

FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba

May 2002

Domestic Affairs

May 1: More than one million people gathered in Havana's Revolution Square to celebrate May Day. According to the Cuban Government, over six million Cubans celebrated May Day all along the country. (BBC News, 2/5/02)

May 2: In spite of the shortages in public transport, Cuba has passed new measures against vehicle owners who offer passengers' services, a niche of the minute private sector tolerated on the island. The Ministry of Transportation announced the entry into force of a new resolution that replaces the current one in force since 1997, and ratified the freeze on new licenses for public transport on motor vehicles. (Notimex, 2/5/02)

May 5: Vladimiro Roca, Cuba's best known political prisoner, was freed just two months short of completing his sentence. Roca was arrested in July 1997, two weeks after riding his bicycle to Cuba's Central Committee and delivering a pamphlet in which he criticized the island's one-party system and encouraged Cubans not to vote in that year's elections. He was sentenced to a five-year sentence for inciting sedition. Roca said he will continue his political activity in favor of "reconciliation and dialogue." "I do not plan to abandon my fight and I will continue my project, which will be adapted to the current situation (...) keeping in mind my aim of achieving reconciliation and to seek a solution to Cuba's problems, within Cuba, not outside," he stated. (AP, EFE, 5/5/02)

May 5: Leonardo Alfonso Hernandez languishes with common criminals in the Combinado del Este prison in eastern Havana, charged with breaching the security of a diplomatic compound. Alfonso Hernandez is one of "the Mexicans," the 21 young men who rammed a hijacked city bus into the gates of the Mexican Embassy on February 27 in the tense hours following rumors that the embassy was open to Cubans seeking exit visas. Alfonso's mother, Carmen Hernandez, said she doesn't know what to expect or whether her son can get a fair trial. (Sun Sentinel, 5/5/02)

May 8: A large fire hit part of the western forest of the Ciénaga de Zapata, one of the most important wetlands in the Caribbean. Its main impact will be on the local ecology, with adverse consequences for the flora and fauna in the area. However, the area of most prominence from an environmental point of view, that which has been designated as a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO and included in the Ramsar List as a Wetland of International Importance, was not affected. (Juventud Rebelde, 8/5/02)

May 8: The Third International Exhibition on Technologies and Products related to Water took place. This event provides alternatives for making better use of that resource. Sponsored by the Cuban National Institute for Hydro Resources (INRH), this event is gathering some 70 commercial firms from Canada, Cuba, Denmark, Spain, France, Italy, Panama, Russia and Venezuela. (AIN 8/5/02)

May 9: This year the Cuban government has confiscated 248 houses, demolished 189, imposed 1,900 fines and removed 33 public officials from office as part of a campaign against illegal activities in the housing sector, said an official source. The news was made public at a meeting of workers of the so called housing system in the City of Havana in which the issues of corruption in house exchanges, unauthorized home purchases and improvements were discussed. (Notimex, 9/5/02)

May 10: Human rights activists delivered an extraordinary challenge to the government of Fidel Castro in the form of petitions signed by 11,020 people seeking greater freedom. The petition drive, known as the Varela Project, calls for a referendum under the terms of the Cuban Constitution on whether there should be more freedom of expression, an amnesty for political prisoners and a chance for ordinary citizens to own small businesses. The signed petitions were delivered to the National Assembly, after supporters painstakingly verified each signature, in the most significant peaceful effort to bring reform to Cuba in four decades. "All of these Cubans, who with great courage and sacrifice have signed Project Varela, are the social vanguard for peaceful change in Cuba," said Osvaldo Payá, who led the drive. He said changes in the rights of Cubans could only be achieved peacefully. (The New York Times, 10/5/02)

May 10: Fidel Castro inaugurated an education television channel. Initially, it will air in Havana and Santiago de Cuba, and in the entire country a year later. (Granma, 10/5/02)

May 11: With the presence of Fidel Castro, more than 100,000 Cubans gathered in the Havana municipality of Regla to denounce the accusations made by the U.S. Under Secretary of State for Arms Control, John Bolton, that Cuba is producing biological weapons. (Radio Habana Cuba, 11/5/02)

