

FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba

April 2003

Domestic Affairs

April 1: Trial will begin for some of the Cuban dissidents arrested last month after being accused of helping US diplomats undermine the socialist government, the wives of defendants said. Government prosecutors are seeking sentences ranging from 15 years to life, said the wives. They said they had received court papers about their husbands' cases. They also said government defense attorneys told them the trials would be held from April 3rd to April 6th. (AP, 1/4/03)

April 3: Possession of "subversive" books, computers and receipts of remittances are part of the evidence supporting accusations against Cuban dissidents, according to the preliminary conclusions of public prosecutors. They are accused of "raising their living standards in spite of performing no socially productive activities" and of receiving "high and frequent" sums of money from the United States. They are charged with "distorting Cuban reality" in their reporting to the press. Osvaldo Alfonso Valdés is accused of receiving "moral and material support" from the U.S. and of contacting U.S. "agents" Frank Calzón and Carlos Alberto Montaner. (EFE, 3/4/03)

April 3: Relatives of dissident economist Marta Beatriz Roque said that during her trial, her secretary, Aleida Godínez, revealed that she was an agent who had infiltrated opposition ranks. "She was the witness who did the most damage to my aunt," said Roque's nephew, Joel Alfonso Roque. (AP, 4/4/03)

April 4: Fidel Castro's government pressed forward in its campaign to steamroll a growing opposition movement, rapidly trying the first of 80 dissidents in court hearings. International media and foreign diplomats were excluded from the hearings. The police presence around the three Havana courthouses where the trials were being held were stepped up. Local human rights activists said those scheduled to appear in court included the poet and well-known independent journalist Raúl Rivero. He was being tried alongside Ricardo González, who recently launched the first independent general interest magazine of its kind in communist Cuba. Prosecutors were seeking sentences of 20 years for Rivero and life for Gonzalez. (AP, 4/4/03)

April 4: Cuban dissident Osvaldo Payá, main promoter of the Varela Project, said he has gone daily to the courtroom where the trials on dissidents are being held, but security forces have shouted obscenities at him and forced him to leave. Elizardo Sanchez, head of the dissident Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation said he has tried to send observers to the trials but that security police stopped them before they could get within 100 yards of the building. (The Washington Post, 4/4/03)

April 4: Sponsors called off a major conference between Cuban exiles and officials that was to be held in Havana. The decision to call off the April 11-13 "Nation and Emigration" conference came as dissidents accused of subversion faced a second day of trials. (The Miami Herald, 5/4/03)

April 4: Two reporters who spent years working alongside Raúl Rivero, Cuba's best-known independent journalist revealed at his trial that they were undercover agents as they testified against him, the dissident's wife, Blanca Reyes, said. Reyes was among family members allowed into the trials and characterized the prosecution of her husband as "a circus." She was particularly enraged when Manuel David Orrio, one of Cuba's better known independent reporters, revealed in court that he was really a state security agent and testified against her husband. Also testifying against Rivero was a man he had known as independent reporter Néstor Baguer, who also admitted being a government agent. (AP, 4/4/03)

April 5: Fidel Castro defended the arrests of dissidents and summary trials against 80 of them alleging that “We do not have to agree to the impunity of those who take money from the United States to betray their country.” Castro also added that the several dozens of “counterrevolutionaries” who have been arrested “are being tried in courts that deal with crimes against state security and this outrages their masters.” (El Mundo, 6/4/03)

April 7: Fidel Castro highlighted the complete restoration and implementation of new services in ten of the capital's local health centers. This work is part of a fundamental overhaul of the Cuban health services already underway. Castro said that 16 other health centers in Havana and 36 in the rest of the country are currently being renovated and enlarged. (Radio Havana Cuba, 8/4/03)

April 7: Fidel Castro's government dealt a crippling blow to Cuba's opposition movement, sentencing peaceful activists, journalists and an economist to up to 27 years in prison for allegedly collaborating with US diplomats to undermine the socialist state. Prosecutors sought life sentences for the dissidents, who were among 80 facing closed trials. Opposition political party leader Hector Palacios, among those originally recommended for a life sentence, received 25 years. The poet and writer Raúl Rivero was given a 20-year sentence, as was the economist Martha Beatriz Roque. Fourteen courts convicted the dissidents of "working with a foreign power to undermine the government" and gave them sentences that ranged from 12 to 27 years in jail. (AP, BBC, The Toronto Star, 7,8/4/03)

April 8: Cuban courts have tried at least 75 government opponents in lightning-fast trials as the communist island presses ahead with a crackdown on dissent, human rights activists said. The known sentences for about half of them reportedly ranged from 15 to 27 years; the remaining sentences were expected by week's end. None of the trials has lasted more than one day, activists said. Another four of those arrested in the crackdown were prosecuted on lesser crimes and received much shorter sentences, measured in months rather than years, veteran activist Elizardo Sanchez said. (AP, 8/4/03)

April 8: The Cuban Ministry of Justice has issued a short official statement on the recent arrest and summary proceedings against a group of Cuban dissidents. The text reads as follows: “Public and oral trials took place on April 3rd, 4th, 5th and 7th, in the criminal courts where a number of counterrevolutionaries, who were recently arrested for their known participation in mercenary activities and other actions against the independence and territorial integrity of the Cuban State, were tried for Crimes against State Security. The trials took place according to the summary proceedings of Article 479 of the State Law of Legal Proceedings with full respect for the guarantees and fundamental rights of the defendants. The sanctions imposed by the Tribunals range between six to 28 years imprisonment and all the defendants were properly instructed of their right to present appeals before the Supreme Court.” (Radio Habana Cuba, 9/4/03)

April 8: Cuban authorities have informed that a group of men who hijacked a ferry boat in Havana and diverted it to the U.S. are being prosecuted in “summary” trials. A brief statement was read on the main Cuban television newscast without mentioning further details, including the number of accused. (AFP, 9/4/03)

April 9: The Cuban Ministry of Justice has issued a short official statement on the recent arrest and summary proceedings against a group of Cuban counterrevolutionaries. The text reads as follows: "Public and oral trials took place on April 3rd, 4th, 5th and 7th, in the criminal courts where a number of counterrevolutionaries, who were recently arrested for their known participation in mercenary activities and other actions against the independence and territorial integrity of the Cuban State, were tried for Crimes against State Security. The trials took place according to the summary proceedings of Article 479 of the State Law of Legal Proceedings with full respect for the guarantees and fundamental rights of the defendants. The sanctions imposed by the Tribunals range between six to 28 years imprisonment and all the defendants were

properly instructed of their right to present appeals before the Supreme Court." (Radio Havana Cuba, 9/4/03)

April 9: Cuba sentenced the last of 75 dissidents convicted after one-day trials of collaborating with US diplomats to undermine the communist government. The four sentences announced included a 25-year term for dissident physician Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet. The defendants were accused of receiving money from US government and working with Washington to undermine the socialist regime. (AP, 9/4/03)

April 9: Cuba defended its speedy prosecution of 75 dissidents, saying it had to protect itself against US attempts to subvert the government. It also maintained that the cases' timing had nothing to do with war in Iraq. In a news conference of more than three hours in Havana, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque said the arrests, summary trials and harsh sentences against the dissidents were justified. "We have been patient, we have been tolerant," Foreign Ministry Felipe Perez Roque said. "But we have been obligated to apply our laws." "What has been presented as the emergence of internal opposition is no more than an attempt at opposition made in the USA," Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said. Pérez Roque also denied international criticism that the arrests and convictions over the course of three weeks were timed so that the world's attention would be focused on war. "This decision was taken before the war on Iraq," Pérez Roque said. (AP, Reuters, 9/4/03)

April 11: Cuba has executed three men convicted of hijacking a passenger ferry to sail to the US, Cuban state-run television reported. The firing squad sentences were carried out immediately after a Cuban court found the men guilty of terrorism. They were part of a gang of approximately 10 involved in the hijacking in which the ferry, carrying at least 30 men, women and children, was forced to sail into the Straits of Florida, but ran out of fuel 30 miles from Havana. (CNN, 11/4/03)

April 11: Referring to the executions of three men who tried to hijack a ferry to get to the United States, dissident Elizardo Sanchez, who leads the Cuban Committee for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, said he was "absolutely troubled, because by no means was a death penalty justified." "It is a regrettable return" to capital punishment, Sánchez told the press. (AFP, 11/4/03)

April 11: Cuban authorities thwarted an attempt to hijack a plane on the Isle of Youth and have arrested four people in connection with the affair, according to an official statement released by local media. The government noted that this marked the third attempt in less than a month to hijack a plane on the Isle of Youth. The two previous attempts, which were successful, took place in March, when planes were hijacked and diverted to the United States. According to the official statement, this is "a diabolical plan" orchestrated by anti Castro groups of Cuban exiles living in Florida. (AP, Notimex, 11/4/03)

April 11: The Permanent Committee of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Cuba released a statement condemning the execution of three hijackers of a ferry boat in Havana. "No one has the right to put in danger other peoples' lives, like the hijackers did, but no one should decide that death be inflicted on people for their criminal actions", added the statement. (AFP, 11/4/03)

April 13: Fidel Castro presided over a gathering of writers and artists in Havana. The meeting of the National Council of the Cuban Union of Writers and Artists (UNEAC) was called to create an international response to fascism, particularly in the area of culture. The National Council of UNEAC issued a statement at the conclusion of the two-day meeting, calling on artists and writers around the world to join in the struggle against cultural and informational manipulation. The statement notes that the world is living in very dangerous times, pointing specifically to the current US-led invasion of Iraq and Washington's threats to continue its "war of conquest". (Radio Havana Cuba, 13/4/03)

April 15: The execution of three men who orchestrated the hijacking of a passenger ferry in a

frustrated attempt to defect to the United States has been widely criticized in Cuba. "The climate here is tense," said a resident of one of the poorest areas of Old Havana, where family members of two of the three executed hijackers live. In that neighborhood as well as the Havana district known as 10 de Octubre, which is home to the mother of the third man, there have been small demonstrations of support for the families of the three executed men, according to reports that were not confirmed by local authorities. The situation also became tense during a mass given in the Havana cemetery chapel, said witnesses. (IPS, 15/4/03)

April 16: Different Cuban professional organizations joined the call to promote actions for the preservation of world peace, according to notes published by the local press. The National Union of Architects and Engineers of Cuba, the Association of Economists (ANEC) and the Hermanos Saíz Association (young Cuban creators) joined the call made by other Cuban artists and intellectuals to create an anti-fascist front opposed to hegemonic intentions of powerful countries. (Prensa Latina, 16/4/03)

April 17: A bus and a semi truck collided on a highway in central Cuba, killing at least 30 people and injuring 71, the government said. The collision occurred before dawn as one of the vehicles swerved to avoid an animal and struck the other vehicle, according to the government's National Information Agency. The agency said at least one child was among the dead. (AP, 18/4/03)

April 18: The Cuban capital will apply in May to host the 2012 Olympic Games according to José Ramón Fernández, president of the Cuban Olympic Committee (COC). "We are asking for a measuring unit so that the decision is not based on number of installations or a city's population, but rather on merit and achievements in the athletics sphere," Fernández told the national press. (Granma International, 18/4/03)

April 19: A group of world-renowned Cuban intellectuals released a letter to their colleagues around the world, asking them to stop criticizing harsh measures recently employed in the island. Titled Message from Havana to our friends in faraway places, the letter was published in the Communist Party daily Granma. Signed by 27 of Cuba's best-known cultural figures, the letter describes the "surprise and pain" felt when liberal intellectuals around the world criticized Cuba for its crackdown on dissidents and the executions of three ferry hijackers. The Cuban letter blamed "the distance, the disinformation and the traumas of failed socialist experiences" on the recent criticism from people it has counted on for support. (The Miami Herald, 20/4/03)

