during the meeting held at the venue of the Cuban Council of Ministers in Havana. Also present in the meeting were the island’s Health Minister, Jose Ramon Balaguer, and Fernando Ramirez de Estenoz, Head of the Foreign Relations Department at the Central Committee of Cuba’s Communist Party. The visiting delegation also includes the Guatemalan Minister of Culture and Sports, Jeronimo Lancerio Estuardo Galvez, and the Vice Minister of Energy and Mines, Carlos Meanny Valerio, as well as Jesus Oliva, Dean of the School of Medicine at the University of San Carlos. (*ACN*,31/1/08)



## SECURITY

**January 17:** Cuba has extended its intelligence-gathering capabilities beyond the United States and Latin America to places where vital US interests are at stake -- like Iran,

Turkey, India and Pakistan -- a former top US counterintelligence official told US lawmakers. Chris Simmons, a former counterintelligence officer at the Defense Intelligence Agency, said a series of intelligence setbacks for Cuba between 1995 and 2003 -- such as the dismantling of a network of spies in Miami, the closure of an intelligence center in Canada and the arrest of former DIA Cuba analyst Ana Montes in 2001 -- forced Cuba to tighten its intelligence operations. Today Cuba puts trusted top intelligence operatives in charge of key embassy postings and operates more with allies like Iran and Venezuela, Simmons said in a briefing organized by Miami Republican Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. Simmons, who worked on Cuba for the DIA for a dozen years, has founded the Cuban Intelligence Research Center, based in Leesburg, Virginia. (*The Miami Herald*, 18/1/08)

**January 27:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez called on Cuba, Bolivia and Nicaragua to form a military alliance under the Bolivarian Agreement (ALBA) to guard against attacks from the US. Chavez said that US military support for Colombia to help fight guerrillas and drug traffickers is a threat to Latin American unity, according to an e-mailed statement from the Information Ministry. "Interfering with Bolivia, Nicaragua or Cuba is also interfering with Venezuela," Chavez said during his weekly "Alo Presidente" television program, citing his allies in the region and ALBA member states. "This is about reestablishing the concept of unity." Chavez on January 26 said Colombia, the US's staunchest Latin American ally, is trying to provoke a war with Venezuela and planning "aggression" against him. (*Bloomberg, ABN, BBC*, 27/1/08)

**January 28:** In Camaguey, the Cuban East Army began a year-long period of military training exercises called Defense Preparedness 2008. The ceremony was presided over by Commander of the Revolution Guillermo García Frías. Army Corps General Álvaro López Miera, Vice-Minister and Chief of the General Staff of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), as well as other high-ranking FAR and Ministry of the Interior officers were also in attendance. (*Granma*, 29/1/08)

**January 30:** Presided over by Commander of the Revolution Juan Almeida Bosque, as well as Army Corps generals Álvaro López Miera, Vice-Minister and Chief of the General Staff of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), and Joaquín Quintas Solá, the Cuban Central Army began in Cienfuegos a year-long period of military training called Defense Preparedness 2008. Also in attendance were military chiefs from the five provinces under the Central Army command. (*Granma*, 31/1/08)



## **TERRORISM**

**January 10:** At the request of the government of President Álvaro Uribe, the Cuban government served as "international guarantor" in the release of Clara Rojas and Consuelo González, held hostage by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Cuban Ambassador to Venezuela Germán Sánchez was dispatched into the

Guaviare jungle, where the hostages were handed over to representatives of the Red Cross and other institutions. Sanchez described the event as a historic development for Latin America. He thanked the Alvaro Uribe government and said that the heartbeat of the planet could be heard in Colombia during the release of the hostages. [[Declaraciones de Germán Sánchez en video](#)] (*EER, ACN*, 11/1/08)