May 12: Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, discredited the "Varela Project", an initiative submitted to Parliament by members of the internal dissidence aimed at promoting political and economic changes. "As to the existence of the project, I reiterate that I'm not very familiar with it; that it is not a made-in-Cuba product, but an imported one; it is a product financed, encouraged and directed by foreign interests", Roque pointed out making reference to the U.S. Interests Section in Havana. (Notimex, 12/5/02)

May 13: Experiences in medical attention in the Arab nations are included among the topics of the 7th Arab-American Medical Organization (AMA-A) Scientific Meeting to be held in October in Havana. Jose Luis Libela - from Cuba's Arab Union (UAC) Directive Board and one of the event's organizers – told reporters that Cuban experts and doctors who provided international service in the Middle East have been invited to this meeting. Among the topics to discuss are primary care, natural and traditional medicine, sports medicine, and minimal access surgery. AMA-A was founded around ten years ago and includes professionals from this sector of Arab origin who live in Cuba and throughout the continent. (Prensa Latina, 13/5/02)

May 16: In a highly unusual gesture the official newspaper of the Cuban Communist Party published the uncensored text of former President Jimmy Carter's speech in which he bluntly criticized Cuba's government for denying basic freedoms and endorsed a referendum to improve human rights. The newspaper, Granma, devoted five of its eight pages to Carter's speech and to his detailed responses to audience members who had denounced the project as a foreign creation. [For more on this, see section US-Cuba Relations.] (Granma, 16/5/02)

May 16: Cuban Cardinal Jaime Ortega Alamino, Archbishop of Havana, was sceptical as to any real political impact that former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's visit to Cuba might have. Monsignor Ortega referred to the expectations raised by John Paul II's visit in 1998 in certain political circles. "There has been no substantial change [since the Pope's visit]. By analogy I would think the same will happen in the case of Carter's visit", said Ortega. (El Nuevo Herald, 17/5/02)

May 20: Leading Cuban dissidents said that President Bush's continued support of trade sanctions and other hardline policies toward Cuba could hurt their efforts to force a democratic opening on the communist island. "Changes have to be made but changes have to be made on both sides," said Vladimiro Roca. "Dialogue, negotiation and reconciliation" will do more than continued U.S. hardline policies, Roca said, reacting to Bush's speech in Washington on Cuba

policy. "The prickly relationship between the two countries (...) can hurt our hopes for advancing a transition to democracy." (Bush's) speech was more of the same, the same prickly rhetoric from the time of the Cold War that has characterized the relationship between the countries for 40 years," Elizardo Sánchez said. Sanchez added that Bush's address "remained far behind" Jimmy Carter's. "Carter's speech reflected the point of view of the great silent majority in both countries who want better relations," he said. Both dissidents said they worried that Bush's promise to increase U.S. government funding for non-governmental groups working with the Cuban people could undermine their efforts in Cuba. "Any kind of financial help from any government for our work is unacceptable," Sanchez said. "That's especially true of a government such as Washington which has such very bad relations with Cuba." [For more on this, see section US-Cuba Relations.] (AP, 20/5/02)

May 29: Residents of the locality of Lenin in the City of Camagüey gathered to discuss the Varela Project. The meeting was watched over by police officers dressed in plain clothes. Rogelio Mendoza, a delegate of the People's Power indicated that "the electorate has the right to introduce legislation in the National Assembly (Parliament). This Project, called Varela, has that right too". The meeting was attended by circa 157 residents, of which 41 were willing to sign on the project. (El Nuevo Herald, 29/5/02)

May 30: Three children died and 42 fell ill after being being vaccinated against measles with apparently contaminated vaccines imported from India, the Cuban Health Ministry said. The ministry said in a brief statement that "a rare incident" had occurred after a group of schoolchildren were vaccinated against the childhood disease. "Some of the vials appear to have been contaminated," the ministry said of the vaccines purchased from India through the Pan American Health Organization. (AFP, 30/5/02)

Economy

May 3: The problem of unemployment in the City of Havana is under debate by local authorities. Unemployment rates increased during the past decade as a result of the crisis that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist block brought about in Cuba. Most of the jobs currently available are in the agricultural sector where there are 15,000 vacancies. (World Data Service, 3/5/02)

May 3: Greenpeace Mexico condemned Cuba's decision to reinitiate the harvesting and trading of the hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). Juan Carlos Cantú, coordinator of the biodiversity campaign of Greenpeace Mexico, affirmed that Cuba intends to sell 7.9 tons of the turtles' scales to Japan disregarding that this is an endangered species. (EFE, 3/5/02)