April 20: Cuba dissident, Oswaldo Payá, leader of the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL), has sent an appeal to tourists visiting the island to show solidarity with the dissident movement and to take part in demonstrations. "We call on all foreigners visiting our country: declare solidarity, take part in demonstrations. Declare yourselves to be in favour of a (democratic) opening in Cuba", said Payá. "We do not want pressure from the United States, much less an intervention", he replied to a question on whether recent U.S. statements help the dissident movement. "We neither believe in the effectiveness of the embargo nor have we asked for it", he added. (El Nuevo Herald, 20/4/03)

April 21: An undercover Cuban agent credited with giving some of the most damaging courtroom evidence against dissidents said the island's opposition movement has been shattered. "The opposition is finished, it has ended, it will never lift its head again," Aleida de las Mercedes Godinez said. "The opposition will never flourish again -- never!" The interview with Ms. Godinez was the first in a series of government-organized interviews the agents are giving to the international media. (AP, 21/4/03)

April 23: All dissidents convicted to long jail sentences will be transferred to prisons far away from their place of residence, state police authorities told relatives. The announcement was made after a visit, suggesting that the prisoners had no knowledge of this decision. Although most of the convicted dissidents live in the City of Havana, they will serve their sentences hundreds of kilometres away from their homes. (Cubanet, 23/4/03)

April 25: Fidel Castro defended the firing squad executions of three ferry hijackers as a deterrent to a mass exodus that he said the United States was seeking to provoke in Cuba. "The wave of hijackings had to be stopped radically," Castro said on Cuban television. The executions ended a three-year moratorium on capital punishment in Cuba and shocked human rights organizations. (Reuters, 25/4/03)

April 28: During a regional meeting of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), the rise of crime on the island was characterized as an "ideological problem." At the meeting, which took place in the City of Matanzas, a report on "illegalities and cases of corruption identified in the last few months" was examined, according to the official daily Granma. Also, added the newspaper, the topic was addressed as one of the key issues facing the island today, discussed in similar meetings across the province. (World Data Service, 28/4/03)

Economy

April 2: Bermuda could be sending its old buses, ferries and cars to Cuba if Transport Minister Dr. Ewart Brown's proposals go to plan. The Minister travelled to Havana where he and his permanent secretary Marc Telemaque met with Government officials to discuss a number of initiatives. Among the proposals was a joint venture for Bermuda's outdated, but still working, buses to be taken to Cuba, along with the sale of the Island's old ferries and cars. And he said discussions were also held on the possibility of providing nonscheduled charter flights between Bermuda and the Cuban capital. (The Royal Gazette, 2/4/03)

April 4: President of the Cuban Central Bank Francisco Soberón Valdés declared his readiness to contribute to broadening of economic ties with Iran. In a meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Havana Ahmad Edrissian, Soberón Valdés expressed his interest in banking cooperation and exchange of the professional expertise with the Central Bank of Iran. (IRNA, 6/4/03)

April 7: Cuba's tourism industry is recovering from a post-September 11 decline and doing better than other Caribbean destinations suffering from the Iraq war's impact on the sector, industry sources said. Tourism is vital to communist-run Cuba's overall economic performance, accounting for close to half the foreign exchange earnings needed to import fuel, food and other essentials. Cuban Tourism Minister Ibrahim Ferradaz said the December-through-March high season closed with "a recovery in all tourism resorts," after the sector suffered a 14 percent decline in arrivals in the year-earlier period. (Reuters, 7/4/03)

April 7: Cuba's sugar harvest remained well behind schedule with the official media reporting that Villa Clara was the first province to produce 200,000 tonnes of raw sugar, six weeks later than the first province last year. During the 2001/02 harvest Eastern Las Tunas reached 200,000 tonnes of sugar in February. Central Villa Clara produced around 370,000 tonnes of sugar during the 2001/02 harvest of 3.61 million tonnes and reached the 200,000-tonne mark on February 27, and 300,000 on March 29. (Reuters, 7/4/03)

April 11: Cuban Minister of Foreign Trade Raúl de la Nuez concluded a visit to Brazil after defining collaboration agreements, and highlighted the interest of the Brazilian government and entrepreneurs to strengthen bilateral relations. De la Nuez said he signed a memorandum of understanding with the Minister of Development, Industry, and Foreign Trade, Luiz Fernando Furlan, to explore development of the Cuban production of alcohol as a motor-vehicle fuel. He highlighted Brazil's extensive experience in that kind of production from sugar cane, and said he talked about a future possibility to build a joint venture to be developed in the Caribbean Island. (Prensa Latina, 11/4/03)

April 15: More than 600 people were evacuated and dozens of dwellings were damaged as a result of severe rainstorms that buffeted the extreme eastern part of the island, authorities said. In

Baracoa, the second-largest municipality in Guantánamo province, heavy seas caused severe flooding in low-lying areas, damaging cocoa plantations and other crops, and disrupted electricity and telephone services. (EFE, 16/4/03)

April 16: Cuban economy authorities have said that tax collection on the island is being conducted as expected, with 99.4 per cent of taxpayers filing their returns in a timely fashion. It was noted that this is the highest percent achieved ever since the restructuring of the tax system at the beginning of the 1990s. (World Data Service, 16/4/03)

April 21: The Cuban Radio and TV retransmission signal station for the Caribbean, situated in the eastern province of Guantánamo, is to receive electricity due to the first multi-source electrical system on the island. José Carlos Díaz Vidal, a specialist from ECOSOL Solar Company, told the press that the station will derive 30 kilowatts from a mini-hydroelectric source, 16 kilowatts from photo-voltaic energy, 6 kilowatts from windmills and 10 kilowatts from diesel." He commented on the electrification of two rural communities in the mountainous zones of Guantánamo: "Cold Wind Up, with solar panels, and Cold Wind Down, with a centralized hybrid system using wind and photo-voltaic energy." (Granma International, 21/4/03)

April 22: The current tourist season is one the best for Cayo Largo del Sur, with 90 per cent occupancy levels, earnings of over \$800,000 and revenues in January in excess of \$3,250,000, indicated Luis Clarke Wright, a representative of the Ministry of Tourism. (Opciones, 22/4/03)

April 25: Venezuela announced that its oil sales to Cuba are back to normal. During an encounter with the foreign press, Venezuela Ambassador to Cuba, Julio Montes, said that the daily shipment of 53,000 barrels of crude oil, diesel and aircraft fuel has resumed. This accounts for more than half of Cuban oil imports. (Reuters, 25/4/03)

Exile Community

April 1: Putting aside differences that sent the Latin Grammys to Los Angeles two years ago, the Latin Recording Academy and South Florida leaders agreed to bring the awards ceremony to Miami in September. The announcement came after months of negotiations between city and county politicians and the Latin Academy. A deal to hold the 2001 show in Miami unraveled several weeks before the show. After Latin Grammy officials objected to the location of protests by Cuban exiles, they moved the show to Los Angeles. Both sides said the agreement brings the event back to a city that is a natural showcase for it. (The Miami Herald, 2/4/03)

April 1: A leading Cuban exile group denounced a crackdown by the Cuban government on dissidents in the communist nation, and said it would help organize a campaign of public protest to press for the release of all political prisoners on the island. "They have tried to take advantage that world opinion and the press are concentrated on the war in Iraq," said Omar Lopez Montenegro, who monitors human rights issues in Cuba for the Cuban American National Foundation. Foundation members at a news conference said they had been in contact with relatives of those jailed. Montenegro said some of the relatives have asked the Miami-based group to help drum up international support to free their loved ones. Joe Garcia, executive director of the foundation, said dissidents were peaceful and did nothing wrong. "These are abusive acts of power," Garcia said. "There are 83 people in jail for doing nothing that would be considered illegal in any country in Latin America." (AP, 1/4/03)

April 2: The former wife of an alleged Cuban spy obtained a seizure warrant for a Cuban airliner which had been hijacked and diverted to the U.S. by a man armed with two grenades. (EFE, 2/4/03)

April 5: Cuban-Americans planning to go to the Nation and Emigration conference in Havana said they understand the Cuban government's decision to postpone the conference. "Obviously I

was disappointed, but I honestly agree with the decision," said Elena Freyre, executive director of the Cuban American Defense League and one of those invited to the conference. "In reality, this is not the best time to have this type of event there. I think it would draw attention away from what the event was trying to accomplish." (Sun Sentinel, 5/4/03)

April 8: A delegation of Cuban exiles gathered across from the entrance of the United Nations Human Rights Commission headquarters to denounce the mass arrests and harsh sentences imposed on scores of pro-democracy leaders, human rights, activists and independent journalists during the most recent violent wave of repression unleashed by Castro's regime. "We call upon democratic governments gathered in Geneva for the 59th Session of the U.N. Human Rights Commission to condemn these blatant human Rights violations in Cuba and demand the immediate release of all political prisoners", said Sylvia G. Iriondo, President of Mothers and Women Against Repression. (PRNewswire, 8/4/03)

April 11: The half-sister of one of the men executed boldly denounced the government in a telephone interview with the press. "We went to the trial the 7th and the sentence was very hard. They said they were going to be sanctioned to death. Just like that", said María Ester Montoya Isaac, sister of Jorge Luis Martínez. She said her brother was not a terrorist. "They never proved that they mistreated anyone on board the ferry. On the contrary, everyone said they tried to maintain the peace. The one with the gun, he shot into the air and into the water, but never threatened anyone," Montoya said. She characterized the trial as a joke and said her brother never got due process. "We appealed the same day as the trial, but they never gave us time to get a good lawyer". Someone called the family to tell them they had to go to the Colón Cemetery for the funeral of Jorge Luis Martínez Isaac. But by the time they arrived at the historic cemetery, her brother had already been buried. (The Miami Herald, 11/4/03)

April 11: Cuban exiles in Miami condemned the firing squad executions of three men in the attempting hijacking of a ferry filled with passengers and cautioned that Fidel Castro is sending a "bloody message" to his opponents. "It is obvious that (the Cuban government) is trying to send a message of terror to the population", said Mariela Ferretti, spokesperson of the Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF). Luis Zúñiga, executive director of the Cuban Liberty Council (CLC), said "we oppose the death penalty whatever the reasons may be and thus, we condemn this action". Ramón Saúl Sánchez, president of the Democracy Movement, considered that the Cuban government "has returned to old habits". (EFE, 11/4/03)

April 12: Dozens of protesters marched in front of the Cuban Embassy in Madrid to condemn the executions by firing squad of three hijackers of a passenger boat. The demonstration was organized by Cuban exile groups in Spain under the motto "For peace, let's avoid future wars." Protesters carried banners and yelled protest slogans. (Notimex, 12/4/03)

April 15: As many world leaders condemned the crackdown, anti-Castro groups seized on the recent developments to pressure the Bush administration to toughen its stance against Castro's government. The Cuban Liberty Council has urged robust measures, including suspending all travel and remittances to Cuba, cash sent by Cuban Americans to their families on the island, two of the nation's most important lifelines. "The victims, martyrs and all their families do not need to see more crimes to validate the position that one cannot negotiate with the oppressors," said Silvia Iriondo, of Mothers Against Repression, which supports sanctions against Cuba. "There can be no dialogue with a regime that is not only responsible for crimes in the past but continues to commit brutal crimes to this day." (Sun Sentinel, 15/4/03)