**January 13:** The chief of the US Guantanamo Naval Base said he favors closing the prison at the Base as soon as possible because he believes negative publicity worldwide about treatment of terrorist suspects has been "pretty damaging" to the image of the United States. "I'd like to see it shut down," Admiral Mike Mullen said in an interview with three reporters who toured the detention center with him on his first visit since becoming chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff last October. His visit came two days after the sixth anniversary of the prison's opening in January 2002. He stressed that a closure decision was not his to make and that he understands there are numerous complex legal questions the administration believes would have to be settled first, such as where to move prisoners. (*AP*, 14/1/08)



## US-CUBA RELATIONS

**January 2:** The panel that runs Florida's university system has told a federal judge to throw out part of a state law that bans colleges from spending money to send professors to Cuba and other "state sponsors" of terrorism. The move by Florida's Board of Governors aligns the appointed board closer with the ACLU, which last year filed a lawsuit on behalf of a group of university professors and the Florida International University faculty senate challenging the ban. In its filing in US federal court lawyers for the Board of Governors contend that while state lawmakers can tell universities how to spend state taxpayer money, the Legislature does not have the authority to order universities on how they can spend private donations or federal research grants. "Where nonstate funds are concerned, the travel act's prohibition runs afoul of the academic freedom accorded to universities under the First Amendment," the board states. The move to challenge the travel ban was criticized by Representative David Rivera, the Miami Republican who authored the 2006 law in response to the indictments of former FIU professor Carlos Alvarez and his wife, Elsa Alvarez, on charges of being unregistered agents for Fidel Castro's communist government. They later pleaded guilty to lesser charges. (*The Miami Herald*, 2/1/08)

**January 3:** In Timor-Leste, a country of less than a million people, on an island off the coast of Indonesia, three Cuban doctors have been in hiding for two months. They have been investigated by the US Department of Homeland Security and have parolee visas to come to travel to the United States. But the government of Timor-Leste have not given them permission to leave. In effect, Miriela Llanes Martínez, Reidén López Carrillo and Irina Valdés are in limbo, with the possibility of capture by government authorities and deportation back to Cuba. Their story is told by another Cuban doctor, Boris Rodríguez,

who lived the Timor-Leste experience and was fortunate to get out before officials decided to make it difficult for others to leave. Rodríguez is one of three who was able to abandon Timor-Leste and enter the United States under an August 2006 law that grants visas to Cuban doctors working in third countries who want to defect. (*Sun Sentinel*, 3/1/08)

**January 6:** Wearing a Santa suit and a wide grin, a wealthy Florida rancher doled out sneakers and sweets to Cuban children, bringing holiday cheer to this communist-run island where the Christmas season goes largely unobserved. About 150 kids ages 5 to 15 shrieked with pleasure applauded and shouted "Viva Santa Claus!" as John Parke Wright tottered into an auditorium at a Roman Catholic convent on Havana's eastern outskirts. "Feliz Navidad!" he bellowed, Spanish for "Merry Christmas!" The celebration actually marked "Three Kings Day," a holiday popular in Latin America that commemorates the arrival of three wise men bearing gifts for the newborn Jesus. An outspoken critic of the embargo, Wright paid for the goodies he gave away and also donated baseball gloves, balls and caps to players for two little league teams he organized. His visit was not officially sanctioned by Havana, but Fidel Castro's nephew, Angel Ramon Castro, was on hand for the giveaway. (*AP*, 7/1/08)

**January 8:** The President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcon, explained to members of the Association of Combatants of the Cuban Revolution that the constant threats of the US government against the island is one of the main reasons to vote for all candidates in the upcoming national general elections on January 20th. Speaking at a meeting of the Association, on the occasion of the 49th anniversary of the triumphant entry of the Rebel Army into the city of Havana in 1959, Alarcon said that Washington insists on trying to harm the Caribbean nation and to divide its people. "This plan created half a century ago - aimed at causing unease, dissatisfaction, problems and difficulties - is still valid and that is why it is so necessary that revolutionaries stay united and also to fight our own deficiencies and errors," Alarcon said. He added that the US administration admitted in a recent report that the United States spends more human and financial resources on pursuing those who visit the island or trade with Cuba than on fighting terrorism and drug trafficking in the North American nation. (*ACN*, 10/1/08)