May 6: The 22nd International Tourism Convention began, The purpose of the Convention, which is taking place in Cuba, is to keep the tourist industry the most important sector of the battered Cuban economy. (World Data Service, 6/5/02)

May 6: Italy extended a credit of 17.5 million euros to Cuba (about US\$17 million) for the rehabilitation of the irrigation systems and food programs in Cuban provinces, said the Foreign Ministry in Rome. (Notimex, 6/5/02)

May 7: Investments planned for this year will be made despite economic tensions in the island, said José Luis Rodríguez, Cuban Minister of Economy. The Minister pointed out however that all new projects would only be started "when the necessary materials and funds are available so that they do not have to be interrupted". (World Data Service, 7/5/02)

May 12: Alí Rodríguez, the president of Petroleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA), the state-owned Venezuelan oil company, has stated that Venezuela will fulfill the agreement regarding the daily shipment of 53,000 barrels of crude to Cuba. (EMEEconomy.Com, 12/5/02)

May 12: Cuba's government has said its telecommunication companies, Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba, and Telefónica Antillana, would no longer provide loan guarantees for Cuba's \$380 million debt-restructuring agreement with Mexico's export-finance bank, Banco de Comercio Exterior. The move casts doubt over the future of Mexico's debt-restructuring agreement with Cuba. As part of that agreement, Cuba last year paid Mexico \$93 million in interest and capital on its debt. Mexico in March awarded Cuba another \$211 million credit line to be used over the next five years. The loan guarantees will now be assumed directly by the Cuban government, according to its official gazette. (The Wall Street Journal, 14/5/02)

May 13: The national bank of foreign trade (Bancomext) of Mexico confirmed in a communiqué that its contractual relations with the national bank of Cuba (BNC) are still in force, in reply to allegations that Havana had cancelled credit contracts. Bancomext pointed out that its relations with the island are not being disregarded, but rather the Cuban government has decided to substitute the guarantees". (Notimex, 13/5/02)

May 14: Russia may export crude oil to Cuba to settle Moscow's debts for the closure of the Russian spy base on the Caribbean island last year, the Vedomosti daily newspaper reported. The state-owned oil companies OAO Rosneft (R.RNF) and OAO Zarubezhneft are expected to receive additional crude oil export quotas of up to 12,000 barrels a day in the third quarter. The oil shipments will be valued at world market prices at the point of sale to Cuba. However, the Russian Finance Ministry will pay Rosneft and Zarubezhneft prices below world levels, Vedomosti said. (Dow Jones, 14/5/02)

May 17: Venezuelan oil supply to Cuba, a third of the island's consumption, has been halted since the failed coup d'état last month in the South American nation, according to the Cuban Minister of Basic Industry, Marcos Portal. "There has been no new shipment of crude oil from that country (Venezuela) in the last few weeks, since the coup d'état", he said. (Reuters, 17/5/02)

May 19: Visa Gold of Toronto is the first of five companies now working in partnership with Fidel Castro's government to find and excavate some of the hundreds of shipwrecks of historical and commercial value believed to dot the ocean floor around the island. Of the five, it is the only public company, in this case, traded on the Canadian stock exchange. "I estimated that the shipwrecks that occurred off Cuba over a period of 250 years had cargoes worth more than \$200 billion," said K. Sethu Raman, Visa Gold director and founder. "But there has never been a serious effort to look for them before." Visa Gold made the first discovery of one such shipwreck last year, the Palemon, a Spanish Brigantine that went down off the northern coast of Cuba in 1839. (AP, 19/5/02)

May 24: The euro began circulating at Varadero, Cuba's leading tourist resort. "Stores ... three hotels and restaurants inaugurated the use of a third exchange currency that will live in our country with the U.S. dollar and Cuban peso," the state-run daily, Juventud Rebelde, said in a report. The euro was expected to be in full circulation by June in Varadero, which has 16,000 rooms. "Introduction of the euro will make it easier and cheaper for Europeans, who are 55 percent of our visitors, to travel here. We hope by 2003 that the euro can be used as a money of exchange at all areas in Cuba frequented by tourists," Cuban Tourism Minister Ibrahim Ferradaz said. (CNN, 9/5/02)