April 15: Liberal and moderate Cuban Americans, whose pro-dialogue position steadily has gained ground in recent years, say Havana's actions against the opposition movement confirm the need for improving diplomatic relations with the island, though they acknowledge their views have become less popular for the time being. "The hardliners from Miami are on top right now and they're making a lot of noise," said Silvia Wilhelm, a Miami Cuban-American who advocates against economic sanctions. "But our position remains, that we are pro-dialogue, pro-opening, for

changes in the embargo and the reconciliation of the Cuban family." (Sun Sentinel, 15/4/03)

April 21: Brothers to the Rescue will take to the skies again -- on the anniversary of Cuba's independence and President George Bush's promise to bolster TV Martí -- to broadcast a television signal to Cubans on the island. Jose Basulto, the group's founder, announced the broadcast. It would be the second such transmission. The first came on February 24, the seventh anniversary of the shootdown that killed four Brothers fliers. Like the first transmission, the message will be an expression of solidarity with the internal opposition to Fidel Castro's regime. (The Miami Herald, 21/4/03)

April 21: A public interest group has refiled a lawsuit against former Attorney General Janet Reno and other federal officials, claiming they organized an unlawful raid of the home of Elián González' relatives in Miami three years ago. Judicial Watch announced that it refiled the lawsuit on behalf of Lázaro, Ángela and Marisleysis González. The lawsuit seeks a full account from government officials who ordered the seizure of then 6-year-old Elián after the US government decided to return him to his father in Cuba. (AP, 21/4/03)

April 22: Judicial Watch said that the conservative watchdog organization is not finished filing suits against Cuba under the 200-year-old Alien Tort Claims Act, or any other way its lawyers can figure out to do it. Larry Klayman, chairman of Judicial Watch, said the organization plans to file suit in Miami federal court on behalf of jailed Cuban dissident Marta Beatriz Roque, through her sister, Isabel Roque, a Miami resident. That suit will use the Alien Tort Claims Act along with one filed for Yordanis Montoya Issac of Miami, whose brother Jorge Luis Martinez Isaac was executed along with two others in a failed ferry hijacking. (UPI, 22/4/03)

April 29: The Bush administration is facing a novel force as it considers how to respond to Fidel Castro's recent crackdown on dissidents: a newfound moderation among Miami's formerly hard-line Cuban-American activists. "The overwhelming position of our board is that the US should not react to Castro's provocation," says Joe Garcia, spokesman for the Cuban American National Foundation. More important, Mr. Garcia says, Washington shouldn't follow through with a proposal by some legislators to curtail the ability of Cuban-Americans to send remittances, which some say could be as much as \$1 billion a year, to relatives in Cuba. (The Wall Street Journal, 29/4/03)

Foreign Affairs

April 1: The United Nations' special human rights monitor for Cuba said that she was unable to present her report on the island because of obstacles the communist regime has posed to her mission. Christine Chanet, appointed special envoy to Cuba last year by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, reminded members of the UN Commission on Human Rights that Fidel Castro refused her entry to visit Cuba. The French former supreme court justice said Cuban authorities told her they denied her entrance because the Cuban government considers the resolution appointing her to be "unjust, selective and discriminatory." (EFE, 1/4/03)

April 2: The Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have proposed Cuba as the cooperation center headquarters to archive information gathered in the battle against dengue fever. Dr. Patricio Yépez, PAHO and WHO representative on the island, made the announcement during the final session of a meeting in Havana's International Conference Center. (Radio Havana Cuba, 2/4/03)

April 2: In an unusual move, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office summoned Cuba's Ambassador to that country to express the UK's dismay at the recent arrests of 78 dissidents on the island. This is the first time in at least two and half years that Ambassador José Fernández de Cossio has been called to the visit the British foreign affairs headquarters. "The recent wave of arrests in Cuba is deplorable," said Bill Rammell, minister for Human Rights after the meeting.

"These arrests are extremely bad for the image of Cuba, which has done much to build a society with good social indicators. We will be following the cases closely and are pressing for access to trials." (Reuters, 2/4/03)

April 3: The World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC) urged Fidel Castro to release all the journalists arrested in the last few days and to withdraw the charges under which they will be summarily tried. A similar petition was issued by the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH). (The New Herald, 3/4/03)

April 4: The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) condemned the trials of 28 independent Cuban journalists who have been detained since a crackdown began on March 18. We are appalled and outraged by the arrests of our colleagues," said CPJ acting director Joel Simon. "Given Cuba's repressive legislation and compliant judiciary, we are extremely concerned that they could receive lengthy prison sentences, including life terms." (IFEX, 4/4/03)

April 4: The Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) launched a strong plea to the international community to mobilize against the indiscriminate persecution of independent journalists in Cuba after indictments in Havana against 28 of them. (El Nuevo Herald, 5/4/03)

April 4: Mexico's PRD Senate legislators (Democratic Revolutionary Party) have demanded that the government of President Vicente Fox abstain from an anti-Cuban maneuver. Senator Serafin Rios Alvarez, state of Michoacan, provided the Senate with an agreement sent to the Foreign Affairs Committee, as well as another recently proposed by the Mexican Ecologist Green Party (PVEM). Rios Alvarez told the press that the Senate will vote on both projects to reject any anti-Cuban condemnation at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva, Switzerland. (Prensa Latina, 4/4/03)

April 4: Brazil's new Ambassador to Cuba Tilden Santiago said he is assuming his functions at a very rich moment to improve bilateral relations, established in 1986. In an interview with the press, Santiago said he has two main objectives in Havana: one in the economic, commercial, and financial field, and the other in the political, strongly supporting Cuba's reinsertion in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the whole world. (Prensa Latina, 4/4/03)

April 4: Canada said it had protested to Havana over a crackdown on leading dissidents. Cuban authorities are seeking life sentences for 12 of the 78 dissidents, rights activists and journalists arrested and charged with collaborating with the United States. "Canada has raised serious concerns with the Cuban authorities regarding the recent crackdown on several dissidents," said foreign ministry spokesman Patrick Riel. "Many of those arrested are well-known as defenders of freedom of expression and, of course, we are closely monitoring the situation." (Reuters, 4/4/03)

April 4: Around 30 member of Reporters Without Borders and Cuban and French intellectuals occupied the premises of the Cuban tourism bureau in Paris to condemn the recent wave of arrests of Cuban dissidents on the island. The demonstrators symbolically turned the office into a prison, hanging a banner saying "Cuba = prison" over the facade, and painting bars on the windows, behind which they put photos of recently detained Cuban journalists like Raúl Rivero, Mario Enrique Mayo and Jorge Olivera. (AFP, 6/4/03)

April 6: The President of the National Assembly of the People's Power, Ricardo Alarcón, returned to Havana after a brief visit to Belize where he attended the establishment of a new legislature in that country. (Granma, 7/4/03)

April 7: Cuba asked both sides in the Iraq war to respect its diplomats, among the last to remain in Baghdad, after an armed attack on a convoy of Russian diplomats leaving for Syria. "Our staff will remain at their post. We hope their diplomatic condition will be respected by both sides in the war if there is fighting around the embassy," the Cuban government said in a statement released. The Vatican and Cuba have the only diplomatic missions that are still staffed in Baghdad, after

the departure of the Russians, the statement said. (Reuters, 7/4/03)

April 7: The heavy sentences imposed against non-violent Cuban dissidents are unjustified and draconian, Human Rights Watch said. "These harsh prison sentences are totally unjustified," said José Miguel Vivanco, executive director of the Americas Division of Human Rights Watch. "Cuba is flouting fundamental human rights norms." "It's perverse that there's a massive crackdown occurring in Cuba just at the moment that the United Nations is examining Cuba's human rights record," said Vivanco. "The Commission must condemn these abuses, and do so strongly and unequivocally." (Human Rights Watch, 7/4/03)

April 7: The Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) repudiated the sentences of up to 27 years in prison handed down against nearly twenty independent journalists in Cuba and called upon hemispheric governments to urge the International Court of Justice in The Hague to intervene. (El Nuevo Herald, 8/4/03)

April 7: Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham summoned Cuba's ambassador to Canada to his office to express "extreme concern" over a dramatic crackdown on peaceful dissent by Fidel Castro's regime. Mr. Graham presented the ambassador with a protest letter addressed to Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque. "The Canadian government is extremely concerned about this potential curtailment of human rights and freedom of expression in Cuba, and is deeply disturbed by the severity of the sentences," said the letter. (The Globe and Mail, 8/4/03)

April 7: UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura voiced concern over freedom of expression and press freedom in Cuba following the arrest of at least 24 Cuban journalists and dozens of human rights activists. "I am very concerned about the situation of freedom of expression and press freedom in Cuba," the Director-General declared. "Reports reaching us regarding the case of the 24 journalists and the human rights activists, said to total 78, are worrying." (UNESCO Press Release, 7/4/03)

April 8: Claudia Roth, the German government's human rights spokesman, harshly criticized the arrests of dissidents in Cuba. "The trial flagrantly breaches the most basic elements of the rule of law and human rights. The defense had neither the chance to meet the accused nor to read the charge sheet in advance." (The Daily Telegraph, 9/4/03)

April 8: Three Dominican students now face expulsion from Cuba after two of them were arrested in connection with the illegal cultivation of marijuana and the other with smuggling of Cuban nationals into Dominica, Education Minister Roosevelt Skerritt has confirmed. The students are in Cuba under the Cuba-Dominica scholarship programme. Skerritt, who did not disclose the names of the students, said that the two held on drugs charges were arrested following a sting operation, while the third student was involved in a scheme to get Cuban nationals to visit Dominica, from where "they would be able to travel to any Caribbean island or to the United States". (BBC, 8/4/03)

April 8: The French Communist Party (PCF) issued a statement condemning the crackdown on dissidents in Cuba: "The Party strongly condemns repression against Cuban dissidents." "Political processes by which Cuban citizens become victims are unacceptable." The PCF demanded their immediate liberation. (La Revue, 8/4/03)

April 9: Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien said he was disturbed by a Cuban crackdown on dissidents but insisted his policy of engaging in dialogue with Havana was producing positive results. "I know there is a problem of human rights in that country -- sometimes it's better, sometimes it's bad - and we're protesting. But it's better to be engaged because that's putting pressure (on Havana)," Chretien told a news conference, saying there was "not a great democracy" in Cuba. "I believe it's better to be engaged and talking than to ignore the problem (...) I know that if you don't do anything it could be much worse", he added. "He (Castro) is trying to talk to other nations and when he has problems of that nature it makes life more difficult. If we

ignore that, he will not mind at all. And I know he's preoccupied, he's not happy when we're talking to him about it (the crackdown)," said Chretien. (AFP, Reuters, 9/4/03)

April 9: Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, said he has information that Mexico will vote in favour of a draft resolution examining the human rights situation in Cuba at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva. "We know that will be the case since we understand Mexico has no room for anything different," said Pérez Roque. (La Jornada, 10/4/03)

April 9: United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Sergio Vieira de Mello has expressed concern over the arrests and ongoing trials of approximately 80 persons charged with working for a foreign Power to undermine the Cuban Government. Mr. Vieira de Mello voiced disquiet regarding the severe sentences defendants had reportedly already received after less than a week on trial. He recalled that he had raised the issue of the arrests during a meeting with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque and in subsequent discussions with Cuban authorities. Mr. Vieira de Mello said he was requesting Cuba to provide urgently detailed information on the trials. "There are questions about the fairness of such expedited proceedings, which have been closed to the public and observers, and I am calling for transparency", the High Commissioner said. (UN information Service, 9/4/03)