**January 9:** Philip Agee, a former CIA agent who became an outspoken critic of Washington's Cuba policy, has died in a Havana hospital following ulcer surgery, state media reported. He was 72. Agee quit the CIA in 1969 after 12 years working mostly in Latin America at a time when leftist movements were gaining prominence and sympathizers. His 1975 book "Inside the Company: CIA Diary," cited alleged CIA misdeeds against leftists in the region that included a 22-page list of purported agency operatives. *Granma*, Cuba's Communist Party newspaper, said Agee died on January 7 and described him as "a loyal friend of Cuba and fervent defender of the peoples' fight for a better world." In 2000, with European investors and a state-run travel agent as his partners, Agee opened a travel Web site designed to bring US tourists to Cuba. The site offers package tours and other help with Cuban tourism that is largely off limits to Americans. Agee has also been accused of receiving up to \$1 million in payments from

the Cuban intelligence service. He denied the accusations, which were first made by a high-ranking Cuban intelligence officer and defector in a 1992 report. (AP, 9/1/08)

**January 9:** US Representative Lincoln Díaz-Balart says the likelihood of a contender for his seat is a Democratic Party strategy to soften US policy toward Cuba after he and other Cuban-American members in Congress have successfully maintained a hard line toward the communist island. "What you have now is a [Democratic] decision that if they don't defeat Mario, Ileana or Lincoln, they won't be able to do anything" to improve relations with Cuba, he said at a meeting with El Nuevo Herald editors and reporters. Díaz-Balart was referring to his brother Mario Díaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. All three Republicans represent South Florida in Congress. The Democrats have yet to announce a candidate to oppose Díaz-Balart, but former Hialeah Mayor Raúl Martínez has said he is considering returning to politics. (*The Miami Herald*, 9/1/08)

**January 12:** A dead man found floating in Biscayne Bay was part of a group of Cuban migrants who were abandoned by smugglers on a sandbar off Cape Florida early on New Year's Day. Feisy Rafael-Miranda, 28, one of 30 Cuban migrants, including six children, were left on the sandbar after an argument broke out over payment money. Rafael-Miranda was found on January 4, when a fishing boat captain spotted the corpse bobbing in a channel south of Stiltsville. The case comes as federal authorities are increasingly concerned about human smuggling from Cuba. US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents and Miami-Dade homicide detectives are investigating the death. (*The Miami Herald*, 12/1/08)

**January 14:** The US Committee to Free the Cuban Five announced a new international campaign called "The Day After" that will immediately follow the long awaited ruling by the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals on the case. The organization calls on all those supporting the cause of the Cuban Five --imprisoned in the United States--, to hold press conferences and/or rallies in front of government offices at home and US embassies and other offices abroad, reads the article published by Granma daily. The committee also urged letters be sent to US President George W. Bush and Attorney General Michael Mukasey demanding the release of Gerardo Hernandez, Antonio Guerrero, Ramon Labanino, Fernando Gonzalez and Rene Gonzalez, arrested in September 1998. (ACN, 15/1/08)

**January 14:** Sixteen Cuban migrants dropped by smugglers on a Key Biscayne sandbar have been repatriated -- but those who survived the swim from the sandbar to shore were allowed to stay. Caught between the US "wet foot/dry foot" policy for Cuban migrants were families separated by rough waters. The wife and young daughter of Sixeo Sánchez, one of the Cubans who reached land, were sent to Villa Clara, where the trip began on December 30. Sánchez, 29, a physical education teacher in Cuba, was able to reach land, but his wife and 6-year-old daughter couldn't swim against the currents and were detained by the Coast Guard. Of the repatriated group, at least three are dissidents affiliated with the Miami-based migrant advocacy group Democracy Movement and should have been considered for political asylum, the group's Miami-Dade spokesman said. "This is another proof that the process of interviewing people aboard the [Coast Guard] cutters is

defective," Ramón Saúl Sánchez said. "It lacks minimal due process." He said the Cubans were not given a chance to show identification that proved their dissident status while they were in Coast Guard custody. (*The Miami Herald*, 15/1/08)

**January 15:** The US State Department is asking foreign governments to demand greater respect for labor rights from foreign companies that operate in Cuba, US officials say. In Cuba, companies can't hire or pay workers directly but must go through a state agency, which pockets the lion's share of the wages. In the 1990s, Cuban dissident Gustavo Arcos proposed minimum labor standards for foreign investors to operate on the island, such as hiring directly without political discrimination and allowing Cubans access to hotels and beaches. "We've talked to governments how they might use economic engagement to push for greater freedoms," Kirsten Madison, the deputy assistant secretary of state in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs said. "We've specifically talked to governments about the Arcos principles." Since Fidel Castro became ill in July of 2006, the State Department has embarked on a campaign to have countries bring more pressure on Cuba to enact democratic reforms. "We hope that working in concert we can help define a shared expectation in the international community of what a transition in Cuba should look like," she told a gathering at the American Enterprise Institute, noting most countries agree Cuba should free political prisoners. (*The Miami Herald*, 17/1/08)

**January 15:** Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, a former union leader, could raise the violation of labor rights with the Cubans, a US State Department official said. "As a government of democratic left in Latin America they are particularly well positioned to talk to the Cubans and to lay out some basic expectations about what they would like to see," Kirsten Madison, the deputy assistant secretary of state in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs said. "Labor rights is a particular area where I think they would have something to say." (*The Miami Herald*, 17/1/08)

**January 15:** Republican Presidential candidate Mike Huckabee called for a halt on visas for immigrants who come from countries that sponsor or harbour terrorists. "Well there's a couple of things that we're going to do differently. I say we ought to put a hiatus on people who come here (...) if they come from countries that sponsor and harbor terrorists. Let's say until you get your act in order and we get our act in order we're not going to just let you keep coming and threaten the future and safety of America," Huckabee said. The State Department identifies five countries as state sponsors of terrorism: Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. (*FOXNews.com*, 15/1/08)

**January 16:** Fidel Castro said that it seems unreal to see the US President setting out guidelines for the world careless about how many hundreds of thousands or millions of people die, or how many clandestine prisons and torture centers must be created to attain his objectives. In his article entitled "An Epiphany Gift," Castro refers to George Bush's recently concluded trip to Middle East countries. [[An Epiphany Gift](#)] (*Prensa Latina*, 16/1/08)

**January 16:** Three Cuban cyclists travelled to the US city of Los Angeles to participate in the third stage of the World Cup of the sport that takes place there on January 18-20.

The island's team is comprised of Yumari Gonzalez and Yoanka Gonzalez (2007 and 2004 world champions in the scratch event, respectively) as well as young talent Yudelmis Dominguez. They will join also Cuban Lisandra Guerra (world silver medallist in the 500-meter time trial event), who is already in Los Angeles after arriving from Aigle, Switzerland, where she trains at the World Training Center of the International Cycling Union. (ACN, 17/1/08)

**January 16:** Two Yolo County companies are part of a California agricultural trade mission to Cuba. Eleven companies, led by A.G. Kawamura, the state's food and agriculture secretary, will visit Cuba on January 21-24 to market California agricultural products to the government. Representatives from Mariani Nut Co. and Sierra Orchards will go on the trip. The companies on the delegation were selected based on their commitment to international trade and how closely their products meet the needs of the Cuban market. The goal of the mission is to start the groundwork for future trips where products will be sold. California exported \$735,000 worth of agricultural products to Cuba in 2006. (*Sacramento Business Journal*, 16/1/08)

**January 16:** US President George W. Bush informed the US Congress that he has extended for another six months a waiver of Title III of the 1996 Helms-Burton Act, which upholds the right of US and Cuban American companies to sue foreign firms in US courts for using properties confiscated from them by the Cuban Government. (*EFE*, 16/1/08)