April 9: Appalled by the latest round of summary trials and sentencing of dissidents in Cuba, a group of countries from Latin America and Europe plans to toughen a draft resolution that would result in censure by the UN Human Rights Commission. Until recently, a group of countries led by Peru, Uruguay, Costa Rica and Nicaragua had planned to repeat last year's resolution. But the sudden onset of a wave of repression has spurred efforts to win a stronger resolution -- and outright condemnation. According to US State Department sources, Great Britain, France and Greece have joined efforts to toughen the resolution. Of the original backers, Nicaragua and Uruguay are similarly disposed to back tougher language, but Peru is not. The position of Costa Rica is unclear. (The Miami Herald, 9/4/03)

April 10: Opposition legislators implored President Vicente Fox to abstain from a UN human rights vote criticizing longtime Mexico ally Cuba. Last year, the Fox administration supported a UN resolution censuring the government of Fidel Castro for its oppression of political movements. The vote in the Human Rights Commission cooled traditionally warm Mexican-Cuban relations. (AP, 10/4/03)

April 11: More than 30 priests of the Bohemian Bretheran Protestant Church protested against the new wave of repression launched against Cuban dissidents by the communist regime there. "We are appalled by news that new persecution of human rights advocates and opponents of the current regime has recently been launched in your country," the priests wrote to the Cuban charge d'affaires in Prague. (CTK, 11/4/03)

April 11: Czech President Vaclav Klaus expressed his disturbance over the politically motivated trials in Cuba. He said that he believes that the Czech Republic should use all opportunities to express its disagreement with the violation of human rights in Cuba, Presidential Office press section director Petr Hajek said. Former president Vaclav Havel also protested against the new round of harsh repressions, as did Foreign Minister Cyril Svoboda. (CTK, 11/4/03)

April 11: Canadian organization Rights & Democracy is deeply concerned about the lack of transparency surrounding the recent arrests and trials of 78 Cuban dissidents. Rights & Democracy shares Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham's belief that the harshness of the sentences could have a serious effect on the future of human rights, freedom of expression and democracy in Cuba. "It is regrettable that such dramatic measures be taken at a time of increasing openness and good will between Cuba and the international community of states. It is of vital importance to the Cuban people that this positive engagement not be squandered," Rights & Democracy's President Jean-Louis Roy said. (Canada News Wire, 11/4/03)

April 12: Blanca Reyes, wife of dissident journalist Raúl Rivero, who has been sentenced to 20 years in prison after a summary trial, sought the mediation of Pope John Paul II and of Jose María Aznar, president of Spain, to intercede with the Cuban government to obtain the release of a group of dissidents sentenced to prison terms. (EFE, 13/4/03)

April 12: Dozens of protesters marched in front of the Cuban Embassy in Madrid to condemn the executions by firing squad of three hijackers of a passenger boat. The demonstration was organized by Cuban exile groups in Spain under the slogan "For peace, let's avoid future wars". Protesters carried banners and shouted protest slogans. (Notimex, 12/4/03)

April 12: In Uruguay two former Uruguayan presidents condemned the recent executions in Cuba; whereas, Uruguayan leftist organizations organized a solidarity event with Cuba demanding the reestablishment of diplomatic relations with the island. "Executions in Latin America should have ended long ago, especially firing squad executions for political reasons," said Luis A. Lacalle of the National Party. Similarly, Julio M. Sanguinetti pointed out that "the Cuban regime has unleashed a wave of repression that includes the bloodshed of three summary executions." On the other hand, local left-wing politicians and labour unions organized two solidarity acts in support of the Cuban regime, verbally attacking the U.S. government. (AP, 13/4/03)

April 12: A delegation of Mexican parties arrives in Cuba to express solidarity with the Cuban people. The political forces integrating this representation are the same that from the Chamber of Deputies are calling on the Vicente Fox administration to abstain voting against the Caribbean nation at the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC). (Prensa Latina, 12/4/03)

April 13: Portuguese writer José Saramago, winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1998, and a friend of Cuba, repudiated the island's government for executing three men last week: "This is as far as I go. From now on, Cuba can follow its own path, and I will stay put. The right to dissent can always be found, written in invisible ink, in all the human rights declarations of the past, present and future. To dissent is an irrevocable right of conscience. It may lead to treason, but that must be demonstrated with irrefutable proof". "Cuba has won no heroic victory by executing these three men, but it has lost my confidence, damaged my hopes, robbed me of illusions. This is as far as I go", he added. (The Miami Herald, 15/4/03)

April 14: The Mexican government issued a statement condemning Cuba's execution of three men convicted in a brief trial of hijacking a ferry to flee to the US. "The Foreign Relations Department profoundly regrets the application of the death penalty against three Cuban citizens," the department said in a press statement. The department said it's rejection of the Cuban executions was based on "the spirit and tradition of Mexican law enforcement, and its position on the death penalty." (AP, 13/4/03)

April 14: More than 300 artists, intellectuals and politicians from around the world have joined an "open letter" campaign launched by a prominent magazine in Spain demanding the immediate release of Cuban government opponents recently sentenced to as many as 28 years in prison. The letter and signatures appear in the latest issue of Encuentro, a magazine based in Madrid that focuses on Cuban issues. (The Miami Herald, 14/4/03)

April 14: The European Union has condemned a crackdown by Cuba on dissidents that has strained relations with the bloc and could jeopardise EU aid. EU foreign ministers sounded their warning at the end of a meeting in Luxembourg. It followed the jailing of 75 dissidents and the execution of three men who hijacked a ferry in a bid to reach the United States. The EU Council of Foreign Ministers said it "condemned the recent actions of the Cuban authorities, notably the executions, the large-scale arrests of dissidents, the unfair trials and the arbitrary and excessive sentences imposed." "These latest developments which mark a further deterioration in the human rights situation in Cuba will affect the EU's relationship with Cuba and the prospects for increased cooperation. The Council will keep the situation under close review," it added. (Reuters, 14/4/03)

April 15: Spain and Bolivia expressed concern over the executions in Cuba and the crackdown on dissidents there, saying they would study the events with other Latin American countries ahead of the next Ibero American summit. "Cuba is always in the background of any talks within the international community and the latest Cuban events worry all of us," Spanish Foreign Minister Ana Palacio told a joint press conference with her Bolivian counterpart, Carlos Saavedra. Saavedra said the executions and the recent crackdown on dissidents on the Caribbean island, would be analyzed by Latin American countries ahead of the Ibero American summit to be held in Bolivia in November. However, he added that no decision had been taken yet regarding Cuba and the summit. "We are all surprised, to say the least, with what has happened in Cuba," said Saavedra. (AP, 15/4/03)

April 15: Switzerland has condemned a wave of repression in Cuba, including the recent execution of three Cubans. The Swiss ambassador in Havana transmitted an official protest to Fidel Castro's government. Livio Zanolari, a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry, told the press that ambassador Jean-Claude Richard had conveyed the Swiss government's concerns to the Cuban foreign minister. The message condemned the use of the death penalty, which had not been enforced in Cuba for the past three years. (BBC, 15/4/03)

April 15: More than 20 dissidents in the former Communist Czechoslovakia, signatories of the pro-democracy Charter 77 declaration, have signed a petition calling on Cuba to immediately halt repressions and unconditionally release all unjustly prosecuted Cuban opposition leaders. The signatories include former Czech president Vaclav Havel, current Senate chairman Petr Pithart, deputy Senate chairman Jan Ruml, deputy foreign minister Alexandr Vondra, deputy ombudsman Anna Sabatova and MP Svatopluk Karasek. The petition condemns Cuba's state power for repressive actions aimed at "deterring the population, suppressing basic human rights and preventing a free dialogue on public affairs". (CTK, 15/4/03)

April 15: All the political forces in Italy and the Vatican have condemned the crackdown of dissidents by Fidel Castro's government. The small Communist Party was the only one that failed to join the criticisms against the Cuban wave of repression. According to media reports, Cuba took advantage of the fact that all eyes were set on the conflict in Iraq. (AP, 15/4/03)

April 15: Chile's Foreign Minister, Soledad Alvear, described as "regrettable" the events that have recently taken place in Cuba: "Chile is a nation that is very sensitive to the issue of human rights after having itself endured 17 years of serious violations that I would not like to see repeated anywhere else in the world," said Alvear to a group of journalists. (El Mercurio, 15/4/03)

April 15: Upon the request of Minister Frattini, the General Secretary of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Giuseppe Baldocci, contacted the Ambassador of Cuba to Italy, Maria de los Angeles Flores, to express the "concern and disapproval of the Italian government over the wave of arrests and sentencing of Cuban dissidents". A memo reports that the General Secretary of Foreign Affairs "especially emphasized how the accusations against them, the great number of people involved, and the short period of time within which the trials occurred are a cause for serious concern for human rights in Cuba. We hope that these considerations, coming from a country such as Italy who has always had open and friendly relations with Cuba, will be carefully considered by the Cuban authorities." (AGI, 15/4/03)

April 16: Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes called Cuba a "suffocating dictatorship." Fuentes, a Mexican novelist and longtime Cuba supporter, felt disillusioned at Cuba's recent crackdown on dissent. He lumped Bush and Castro together and declared himself against both. Castro, he said, needs "his American enemy to justify his own failings." "As a Mexican, I wish for my country neither the dictates of Washington on foreign policy, nor the Cuban example of a suffocating dictatorship," he wrote in a letter published in Mexico City's Reforma newspaper. (AP, 16/4/03)

April 16: The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has condemned the Cuban

government's execution of three men charged with the hijacking of a passenger ferry boat in Havana and taking its passengers hostage. In a statement, the commission said the imposition of the death penalty by firing squad against the accused hijackers, following a short trial, did not provide for due process, and as a result, "their execution is converted into the arbitrary deprivation of life." (Washington File, 16/4/03)

April 16: The President of Ecuador, Lucio Gutiérrez, condemned the firing squad execution of three Cubans who hijacked a ferry boat with the intention of fleeing to the United States. "We join the global outcry against the regrettable executions carried out in Cuba", said Gutiérrez in a statement circulated by the national communications department. (AFP, 17/4/03)

April 16: The top UN human rights body debated a resolution censuring Cuba as the communist nation accused "vile lackeys" of the United States of trying to undermine its stability. The 53-nation Human Rights Commission postponed a vote on the resolution for one day following two hours of politically charged debate over Cuba's latest crackdown on dissidents. Cuba, meanwhile, accused the United States of trying to strong-arm poor nations into supporting the measure. "The government of the United States is applying colossal pressures on the countries of Latin America, Africa and others from the Third World," said a government statement read on state television. (AP, 16/4/03)

April 17: Shortly before announcing that the first of two amendments presented by Cuba to the Human Rights Commission (HRC) - urging an immediate end to the US blockade - had been rejected, Parliamentary President Ricardo Alarcón stated that such a vote would allow members of the Human Rights Commission (HRC) to demonstrate that they really are concerned about the human rights situation on the island, or whether this is merely part of an annual ritual acted out against the island. The other amendment that Cuba wanted to be added to the anti-Cuban resolution condemned acts of terrorism committed against the island from the United States. (Granma International, 18/4/03)

April 17: The top United Nations human rights watchdog narrowly passed a resolution calling on Cuba to accept a visit by a rights investigator but rejected an amendment that would have criticized the country for the recent wave of repression. The 53-nation Human Rights Commission voted by 24 votes to 20 in favor of a resolution, presented by Peru and Uruguay, urging Cuba to accept a visit by a UN investigator, French jurist Christine Chanet. Against the document voted Algeria, Bahrain, Burkina Faso, China, Cuba, Congo, Gabon, India, Libya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe. In favor of the document voted: Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, France, Germany, Guatemala, Ireland, Japan, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, South Korea, Sierra Leona, Sweden, Great Britain, United States and Uruguay. Argentina, Brazil, Kenya, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Thailand, Togo and Uganda abstained. Cuba has refused to allow Chanet to visit, claiming such a visit could infringe on its sovereignty.