**January 17:** Cuba is not interested in improving relations with the United States while President Bush is in office and will wait for a change in US leadership before extending anew an offer for dialogue, Cuba's top diplomat in the US said. Havana is looking to America's vote in November to decide whether it wants to talk to Washington, said Jorge Alberto Bolanos Suarez, head of the Cuban Interest Section in Washington. In an interview with the press, he said Cuban offers for dialogue with the United States made by Castro's brother, Raul, after he took day-to-day control of the government in 2006 were not intended for the Bush administration. "When Raul spoke about it he was not referring to the present administration," Bolanos said. "He was speaking clearly that after the US elections, the new (US) government should take a position with regard to Cuba. "That is the time when Cuba would be ready to dialogue on the basis of mutual respect, without the arrogance that has always colored the US position," he said. "I'm not concerned what the current State Department says because we are waiting for what the next one has to say about Cuba." (*AP*, 18/1/08)

**January 19:** Once taboo in Miami, the exhibiting of artwork from Cubans on the island is no longer unusual. Exempted from the US embargo against the Cuban government, art made by Cuban artists on the island is often featured in group and solo shows and sold at galleries in Coral Gables, Wynwood and the Design District. The artist Kcho, considered one of Cuba's top talents, has never had a solo show in Miami, but his sculptures sold in December at the fair Art Miami almost as soon as they were displayed by a Venezuelan gallery. Currently, the show "AfroCuba Works on Paper, 1968-2003" at the Lowe Art

Museum features the work of artists on the island. Most of the work is on loan from art institutions in Cuba or the artists themselves. (*The Miami Herald*, 19/1/08)

**January 20:** There's a bright ray of hope for students in the United States who want to become doctors. Beginning in 2001 students from the US began studying in Havana for free at the Latin American School of Medicine (LASM). Originally 500 students were offered scholarships annually. This has been increased to 1,000. The only condition is that the students make a commitment to serve poor communities in the US after receiving their medical licenses. Most of the U.S. students who have either graduated from the LASM or are now in the medical program are people of color and/or women. (*Workers World*, 20/1/08)

**January 21:** California, the top US food producing state, has sent its first official agricultural trade mission to communist Cuba, looking to tap a potential \$180 million food market. While other US states have pushed ahead in selling Cuba an average \$350 million per year in agricultural products, mainly grains, California is a late arrival. Californian companies sold products worth just \$735,000 to Cuba in 2006. "Some of us might be a little late in getting here, but we are here," California Food and Agriculture Secretary A.G. Kawamura told reporters in Havana. Kawamura is leading a delegation of companies seeking Cuban contracts for dairy products, wine, grapes, figs, nuts and other specialty fruits. So far, Cuba has bought powdered milk and rice from California, and some wine and apples. (*Reuters*, 22/1/08)

**January 21:** The United States remained Cuba's main supplier of food and farm products in 2007, selling the communist-run island more than \$600 million in agricultural exports despite its trade embargo, a top official said. Cuba imported roughly the same amount of agricultural products as it did in 2006, but rising production and transportation costs forced it to spend \$30 million more than the \$570 million it paid two years ago for the same goods, said Pedro Alvarez, chairman of Cuba's food import company Alimport. Alvarez's comments came during a joint news conference with California Secretary of Food and Agriculture A.G. Kawamura, who is in Cuba on a trade mission and is hoping America's largest food-producing state can one day sell as much as \$180 million in agricultural products to the island. It was the state's first agricultural mission to Cuba. (*The New York Times*, 21/1/08)

**January 21:** Cuba's ambassador to the World Trade Organization read a statement at the organization's headquarters criticizing a US law denying trademark ownership rights to Cuba's government for confiscated property. Ambassador Juan Antonio Fernandez told the trade group that the US had failed to comply with the WTO's dispute-settlement body regarding Bacardi trademarks, according to the Cuba News Agency. Fernandez suggested the dispute-settlement body mechanisms needed reformation, since they weren't successful in resolving and preventing trade disputes between countries, according to Cuba News Service. Cuba and its licensee Pernod-Ricard SA and Bacardi Ltd. have battled for more than a decade over rights to the Havana Club rum brand. (*Bloomberg*, 24/1/08)

**January 22:** With a trio of Cuban American congressmen flanking him, Senator John McCain held himself out as a warrior of the Cold War, who understands the importance of keeping up the fight against Communism in nearby Cuba. Surrounded by a mob of press and voters of epic proportions, McCain visited the Versailles restaurant, a signature spot in Miami's Cuban American community, throwing back a "cortadito" to the cheers of the crowd. "I understand Cuba," said McCain. "I am proud to have sat on a flight deck of a United States Navy aircraft during the Cuban missile crisis." McCain served on the USS Enterprise, which was the first aircraft carrier sent to Cuba to circle the island, because it was nuclear capable. "I'm proud to have fought for and defended freedom for the people of Cuba, consistently calling for continuing the embargo until there are free elections, human right organizations and a free and independent media," he said. "Then and only then will the United States of America extend the aid and assistance because we don't want American tax dollars to go to a corrupt government headed either by Fidel or Raul Castro or anyone else who has denied freedom from the Cuban people." McCain was accompanied to the restaurant by each of South Florida's Cuban American members of Congress: Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Lincoln Diaz-Balart, and Mario Diaz-Balart. Also by his side was Roberto Martin Perez, the president in exile of Cuba's political prisoners, who was imprisoned for 28 years by Fidel Castro. (*The Swamp*, 22/1/08)

**January 22:** The United States refused to accept the parliamentary electoral process held in Cuba as genuine "elections," while admitting that it continues to work on a President George W. Bush proposal to establish an international fund for the freedom of the Caribbean island. The head of US diplomacy for Latin America, Tom Shannon, declared to have no comments regarding the electoral process, claiming that it had not been an election and therefore he would not refer to it as such. Asked if foreign countries had already announced their intention to join in President George W. Bush's initiative to create an international fund for "freedom" in Cuba, Shannon replied that his government was still working on the project. [[Thomas Shannon's briefing on Western Hemisphere, video](#)] (*AFP*, 23/1/08)

**January 22:** The religious leader who helped organize a Manhattan school's controversial trip to Cuba must speak to investigators, a judge has ruled. The Reverend Lucius Walker was ordered to comply with a subpoena regarding the Beacon School's spring break trip to Cuba with his group, the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization. Schools investigator Richard Condon is probing the role of the school and a teacher in the planning of the 10-day trip, which appears to have violated travel restrictions. Walker has repeatedly refused to speak with investigators about the April trip. His attorney, Palyn Hung of the New York Civil Liberties Union, said that Walker hadn't decided whether to appeal. (*Daily News*, 23/1/08)

**January 23:** Cuba's cruise business has been paralyzed by US sanctions that deter cruise ships from visiting during their tours of the Caribbean, the director of Havana's passenger terminal said. The cigar and rum shop is closed in the deserted \$10 million terminal and no ships are expected to moor for days. "The reason is the US blockade, which does not allow ships to visit Cuban ports," said Jose Antonio Lopez, general manager of the state company that run Cuba's four cruise terminals. "This is paralyzed,"

he said. "All cruise operators want to come to Havana and thousands of cruises sail around Cuba, but they are penalized if they visit," Lopez said. "Even the ones most interested in visiting Cuba don't dare do so." Fidel Castro has not helped much with his criticism of the cruise business. A year before he fell ill and dropped out of public sight in 2006, Castro called cruise ships "floating hotels" that left behind "rubbish, empty cans and paper" but little income. (*Reuters*, 23/1/08)