April 17: The Mexican Foreign Ministry has indicated that Mexico's vote at the UN Human Rights Commission is consistent with its principles and not condemnatory or critical against Cuba. (El Universal, 17/4/03)

April 17: Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, still a supporter of the Cuban revolution, criticized the firing squad executions of three Cubans who attempted to hijack a boat to flee to the US, and the long prison sentences imposed recently on dozens of dissidents. In the Uruguayan weekly Brecha, Galeano says these sentences are "bad news, sad news that deeply hurt those who believe that (...) freedom and justice should exist together or they don't exist at all." (AFP, 17/4/03)

April 17: Brazil, which abstained from vote on the motion on Cuba at the UN commission on Human Rights, has expressed "strong concern" about the summary trials of the dissidents and the application of the death penalty, and will make its position "clearly known" to the Castro

government. Within Brazil's leftist Workers Party (PT), of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the issue generated some divisions. (IPS, 17/4/03)

April 17: Fausto Bertinotti, secretary of the "Rifondazione Comunista" party publicly expressed the Italian communists' condemnation of the wave of repression in Cuba as well as expressed their disagreement with the recent executions and the long prison sentences handed down to dissidents in Havana. (AFP, 17/4/03)

April 17: The Latin American Parliamentary Commissions (PARLATINO) for Health, Labor, Childhood, and Youth are holding sessions in Havana, to continue debating topics of their fields. (Prensa Latina, 17/4/03)

April 18: During a meeting of PARLATINO (Latin-American Parliament) in Havana, the President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón, made reference to the results of discussions at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. Alarcón said that the anti-Cuba vote "is aimed at justifying aggressive and intrusive positions against the island". (World Data Service, 18/4/03)

April 18: Opponents of President Hugo Chavez protested the "Cubanization" of Venezuela outside the Cuban Embassy while others voiced support for the leftist leader's "revolutionary" government. Dozens of government adversaries waved Venezuelan flags and placards reading "Fidel, Assassin!" and chanted "Chavez, Communist!" outside the embassy in eastern Caracas. Meanwhile, "Chavistas," as the president's supporters are called, shouted "Fascists, Go Home!" as they waved small Cuban flags. Police and National Guardsmen formed a barricade to prevent the rival groups from clashing. (AP, 18/4/03)

April 18: Cuba's foreign minister cried victory after the UN Human Rights Commission voted against condemning his country's recent crackdown on dissidents, and Fidel Castro's government dismissed the possibility of US punitive steps. Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque called the vote a "resonant victory." "The unquestionable majority vote is a clear signal from the Human Rights Commission that Cuba has the right to apply its own laws," Perez Roque told a news conference. Perez Roque said his country would not comply with the milder resolution, which urged Cuba to accept a visit by UN human rights investigator, French jurist Christine Chanet. Facing growing international isolation, Pérez Roque said Cuba was considering the withdrawal of a request to join a European Union preferential trade and aid accord with former colonies due to European criticism of its rights record. (AP, Reuters, 18/4/03)

April 19: In a report issued in London, members of the democratic left condemned "the Cuban state's repression of independent thinkers and writers". The group states that the Cuban dissidents were sentenced for "crimes" such as writing essays critical of the government and meeting with delegations of foreign political leaders". "These are violations of the most elementary norms of due process of law", the report says. (The Guardian, 19/4/03)

April 19: Brazilian Architect Oscar Niemeyer sent a message of support to Fidel Castro. Niemeyer sent a telegram expressing "solidarity with the fight" of the Cuban President the same day that the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva adopted a resolution urging Cuba to allow a UN Rapporteur to visit the island. (AP, 22/4/03)

April 22: A United States-backed resolution condemning human rights abuses in Cuba is up for debate at the Organization of American States, but the proposal is stirring opposition from some Latin American nations. The resolution, proposed by Nicaragua and co-sponsored by the United States and Costa Rica, will be taken up by the permanent council of the Washington-based OAS. (Reuters, 22/4/03)

April 22: Three Russian nationals, arrested in Cuba last summer when attempting to smuggle in a large batch of heroin, have been sentenced to 30 years imprisonment, the defendants' lawyers told the press, after receiving a formal notification about the court ruling. Long prison terms were

given to Rodion Dobrorez and Pyotr Voichinsky, who lived in the United States, and Muscovite Dmitry Kiselev. Investigators said they arrived in Havana from Ecuador last June. During an inspection of their luggage at the international airport Jose Martí, customs officials found on them more than 1.9 kilograms of heroin packed in plastic bags. (TASS, 23/4/03)

April 22: The Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ana Palacio, affirmed that the Spanish government "does not compromise on matters of human rights, neither in Cuba nor anywhere else." At a joint press conference with her Tunisian counterpart, Habib Ben Yahia, the Spanish Minister said that her government's position is "clear," with regards to the recent events in Cuba. (AFP, 23/4/03)

April 22: Several European Union countries are preparing to cut back their diplomatic programmes in Cuba in protest at the political crackdown by Fidel Castro's regime. "We were dismayed watching the dissident trials. The executions put the lid on it," a European diplomatic source in Havana said. "There has been a real feeling of indignation and disappointment, a sense that we simply cannot let this pass." The diplomat also revealed that "a majority of EU capitals have requested a consultation with their Cuban ambassador to express their displeasure over the political round-up." (The Financial Times, 23/4/03)

April 23: Nicaragua recalled its diplomatic representative in Cuba for consultations, after the Cuban government accused several Latin nations of acting as "lackeys" of the United States. In a press statement, Nicaragua's Foreign Ministry said it rejected "the improper language" used by Cuba, and said it had recalled its charges-de-affaires in Havana, Mercedes de De Sedas, for consultations in Managua "in order to evaluate the situation." Foreign Minister Norman Caldera also called in Cuba's representative in Managua, Manuel Guillot, to explain her government's position. (AP, 23/4/03)

April 23: Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim reported that he contacted Cuban government officials and conveyed his assessment that Havana's attitudes are hindering assistance from friendly countries. According to Amorim, Cuba is living under siege as a result of the United States' unilateral embargo and would have become a democracy by now had this embargo been lifted. The minister believes that a more open political system in Cuba would be to that country's advantage. (BBC, 24/4/03)

April 23: The Chamber of Deputies of Brazil introduced a declaration condemning the "repressive policies" applied by the Cuban government against dozens of dissidents, during a heated session in which the left-wing members left the room. The declaration was passed by a majority vote of 52 out of the 54 members present. (AP, 23/4/03)

April 24: Amnesty International is concerned for the health of 62-year-old Cuban prisoner Oscar Espinosa Chepe. He is currently being held at the State Security headquarters at Villa Marista in Havana and is believed to be suffering from a chronic kidney condition, a thoracic hernia, persistent hyper-tension and weight loss. Oscar Espinosa Chepe may be a prisoner of conscience (POC), and Amnesty International is reviewing the available information to determine his POC status. (Amnesty International, 24/4/03)

April 24: Employees of the Cuban embassy in Paris have exchanged blows with a group of protesters. The group was demonstrating against a recent wave of prison sentences passed on political dissidents in Cuba. The staff used sledge-hammers to smash chains attached by the protesters to the embassy railings and scuffles broke out. A reporter of TV Española was injured together with secretary general of Reporters Without Borders, R. Ménard, and six other participants in the protest. (AFP, El País, 25/4/03)

April 25: Dominican President Hipolito Mejias considers Cuba's position, as honored guest country in the 6th International Santo Domingo Book Fair. In statements to the press, after participating in the opening of the Cuban pavilion, Mejia said he had a special interest in visiting

the exhibit and participating in the opening of the Fair with Cuban Vice President Jose Ramon Fernandez. (Prensa Latina, 25/4/03)

April 25: Fidel Castro questioned the verbal attacks coming from Spain after the execution here of three men who hijacked a passenger ferry and the arrest of 75 people involved in conspiracies at the service of the United States. In his extensive talk Fidel Castro cited the names of former Spanish leader Felipe Gonzalez and his successor Jose Maria Aznar, as among those critical of the Cuban government for holding summary trials and the sentences given to dissidents fabricated by the US Interests Section in Havana. (Prensa Latina, 25/4/03)

April 26: Pope John Paul wrote to Fidel Castro expressing his deep sorrow at the execution of three ferry hijackers and hefty jail terms imposed on scores of dissidents, the Vatican said. Adding his voice to growing international criticism of Castro's biggest crackdown on political dissent in decades, the pope asked for "a significant gesture of clemency" and spoke of his "profound pain" over the deaths of the three men by a firing squad. The papal letter was dated April 13 and written for the 82-year-old pontiff by his secretary of state Angelo Sodano. (Reuters, World Press Review, 26/4/03)

April 26: Reporters Without Borders protested at plans to transfer a dozen independent journalists arrested to provincial prisons hundreds of kilometres from their Havana area homes and warned that it would lead to their ill-treatment. The families of a dozen of the 26 journalists detained in a crackdown on 78 dissidents were told by state security police that their relatives would shortly be sent to jails up to 900 kms from the capital. The families immediately denounced the move as an effective "second sentence" in view of the problems of moving around the country due to transportation problems in the island. (Reporters Without Borders, 26/4/03)

April 26: Venezuelan troops and police fired tear gas and shotgun pellets to separate opponents and supporters of Fidel Castro who clashed on Saturday near the Cuban embassy. Several truckloads of National Guard troops in riot gear rushed to a street near the embassy after the rival groups pelted each other with stones and bottles. At least one person was hurt. (Reuters, 27/4/03)

April 26: Hundreds of people gathered in Madrid to protest against the recent firing squad executions in Cuba of three hijackers of a ferry and against the prison sentences imposed on members of the Cuban dissidence. Representatives of different political groups, including the Partido Popular (PP) and the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), as well as artists and intellectuals were among the protesters. (Reuters, 26/4/03)

April 26: Cuba has refused to extend diplomatic visas to a group of Mexican legislators from President Vicente Fox's party who wanted to travel to the island to show their support for Cuban opposition movements. Two senators and two congressmen from the conservative National Action Party said the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City denied their requests for official visas, forcing them to cancel a three-day visit. (AP, 26/4/03)

April 29: The Italian lower house approved a motion calling on the government to halt Italy's economic aid to Cuba if dissidents are not freed and executions are not stopped. The motion - sponsored by the centre-right ruling coalition but partially backed by the left as well - also urged the government to seek a EU-wide common position of pressure on Cuba. The move could be helped by Italy's forthcoming term of EU presidency, scheduled to start in July. (BBC, 30/4/03)

April 29: The 1982 Nobel Prize winning author, Gabriel García Márquez, refuses to join the likes of Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes and Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano in condemning the Cuban leader. The Colombian writer defended himself in the daily newspaper El Tiempo after US writer Susan Sontag told reporters that it was "unpardonable" for him not to have spoken out over the recent Cuban crackdown. "I don't answer unnecessary and provocative questions," said the author of modern classics such as "100 years of Solitude" and "Nobody writes to the Colonel." "I

myself could not calculate the number of prisoners, dissidents and conspirators that I have helped, in absolute silence, to emigrate from Cuba over no less than 20 years," said Garcia Marquez. "As to the death penalty, I don't have anything to add to what I have said in private and publicly for as long as I can remember: I'm against it in any place, for any reason, in any circumstances." (Reuters, 29/4/03)