**January 23:** Senator Bill Nelson (Democrat-Florida), a foe of drilling offshore Florida, has asked President Bush not to renew an international agreement that allows for oil and natural gas drilling in Cuban waters within 50 miles of the Sunshine State's coastline. A number of foreign countries have signed agreements with Cuba to explore its energy-rich waters in the Gulf of Mexico. The latest country to partner with Cuba is Brazil, which joins China, India, Spain and companies from Canada. "Soon there could be oil [and gas] rigs within 50 miles of the Florida Keys and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. And, as the Gulf Stream flows, an oil spill or other drilling accident would desecrate part of Florida's unique environment and devastate its \$50 billion tourism-driven economy," Nelson said in a letter to President Bush. (*NGI's Daily Gas Price Index*, 25/1/08)

**January 24:** US President George W. Bush reinforced his hard line against communist Cuba, accusing Fidel and Raul Castro of repressive policies and urging them to free all political prisoners. Bush took his latest swipe at Cuba's government at a meeting with the wife of jailed Cuban dissident Oscar Elias Biscet, recently awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest US civilian honor. "It's hard for us to imagine what it would be like if we're living in a society as repressive as the society of Fidel and Raul Castro," Bush said sitting in the Oval Office beside Elsa Morejon, who wore a pin bearing her husband's portrait. "My call is for those who believe that the Cuba of today is a hopeful place to recognize the realities," Bush told reporters at the White House. "This is a country that's got political prisoners who are languishing in jails, who are mistreated in jails. Our message is that political prisoners ought to be free. So should the Cuban people -- free to express themselves, free to realize their God-given talents," he added. Biscet, a doctor and human rights activist, has spent eight years in jail for opposing Cuba's communist government. He was released in 2002 but arrested again weeks later and sentenced for 25 years for acting against Cuba's independence, a common charge against dissidents. [[President Bush Meets Elsa Morejon](#)] (*Reuters*, 24/1/08)

**January 24:** One month after three top Cuban dancers defected to the US, seven more have fled the communist island, according to a newspaper report. At least seven members of the Spanish Ballet of Cuba left an arts festival in the Mexican city of Merida, and four of them have already arrived in Miami. Dancers Cindy Arguelles and Lisandra Frontella, both 20, Daryl Perez, 19, and Erick Pupo, 18, arrived in Miami, days after defecting during Merida's International Arts Fair. After the group's performance on January 17, three other dancers left the troupe, including renowned dancer Liliana Fagoaga, according to Perez. He said those dancers were hiding in Mexico while trying to reach the United States. (*AP*, 24/1/08)

**January 24:** Canadian credit unions are advising their customers who plan to travel to Cuba to use credit cards other than their MasterCard. The problem is the result of the Bank of America Corp.'s acquisition last October of the credit card business of Regina-based CU Electronic Transaction Services (CUETS), the largest issuer of MasterCard credit cards in Canada. CUETS provides credit cards to Canada's credit union system. Betty Riess, a spokeswoman for North Carolina-based Bank of America, said its MBNA Canada subsidiary, which bought the credit card business, isn't able to process transactions in Canada, so it has to do so in the US. "That puts us under US law to disallow transactions from sanctioned countries, which would include Cuba," she said. (*The Peterborough Examiner*, 24/1/08)

**January 25:** Montana pea and lentil growers have negotiated a \$7.8 million sale to Cuba. The deal will move nearly 15,000 tons of crops from one of the fastest-growing segments of Montana farming. To complete a deal, Cuba must deposit its payment in the bank of a third country, where US businesses can then take the cash while still honoring the trade ban. Business travel to Cuba, less than 100 miles off the Florida coast, is tightly regulated. Yet Montana pea growers have coveted the Cuban market. "It's so close to us, it makes producers salivate," said Kim Murray, of the Montana Pulse Advisory Committee. (*Billings Gazette*, 25/1/08)