April 29: Cuba's recent clampdown on dissidents is alienating Italy, a country historically close to the Caribbean island. The Italian lower house approved a motion calling on the government to halt Italy's economic aid to Cuba if dissidents are not freed and executions are not stopped. The motion - sponsored by the centre-right ruling coalition but partially backed by the left as well - also urged the government to seek a EU-wide common position of pressure on Cuba. The move could be helped by Italy's forthcoming term of EU presidency, scheduled to start in July. (BBC, 30/4/03)

April 29: In Madrid, an overwhelming majority of Spanish members of parliament, including representatives from the ruling Partido Popular (PP) and the opposition Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), condemned "the wave of repression" in Cuba. The text urges the government to "promote bilateral actions, within the UN and multilateral organizations for promoting the respect of human rights and civil liberties in Cuba." (The Miami Herald, 30/4/03)

April 30: Cuba was re-elected to the UN Human Rights Commission despite the island's crackdown on dissidents, prompting the United States to walk out of the United Nations meeting in protest. "They won't be able to force us out," said Jose Antonio Fernández, the head of Cuba's delegation. Latin America chose Cuba, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras and Peru for six open seats. (AP, 30/4/03)

April 30: A group of intellectuals including Noam Chomsky, Edward Said and Howard Zinn, criticized the policies of Washington and Havana and signed a document criticizing the recent events in Cuba. "We, the undersigned, firmly object the current wave of repression in Cuba. We condemn the arrests of dozens of members of the opposition to the Cuban government for carrying out political, non-violent activities, as well as the outrageously long sentences (of up to 28 years in prison) imposed on them in the wake of unfair trials." (La Jornada, 30/4/03)

April 30: The European Commission has decided to postpone "indefinitely" the presentation of its analysis to the Group of Fifteen regarding the request from Havana to join the Cotonou Agreement. After examining the latest events in Cuba, the recommendations that the EU was scheduled to present to the Fifteen in June on the possible accession of Cuba to the Cotonou Agreement "have been cancelled for the moment", announced EU spokesman Gerassimos Thomas. (AFP, 30/4/03)

Terrorism

April 6: Comandos F-4 keeps on training for a possible invasion of Cuba. Its members think armed action is the only way to bring change to Cuba. It is one of the last paramilitary groups still training in the United States since the heyday of such organizations in the 1960s and 1970s, when bombings and armed incursions into Cuba were common occurrences. Since then, a number of the former militants have died and others have laid down their weapons. But some, like Comandante Rodolfo Frómota of Comandos F-4, remain committed. "I will never abandon the cause of a free Cuba," says Frómota, the highest-ranking member of Comandos F-4 in the United States. Although they've agreed to not make any more armed incursions into Cuba, the members of Comandos F-4 train in their camps -- in case the United States needs their help in a future invasion. They're also prepared to be part of a post-Castro Cuban military. (Sun Sentinel, 6/4/03)

April 29: A Panamanian court turned down a request to release four Cuban anti-Castro exiles under arrest in Panama for planning to assassinate Fidel Castro. The Court of Appeal ordered to keep Luis Posada Carrilles, Guillermo Novo Sampoll, Pedro Crispin Remon and Gaspar Jimenez

Escobedo remanded in custody for their participation in the alleged plot against Castro. (AFP, 29/4/03)

US-Cuba Relations

April 1: Washington has decided to put an end to the arbitrary solitary confinement of the 5 Cuban prisoners, Gerardo Hernández, René González, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero and Fernando González. Though placed in the general penal population, they are subjected to several discriminatory restrictions against them related to the use of the telephone, correspondence, consular access, and family visits. (Radio Havana Cuba, 1/4/03)

April 1: For the second time in less than two weeks, a Cuban aircraft has been hijacked to Key West where the alleged hijacker was again snared – this time in a rare moment of cooperation between the United States and Cuba. Adelmis Wilson Gonzalez was taken into FBI custody after a 12-hour negotiation in Havana during which he threatened to blow up the plane with what turned out to be fake grenades, Cuban and US officials said. In a surprising move at a time of tense relations, the top US diplomat went to the control tower at Jose Marti International Airport in Havana to warn the man that he would be criminally charged in the United States if he flew there. US Interests Section chief James Cason "explained to him by radio that hijacking was a serious offense and that if he came here as a hijacker they would investigate the crime and prosecute," said Robert Zimmerman, a State Department official. (Sun Sentinel, 2/4/03)

April 1: President Bush nominated a Miami attorney and lobbyist to head Radio and TV Martí, replacing Salvador Lew, whose tenure was dogged by internal strife and criticism. Bush will ask the board that oversees the Office of Cuba Broadcasting to approve Pedro Roig as director of the Voice of America program created to be an alternative to Cuban-run media. "His years of experience will serve him well in his new position," a White House spokesman said. (The Miami Herald, 2/4/03)

April 1: At the same time the Cuban man with grenades was forcing an airliner to the US, six other accused hijackers were appearing in front of a Miami federal judge on another case. The six -- Alexis Norneilla Morales, Eduardo Javier Mejia, Yainer Olivares Samon, Neudis Infantes Hernandez, Alvenis Arias Izquierdo, and Mikel Guerra Morales--, are being held at the Federal Detention Center in Miami. In a move that outraged the Cuban government and US prosecutors, all six were granted \$100,000 bonds and put under house arrest last week by US Magistrate Judge Hugh Morgan in Key West. But the six are still being held pending a to-be-scheduled hearing on the government's appeal of the bond ruling. (The Miami Herald, 1/4/03)

April 2: Hijackers armed with pistols and a knife took over a Cuban ferry and threatened to throw passengers overboard unless the boat sailed to the US, the Cuban government said. The FBI in Miami said the ferry was drifting in international waters about 60 miles off Key West, Fla. The ferry was hijacked overnight by a group of people armed with three pistols and at least one knife, a government statement said. (AP, 2/4/03)

April 3: A federal magistrate denied bond to the 33-year-old man whose fake grenades and alleged threat of violence unleashed a diplomatic crisis and forced a Cuban government-owned plane to land in Key West. US Magistrate Hugh Morgan also ordered the government to give the attorney for Adermis Wilson Gonzalez at least 24 hours to interview 19 of the plane's 31 passengers, who immigration officials said have asked to be returned to Cuba. (The Miami Herald, 4/4/03)

April 3: US State Department Spokesman Philip Reeker, made public a communiqué urging the international community to side with Washington in condemning the wave of repression unleashed by the Cuban government. (AFP, 4/4/03)

April 3: A small ferry boat hijacked in Havana Bay and forced to sail toward Florida had returned to Cuba after Cuban authorities chased it some 30 miles into international waters. The boat left international waters under Cuban government escort, a US Coast Guard official in Miami said. (AP, 3/4/03)

April 3: In letters to the Government of Cuba and to Secretary of State Colin Powell, the Washington Office on Latin America criticized the arrests of more than 70 dissidents in Cuba that have taken place in the last several weeks, and expressed concern that actions by US officials in Cuba were counter-productive on human rights while damaging US-Cuban relations. In the letter to Cuban authorities, WOLA Executive Director Bill Spencer wrote that WOLA "expresses our profound concern about the wave of arrests of independent journalists, dissidents and human rights activists that has taken place in Cuba over the past several weeks, and our disappointment at the announcement that the government is proceeding with criminal prosecutions of those arrested, rather than releasing them". (Washington Office on Latin America, 3/4/03)

April 4: Center for International Policy's Wayne Smith, Anya Landau and Sarah Stephens joined a group of Washington-based policy analysts who urge changes in US policy towards Cuba is sending a letter to the chief of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington "to express our profound concern at the arrest of more than 70 Cuban citizens in recent days, and to urge their immediate release." "In the course of our work, many of us have met many of the Cubans who have been arrested for advocating ideas that do not coincide with those of your government," the signers wrote. "We fail to understand how these ideas can constitute a threat to Cuba's security. To the contrary we can only believe that a strong competition of ideas will help Cubans to chart their future." (Center for International Policy, 9/4/03)

April 4: A Cuban couple, one of whom worked for Cuba's mission to the United Nations, sought asylum in the United States, sources at the United Nations said. The man and woman, who were not identified, walked into the US mission to the United Nations, across the street from UN headquarters. No reason was given for the defections. (Reuters, 4/4/03)

April 4: Seventeen Cubans aboard a passenger plane that was hijacked and forced to land in Florida returned to Cuba, while another 10 chose to stay in the United States. The plane was diverted to Key West International Airport during an ordeal spent largely at a Havana airport. A man carrying two fake grenades demanded that the passenger plane be refueled to reach the United States. He released 31 passengers and crew before surrendering in Florida. The 10 who decided to stay in the United States were released from a federal detention center, said Ana Santiago, spokeswoman for the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The wife and son of accused hijacker Adermis Wilson Gonzalez were among them. (AP, 5/4/03)

April 4: The United States has strongly denounced Cuba for opening treason and subversion trials against at least 78 political dissidents. State Department spokesman Philip Reeker said Cuba's crackdown on dissent is "the most despicable act of political repression in the Americas in a decade." (VOA, 4/4/03)

April 5: Fidel Castro said he was pleased the top American diplomat here tried to defuse a plane hijacking in recent days, but still accused US Interests Section chief James Cason of encouraging dissidents now on trial for state security crimes. "No one can deny that the chief of the Interests Section arrived with instructions to carry out provocations of all kinds against Cuba," Castro said on a government television show that began on April 4th and wrapped up early April 5th. (AP, 5/4/03)

April 7: The United States has condemned the convictions of several leading Cuban dissidents and journalists who have received lengthy prison sentences in Havana for treason and subversion. At a briefing in Washington, State Department spokesman Philip Reeker condemned what he called "show trials" of members of Cuban civil society. Mr. Reeker said the government of Fidel Castro is persecuting journalists for acting like journalists, economists for acting like

economists, and peaceful activists for seeking a solution to Cuba's growing political and economic crisis. (VOA, 7/4/03)

April 7: Gerardo Hernández' lawyer, Paul Mckenna, has lodged an appeal with the Atlanta Circuit Court asking for a retrial for his client. Hernández is one of the five Cubans imprisoned in the United States. Mckenna stated that he is very pleased at the filing of the report and confident of a favorable result in terms of the appeal. (Granma, 7/4/03)

April 7: The recent crackdown by Cuban officials on dissidents has helped create the potential for a large-scale exodus of the island nation's residents, similar to ones in 1980 and 1994, the top US diplomat based in Havana said. James Cason, chief of the US Interests Section in Havana said the actions taken by Cuba against activists is stoking renewed fear among the island's residents. The Castro regime accused Cason of fomenting unrest on the island by conspiring with dissidents to undermine Cuba's socialist system. "They say that when I go out to speak with anybody, it becomes subversive," Cason said at the University of Miami. "The continued disintegration of Cuban society generates instability throughout the region and creates the threat of a mass migration to the United States," Cason said. "This undermines our security and the long-term potential for the Cuban nation." "Cuban airplane hijackings are a product of frustration," Cason said, adding that there could be more such incidents to come. "To the extent that the Cuban government says the US is lax on hijackers and does not improve its airport security, you are going to see a lot of these violent attempts to get out." (NBC, 8/4/03)

April 8: An independent Cuban journalist imprisoned in Cuba is suing Fidel Castro and other Cuban leaders in US District Court, accusing them of torture and unfairly convicting him in one of many closed-door trials of dissidents on the communist island. The complaint filed on behalf of Omar Rodriguez Saludes accuses Cuban officials of violating the civil rights of detained opponents of the Cuban government. The lawsuit is partly based on the Alien Tort Claims Act, which lets foreign residents who break "the law of nations or a treaty of the United States," sue in US courts. It also cites the 1991 Torture Victims Protection Act, which lets US courts assess damages against individuals or governments accused of human rights abuses committed abroad. (Sun Sentinel, 8/4/03)