**January 28:** Blanca Gonzalez, whose son, Normando Hernandez Gonzalez, has become an international symbol of Cuban human-rights abuses, joined Laura Bush in the first lady's gallery when President George W. Bush delivered his final State of the Union address. In a press release, the White House described Gonzalez as "the mother of Normando Hernandez Gonzalez, a political prisoner suffering under the regime of Fidel and Raul Castro." Bush has insisted throughout his presidency on keeping US sanctions against Cuba. His administration has also called for Cuban President Fidel Castro to release all political prisoners. Blanca Gonzalez, herself a political activist, has lived in Miami since being granted political asylum by the US in 2002. (*Bloomberg*, 28/1/08)

**January 29:** The family of an American who was tortured and executed by a Cuban firing squad is asking a federal court to enforce a state judgment that awarded them millions of dollars. Jeannette Hausler is the sister of Robert Fuller, a US citizen who owned a plantation in Cuba and was killed in 1960, in violation of US anti-torture and extra-judicial killing laws. In 2007, a Florida state court awarded her family \$400 million in damages. They filed court papers last week asking a federal court to pay them \$80 million. Receiving payment is difficult in cases like this because they are trying to identify Cuban assets frozen in US bank accounts. (*AP*, 29/1/08)

**January 29:** North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson is making another trip to Cuba to push North Dakota farm products. Johnson said he has traveled to Cuba seven times in the past seven years to pitch the state's commodities. He said the state has sold about \$30 million worth of peas and lentils to Cuba since 2001. But he said a deal he helped broker last year that would have sent 100 tons of seed potatoes to Cuba has languished. Rules have not been crafted to deal with potato food-safety issues, known as "sanitary and phytosanitary measures," that ensure the commodity is disease- and insect-

free, Johnson said. "It's disappointing," Johnson said. US regulators "are still dithering around with the protocol – it's hard to say where the block is." (AP, 29/1/08)

**January 30:** Fidel Castro called President Bush's State of the Union address a new low point in "demagoguery, lies and total lack of ethics" in a new commentary. Castro wrote that "Bush tells us more with his external expressions than with the words written by his advisers," but added that "for a population that knows how to read, write and think, nobody can offer a more elegant criticism of the empire than Bush himself." Castro and top Cuban officials routinely refer to the United States as "the empire." In his essay, called "The Antithesis of Ethics" and published on the front pages of government newspapers, Castro said Bush's latest speech was worse than earlier State of the Union addresses: "the worst for its demagoguery, lies and total lack of ethics." [[The Antithesis of Ethics](#)] (AP, 30/1/08)

**January 31:** The president of Cuba's Parliament, Ricardo Alarcon, urged those who fight for a better world to create new alliances in "this time of unity" when the ideals of Cuban National Hero Jose Marti are more valid than ever. During the closing ceremony of the 2nd International Conference "For World Equilibrium" in Havana, Alarcon referred to the participation in the event – with their ideas and solidarity – of five Cuban political prisoners – internationally known as the Cuban Five. Alarcon criticized the US government that, in spite of the current situation of hunger and illiteracy that prevails in many regions of the world, continues with its crazy ideas of world domination and its military race. (ACN, 31/1/08)

**January 31:** The US Free the Five Committee has issued a press release announcing new actions for the liberation of five Cubans who remain imprisoned in the United States. The activists will inaugurate a big poster in the intersection of the streets Hollywood Blvd. and Bronson in Los Angeles, California. Antonio Guerrero, Fernando Gonzalez, Ramon Labanino, Rene Gonzalez and Gerardo Hernandez – internationally known as the Cuban Five –, have been imprisoned in the United States for more than nine years for infiltrating anti-Cuba groups in Miami, Florida. The Free the Five Committee in the US announced that the poster will remain in this central area of Los Angeles, at least, for a month. (ACN, 31/1/08)

**January 31:** Cuba remains the one country in Latin America that represses nearly all forms of political dissent, affirmed Human Rights Watch (HRW) in its annual report. There have been no significant policy changes since Fidel Castro relinquished direct control of the government to his brother Raul Castro in August 2006. "Cubans are systematically denied basic rights to free expression, association, assembly, privacy, movement, and due process of law." [[World Report 2008: Cuba, 205-209](#)] (*La Jornada*, 1/2/08)