April 8: The House approved a resolution condemning the arrests of 79 Cuban dissidents and the harsh sentences handed down to dozens of them. The measure passed by a 414-0 vote, with just 10 abstentions. "The House of Representatives sent a clear message in support of the Cuban people's right to be free and in opposition to the brutal tyranny that oppresses Cuba," said Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Florida Republican and the measure's co-sponsor. He said that "today's vote honors the Cuban people as well as the American people." (AFP, 9/4/03)

April 9: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque defended the swift trials and lengthy sentences-ranging from six to 28 years-given to the dissidents. During the trials in Cuba, the dissidents were accused of being financed and advised by America's top diplomat in Havana, Interests Section Chief James Cason. "Our country has had to struggle against the obsession of the US government to fabricate an opposition in Cuba. We've seen more than 40 years of economic embargo, aggression and armed invasion (...) with the Bush administration, there has been a leap in hostility against Cuba," Perez Roque said. Perez Roque submitted payment lists at trials he said came from the US government. (CNSNews.Com, 11/4/03)

April 10: The US ambassador to the Dominican Republic, Hans Hertell, said the war in Iraq is an example for Cuba. "I think what is happening in Iraq is going to send a very positive signal, and it is a very good example for Cuba," he told local media. Hertell said the US-led war is the beginning of a campaign aimed at all countries around the world implementing a multiparty democratic system, including Cuba, the only one-party communist system in the Americas. (AFP, 10/4/03)

April 10: Fidel Castro disclosed publicly a brief message addressed to the U.S. Ambassador to

the Dominican Republic, Hans Hertell, in response to some statements made on Cuba by the diplomat. The brief hand-written note made public on Cuban television and signed by Castro reads as follows: "Congratulations on your statements of today regarding your government's liberation crusade, including Cuba. Thank you very much." (Listin Diario, 11/4/03)

April 10: Accusing Cuba of engaging in "despicable repression," Secretary of State Colin Powell urged Fidel Castro to free the scores of dissidents imprisoned recently and sentenced to long terms. "Nearly 80 representatives of a growing and truly independent civil society have been arrested, convicted and sentenced to lengthy prison terms in summary, secret trials," Powell said in a statement. (AP, 10/4/03)

April 10: A delegation of business representatives from North Carolina, led by Meg Scott Phipps, Agriculture Commissioner for that state, is visiting Cuba. (World Data Service, 10/4/03)

April 10: The American Society of Newspapers Editors has protested to Fidel Castro that Cuba's recent crackdown on independent journalists and dissidents is "a crushing setback" to the country's growing openness and tolerance of dissent.

April 11: During a daily briefing with the press, White House spokesman, Ari Flescher, said that the US Government strongly condemned recent violations of human rights in Cuba. "The President condemns in the strongest terms the Cuban government's actions in terms of the repression of these brave citizens. The President continues to view the Castro regime as an abuser of human rights". (White House Press Release, 11/4/03)

April 11: Cuba's crackdown on dissidents threatens to stymie attempts to ease travel and trade restrictions between the United States and its communist neighbor, US lawmakers, trade specialists and anti-Castro activists said. Kirby Jones, a Cuba trade consultant who sponsors meetings in Havana between US businessmen and Cuban officials, said that while he believes intensified tensions between the United States and Cuba is the product of economic restrictions, politicians may be wary to move forward immediately. "All I know from talking to people is this is not a good time to drop a bill on opening travel to Cuba." (Reuters, 11/4/03)

April 11: US officials have dismissed as "ludicrous" allegations from Cuba that 75 dissidents jailed in the communist country were "mercenaries" funded by the US government to undermine Fidel Castro's regime. "That movement is 100 percent indigenous to Cuba," Robert Zimmerman, deputy press advisor with the US State Department's Western Hemisphere Bureau, said. "It's a small movement - the sort of movement you would have in a country where you can get arrested for having a typewriter. "So for the Cuban foreign minister or anyone else to suggest that they were Cuban dissidents or mercenaries acting at the behest of the US in any way is absolutely ludicrous. This is simply a tyrannical regime trying to defend the way it's been doing business for 40-odd years," Zimmerman said. (CNS News.Com, 11/4/03)

April 11: USAID does support a number of non-governmental organizations in the US that promote democracy and help dissidents and other individuals in Cuba trying to "create a space for democracy and free-expression in that society," Alfonso Aguilar, assistant administrator at the US Agency for International Development's Latin American and Caribbean Projects, said. "They indeed might have supplied or provided assistance for dissidents and their activities, but we have not provided that assistance directly," he added. "That's an absolutely outrageous statement on his (Cuban Foreign Minister Perez Roque's) part," "We did not, although we're perfectly authorized to do so by law. It's absolutely legal for the US to provide assistance to dissidents and their families in Cuba," Aguilar said. "We have not done so, principally to avoid the kind of outrageous allegations and the untruths that have been uttered by the Cuban government." (CNSNewsWire, 11/4/03)

April 11: Fidel Castro remained defiant amid international criticism of Cuba's harsh measures to reign in dissent and halt hijackings, saying he would fight to the end to defend his nation against

the United States. "We are now immersed in a battle against provocations that are trying to move us toward conflict and military aggression by the United States," Castro told a group of Venezuelans in a speech broadcast on state television. "We have been defending ourselves for 44 years and have always been willing to fight until the end," Castro added in the speech, which marked the coup attempt against his political ally Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez a year ago. Castro made no direct reference to the execution of three hijackers by firing squad, nor the sentences of up to 28 years handed down for 75 government opponents charged with collaborating with US diplomats to undermine the socialist system. (AP, 12/4/03)

April 13: Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld suggested that Cuba would not likely become a US military target after the war with Iraq, despite a wave of repression that culminated with the summary trials and execution of three men who tried to hijack a ferry boat to Florida. During an interview on NBC News' Meet the Press, Rumsfeld responded to a question about Cuba: "We care about the people of Cuba, who are repressed in a dictatorship," Rumsfeld replied. "People are imprisoned and killed and denied rights to speak their mind, and that's sad. It's unfortunate. "But the American people, for the most part, are people who want to go about their business, and we recognize we can't try to make everyone in the world be like we are." (The Miami Herald, 13/4/03)

April 13: US Representative Bill Delahunt, Democrat of Massachusetts, criticized the trials and lengthy jail terms handed out to the dissidents, some of whom he had visited only a few weeks ago. But he said the restrictions on exchanges were a setback and ought to be reconsidered. "There is a parallel here between this administration and the Castro government," he said. "They are both going backward." (The New York Times, 13/4/03)

April 14: The invasion of Cuba by the United States had been contemplated since before the war against Iraq, said Cuban Ambassador to Guatemala, Ángel Abascal, who defended his government against the shower of criticism of the firing squad executions of three men who hijacked a ferry and attempted to divert it to Miami, Florida. (Proceso, 14/4/03)

April 15: An "Informative Note" broadcast by Cuban TV has accused the US government, aided and abetted by the UK and Spain, of "exerting colossal pressures on Latin American, African and other Third World countries" to vote against Cuba in the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). The note added that the EU "which has traditionally been incapable of sustaining a position independent of American pressure regarding Cuba, has joined in a servile manner, as it usually does, the gross maneuver of the United States to impose once again an immoral condemnation on Cuba". (BBC, 17/4/03)

April 15: Governor Tom Vilsack says he won't travel to Cuba after a recent crackdown on Cuban dissidents. Vilsack and other state officials had discussed finding ways to market Iowa products in Cuba. The governor says he changed his mind about traveling to Cuba after several dissidents who expressed opposition to Fidel Castro's regime were jailed and three men, not dissidents, were executed. (AP, 15/4/03)

April 15: Secretary of State Colin Powell, calling Cuba's rights situation horrible and getting worse, urged the UN Human Rights Commission to censure Cuba for suppressing dissent. Powell spoke in unusually harsh terms about Cuba when he was asked Tuesday at a news conference for an assessment of its rights record. "It has always had a horrible human rights record. And rather than improving as we go into the 21st century, it's getting worse," Powell said. He noted that scores of dissidents were arrested and given long prison terms recently "just for expressing a point of the view that is different from that of Fidel Castro". Powell said Cuba's behavior "should be an outrage to everyone. It should be an outrage to every leader in this hemisphere, every leader in this world." (AP, 15/4/03)

April 16: The Bush administration is considering a series of steps to punish the Cuban government for its recent crackdown on dissidents, officials said. Among the more drastic is the

possibility of cutting off cash payments to relatives in Cuba "a mainstay for millions of Cubans" or halting direct flights to the island, the officials said. President Bush is likely to make a public statement about the crackdown. At the same time, the president is expected to issue a stern warning to the Havana government that the United States will not tolerate another exodus of rafters, the officials said. (The New York Times, 16/4/03)

April 16: Members of Congress have renewed criticism of the Cuban government in the wake of a recent crackdown on dissidents in that country. Lawmakers on the House of Representatives International Relations committee gathered in an unusual hearing during a congressional recess to examine recent developments. Congressman Chris Smith, a New Jersey Republican, chaired the hearing, and set the tone when he condemned the recent arrests and imprisonment of dozens of dissidents in Cuba. The Cuban government's recent crackdown on dissidents is indicative of its failure, and the United States must continue to support Cuban citizens in their efforts toward democracy and a better life, says Lorne Craner, assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor. (VOA, Washington File, 16/4/03)

April 17: Cuba's crackdown on political dissidents only makes US efforts to promote democracy by working with opposition activists there "more urgent," the White House said. "Cuba's efforts to silence voices of opposition only make our policy goal of encouraging rapid, peaceful transition to democracy more relevant and more urgent," said spokeswoman Claire Buchan. "We'll continue to work with independent Cuban civil society and with the Cuban people, and are willing to consider steps to advance that policy goal in this climate," she told reporters. (AFP, 17/4/03)

April 17: The family of an American businessman killed by a Cuban firing squad in 1961 won a judgment for \$67 million in damages against the Cuban government. The family of Howard Anderson was awarded the damages in a lawsuit filed two years ago under a federal law that lets Americans sue foreign countries or individuals responsible for terrorism. The family had sought almost \$600 million. (AP, 18/4/03)

April 17: Two of the five members of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors are in Cuba. A third went last month, and a fourth visited the island in December. County insiders say some of the supervisors are interested in potential trade opportunities between Cuba and Los Angeles County, which has the largest US port complex. (Los Angeles Times, 17/4/03)

April 17: Cuba's crackdown on its opposition has bled away support in the US Congress for lifting a decades-old US embargo against the communist regime, according to Cuba experts. The moves, which had been gathering steam in the past few years, are now stalled indefinitely, analysts said. "The liberalization moves are not going to go anywhere," lamented Sally Grooms Cowal, a former ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago, and long-time Cuba watcher. If not for the crackdown by Castro "that trade would have continued to grow," said Cowal, who even predicted a "new Cold War" could break out between Havana and Washington. (AFP, 17/4/03)

April 17: The United States insisted it was pleased by the UN body's passage of a mildly worded resolution that omitted any mention of Havana's recent harsh clampdown on dissidents. The State Department, which has been pushing for the Geneva-based commission to specifically condemn the crackdown, said the resolution sent a "strong message" to Cuban dissidents and Fidel Castro's communist government. In a statement by the White House Deputy Press Secretary, the US Government expressed its satisfaction with the resolution approved in Geneva. "The United Nations Commission on Human Rights has once again voted to express its concern about the appalling human rights violations by the Cuban Government against its own people", the statement says. (AFP, Office of the Press Secretary, 17/4/03)

April 17: House Democratic Caucus Chairman Bob Menéndez criticized the UN Commission on Human Rights' Resolution on Cuba's human rights violations as a "slap on the wrist" and "the weakest resolution on human rights that I recall in 29 years of public service." In a statement from his Union City, NJ office, Menéndez added, "While human rights abuses in Cuba have intensified

with the brutal crackdown on 80 dissidents, with sentences ranging between 15 and 28 years, as well as the recent execution of the three Cuban hijackers who sought to escape the repressive regime, a strong condemnation by the United Nations was in order. Instead, the UN Resolution was a weak slap on the wrist of the Castro regime." (The White House Bulletin, 18/4/03)

April 18: Havana warned US officials that the punitive measures they are mulling, including ending direct charter flights between the United States and Cuba, would cause more problems for Washington than Havana. In a statement, the government of Fidel Castro said "the difficulties of prohibiting payments and flights to Cuba, which will affect an incalculable number of people in Cuba as well as in the United States, will fall on the government of that country (the United States)." "The punished will be many families (...) and, what is worse, many elderly people who depend on these remittances," said the statement, published on the front page of the Communist Party daily newspaper Granma. Cuba also warned the Bush administration that it would not be responsible if the US proposal to suspend family remittances and direct charter flights between the two countries sparks illegal mass migrations. (AFP, Reuters, Knight Ridder News, 18/4/03)

April 18: The new travel restriction, contained in a sweeping set of changes to US policy on Cuba, is not related to the Cuban government's recent crackdown on dissidents or the firing-squad execution of three men who had hijacked a passenger ferry in an attempt to escape. The new travel policy, which went into effect on March 24, also does not affect trips by Cuban Americans visiting relatives. In fact, the new rules broaden family visits and the amount of money that can be taken for relatives. The definition of a close relative now encompasses three generations instead of two, permitting a Cuban American to visit a second cousin or great-grandparent. And visitors can take, per trip, up to \$3,000 in remittances for 10 households, up from \$300. (The Miami Herald, 18/4/03)

April 18: Playboy Enterprises has paid the government \$27,500 to settle an allegation that it conducted business in Cuba in violation of a long-standing US embargo, according to documents released. The Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, which enforces the embargo and other economic sanctions the United States imposes, recently began disclosing penalties assessed or payments made as part of settlements involving alleged violations of economic sanctions. The documents provide few details. The Playboy case involved a "currency travel-related transaction," the documents said. (AP, 18/4/03)

April 19: Arkansas lawmakers still support normalizing relations between the United States and Cuba despite a crackdown by Cuban authorities that has led to the imprisonment of as many as 100 people. Arkansas' congressional delegation, which sees Cuba as a valuable market for rice and poultry, has been leading the call to ease sanctions. Five of the delegation's six members belong to the Cuba Working Group of their respective chambers. The two groups seek to end a trade embargo that has essentially limited U.S. exports to food and medical supplies and have endorsed legislation that would end a ban on travel to Cuba. "To me, the biggest issue is Castro's repressive government, and our policy toward him the last 40 years has not changed that," Rep. Vic Snyder said. "In the short term, he needs to hear very clearly that it's the desire of all Americans that this repression stop, but the evaluation of the current policy needs to go on," he said. (Arkansas Democrat Gazette, 19/4/03)

April 20: A wave of repression in Cuba has been so alarming that US officials have begun to wonder whether Cuba may unleash a new Mariel-style exodus -- a typical Cuban response in times of crisis. American officials are so worried that they have already quietly advised Cuba not to attempt any such action. But if a new exodus occurs, officials say they will activate a classified federal contingency plan designed to deal with migrant surges. Operation Distant Shore would trigger a dramatic escalation in the number of Coast Guard and other military vessels patrolling the Florida Straits -- a veritable floating wall designed to interdict as many migrants as possible at sea. "The United States remains committed to safe, legal and orderly migration from Cuba to the United States," National Security Council spokesman Sean McCormack said. (The Miami Herald,

20/4/03)

April 20: Cuba's Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto, said that US policies toward the island are "insidious and perverse." Speaking during a Concert for Peace, held in Pinar del Río, the minister of culture expressed confidence that the people of the world will close ranks to stop "the monster, its destructive war machine and the manipulation of information." Cuba's minister of culture said that the Concert for Peace in Pinar del Río is just a small part of the huge movement to protest the dangers of a "colonial and imperialist strategy" led by the United States. (Radio Havana Cuba, 21/4/03)

April 23: The Chairman of the Board of Directors of the US-based Cuba Policy Foundation and its Board members, along with its Executive Director, resigned to protest the recent waive of repression and executions in Cuba. The resigning Board members and the Executive Director issued a Statement of Reasons for the mass resignation: "We organized, funded and supported the Foundation because we hoped, and had reason to believe, that its energetic efforts to modify the ban on Cuba trade, travel and investment might succeed over time. We can only conclude, however, that in spite of its claims to the contrary, Cuba does not share our enthusiasm for a more open relationship. For this reason we have tendered our resignations". (Cuba Policy Foundation, 23/4/03)

April 23: A high-ranking Cuban envoy accused the United States of trying to foment anti-government opposition on the communist-ruled island by trying to trigger an immigration crisis. "Clearly, they are violating the immigration agreements and they are trying to create the conditions for a crisis that would justify, according to their views, other actions against Cuba," Dagoberto Rodríguez, head of the Cuban Interests section, told reporters. He said the United States was trying to "generate instability in Cuba using the natural desire of many people to migrate." (AFP, 23/4/03)

April 23: Cuba has accused the United States of violating the migratory accords signed between both countries in 1994 and 1995. The head of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, Dagoberto Rodríguez, said that the Bush administration has reduced the number of visas for legal departures and allows air and sea hijackings to take place in order to provoke a crisis in Cuba and thus justify future actions against the island. Speaking at a news conference in the US capital the Cuban diplomat told reporters that Washington's stated doctrine of launching pre-emptive strikes against countries it may perceive as 'dangerous' to its so-called national security constitutes a very real threat against Cuba and other nations. (Radio Habana Cuba, 24/4/03)

April 23: Answering Havana's complaints about a backlog in US immigrant visa requests, a senior US State Department official acknowledged the US mission is behind in processing but said it will fulfill its commitment of 20,000 such visas this fiscal year. Without providing any figures, the State Department official said US numbers for immigrant visas granted to Cubans during the current fiscal year that began October 1 differ "considerably" from those being cited by Cuban authorities. (Dow Jones Newswires, 23/4/03)

April 23: The Cuban Catholic Church urged the governments of Cuba and the United States "to embark once and for all on the path to harmony" for the sake of the citizens of both countries in an article printed in "Palabra Nueva," a magazine published by the Archdiocese of Havana. The article also added that citizens from both countries are trapped between "the anvil and the hammer" and harmony would improve bilateral relations. The article -- signed by the Church spokesman Orlando Márquez -- pointed out that the hostile statements from both sides as well as the laws affecting relations between their citizens "are ethically reprehensible." (Notimex, 23/4/03)

April 24: US Senator Tom Harkin asked Fidel Castro to free 75 dissidents sentenced to long prison terms in the nation's harshest crackdown in decades. Harkin, who has fought for years to ease US sanctions on Cuba, also urged Washington to adopt more moderate policies toward the island, promoting more openness between the two countries while emphasizing respect for

human rights. Harkin and Castro "had a frank, cordial conversation about human rights, trade and other issues that relate to both countries," the senator's Washington office said in a statement. The senator demanded the release of the dissidents, his office said. (AP, 24/4/03)

April 25: Fidel Castro gave his first full response to the extraordinary events in Cuba over the last five weeks. Castro said he was acting to prevent an attempt by US President George W Bush to provoke a war with Cuba. In a defiant three-and-a-half hour speech, everything was blamed on the United States. America, he said, was trying to destabilise Cuba, to provide an excuse for military intervention. The 75 dissidents that have recently been imprisoned he describes as "mercenaries in the pay of the enemy". Fidel Castro singled out America's top diplomat in Cuba as he blamed a supposed conspiracy between the US government and exiles in Miami for his recent dissident crackdown and the firing-squad executions of three hijackers. Castro accused US Interests Section Chief James Cason of fomenting subversive activities by opponents of his government. "The arrest of various dozens of mercenaries who betrayed their homeland for privileges and money from the United States, and the death penalty for common criminals (...) were the result of conspiracy stirred up by the government of (the United States) and the terrorist mafia," he said. Castro typically uses such terms for Cuban exiles who actively oppose his rule. (BBC, AP, 26/4/03)

April 25: No Iraqi prisoners will be sent to the Guantanamo Bay detention center that holds Taliban and al-Qaida prisoners from Afghanistan, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said. "Regardless of what they are characterized as," whether prisoner of war or something else, the Iraqis will not go to Guantanamo, he said. (AP, 25/4/03)

April 26: Some 10,000 Cubans gathered in Cuba's eastern city of Rio Cauto, 600 km east of Havana, to condemn the United States for fomenting opposition to the Cuban government. At the rally, several speakers expressed their support for Cuban leader Fidel Castro and branded the United States as the principal violator of human rights. They criticized Washington for using military force under the pretext of fighting international terrorism, whose first victims were Afghanistan and Iraq. The rally was part of the Open Tribunes campaign that takes place each Saturday in different parts in Cuba. (Xinhuanet. 26/4/03)

April 28: Top US officials warned Fidel Castro that Washington would work with renewed "vigor" to bring an end to his communist stranglehold on the island. The United States would use "new creativity and vigor to hasten the inevitable democratic transition on the island," said Roger Noriega, President Bush's pick to be assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs. (The Washington Times, 29/4/03)

April 28: US Secretary of State Colin L. Powell criticized Cuba as an "aberration in the Western Hemisphere" and said the administration is studying ways to respond to the Havana government's recent crackdown on its critics. "We're reviewing all of our policies and our approach toward Cuba in light of what I think is a deteriorating human rights situation," Mr. Powell told reporters after a meeting with the Jordanian foreign minister. (The New York Times, 29/4/03)

April 29: Maryland's agriculture secretary canceled a trade mission to Cuba because of concerns over Fidel Castro's recent crackdown on dissidents. The *Pride of Baltimore II*, a replica of a Baltimore clipper, was to bring the Maryland delegation to Havana. But the organization that runs the state-owned ship announced Tuesday that it also was dropping Cuba from its itinerary. "While we are committed to expanding the market for Maryland's agricultural products, Gov. (Robert) Ehrlich and I share the Bush administration's serious concerns about making this visit to Cuba at this time," said Agriculture Secretary Lewis R. Riley. (AP, 29/4/03)

April 30: A bipartisan group of eight senators presented a bill that would open up Cuba to US tourism and allow American citizens to spend dollars freely there. "If we allow more and free travel to Cuba, if we increase trade and dialogue, we take away Castro's ability to blame the hardships of the Cuban people on the United States," Senator Michael B. Enzi, a Wyoming

Republican, told his colleagues. Joining Enzi in co-sponsoring the bill were fellow Republicans Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island and Larry Craig of Idaho, and Democrats Max Baucus of Montana, Byron Dorgan of North Dakota, Mark Dayton of Minnesota, Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico and Tim Johnson of South Dakota. (The Miami Herald, 1/5/03)

April 30: The Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism of the US Department of State released its "2002 Patterns of Global Terrorism". In its section, Overview of State-Sponsored Terrorism, the document says that "despite significant pressure from the US Government, the seven designated state sponsors of terrorism—Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Syria, and Sudan—did not take all the necessary actions to disassociate themselves fully from their ties to terrorism in 2002". (Washington Files, 30/4/03)

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