May 24: State-owned oil company Petróleos de Venezuela (PDV) has stopped its contractual deliveries of crude and oil products to Cuba due to the Caribbean island's reported \$63 million in

outstanding debt. A Cuban delegation is in Caracas negotiating ways of settling the debt. (The Oil Daily, 28/5/02)

May 27: Cuba has ordered state-run companies and other government operations to cut power use by 10 percent, the official media said. Cuba had already slashed 2002 import plans and cut back state enterprise budgets and power consumption due to the world economic slowdown, fallout from the September 11 attacks and last year's Hurricane Michelle, the island's most damaging storm in half a century. (Reuters, 27/5/02)

May 30: The official newspaper Granma published a note in which the Cuban Government denies that Petróleos de Venezuela (PDV) has stopped its deliveries of crude and oil to Cuba due to the island's debt. (Granma, 30/5/02)

Exile Community

May 2: Cuban novelist and filmmaker Jesús Díaz, founder of Encuentro, an international magazine that brought together Cuban intellectuals from the island and in exile, died in his Madrid home, apparently in his sleep. Encuentro (Encounter), the magazine Díaz launched in 1996 on the crest of the Cuban literary boom, is considered by many to be the premier Cuban cultural magazine. He also established a popular online version of the magazine, Encuentro en la Red. His novels include *Las iniciales de la tierra* (The Earth's Initials), *Las palabras perdidas* (The Lost Words), *Siberiana* (Siberian), *La piel y la máscara* (The Skin and The Mask), and his most recent novel, *Las cuatro fugas de Manuel* (Manuel's Four Escapes). Diaz defected to Europe in 1991. (The Miami Herald, 3/5/02)

May 2: A delegation from the Cuban American National Foundation met with former President Jimmy Carter to offer advice on his upcoming visit to Havana. The group also committed itself to support the lifting of the U.S. trade embargo if Cuba agreed to several actions, including "free and fair elections" within 12 months. (The Miami Herald, 3/5/02)

May 10: The submission of more than eleven thousand signatures on a petition in support of the Varela Project is an important step forward in the cause of freedom in Cuba, noted Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) chairman Jorge Más Santos. "Today, eleven thousand Cuban citizens stood up and shouted 'no more,' to the Castro regime," noted Santos. [For more on this, see sections Domestic Affairs and US Cuba Relations.] (USNewswire, 10/5/02)

May 10: Two members of a Miami group known for sailing flotillas toward Cuba were acquitted of charges that they intentionally sailed into the communist nation's waters without U.S. permission. Senior U.S. District Judge Norman C. Roettger said he agreed with defense attorneys that the government had not provided evidence that Alberto Perez and Pablo Rodriguez had intentionally violated federal law. A 1996 regulation requires most private boaters to obtain U.S. Coast Guard permission before they depart the Florida Security Zone, which skirts most of the state, if they intend to enter territorial waters within 12 miles off Cuba. (The Miami Herald, AP, 11/5/02)

May 15: Cuban exile leader Ramon Saúl Sánchez was found innocent of breaking federal law when he piloted his boat into Cuban waters during a protest last July. Sanchez, the leader of the Democracy Movement, will face up to 10 years in prison and \$20,000 in fines if convicted. (Sun Sentinel, 15/5/02)

May 15: Cuban exiles in Florida had varied reactions to the speech given by ex-President Jimmy Carter in Havana, with a markedly difference of opinions. The harshest came from Cuban-American Republican Congressman, Lincoln Díaz Balart, who referred to it as a "defence of castricism", in a TV interview. Gladys Pérez, of the Cuban Committee for Democracy, a moderate exile organization, referred to the speech as "extremely positive" and a "historic event". The

Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF) was in general receptive to Carter's words for his explicit mentioning of the Varela Project and for his defence of democracy. (Nuevo Herald, 15/5/02)

May 16: A survey released of 800 Cuban-Americans in Miami's Dade County, revealed that nearly 50 percent want the United States to lift the blockade over trips to Cuba. Forty-six percent declared in favor, 47 percent against – a technical tie given the three percent margin of error. Cuban Research Group, an association of wealthy Cuban-Americans, disclosed the poll before US President George W. Bush's visit to Miami. The poll showed that 52 percent believe Washington's Cuba policy should not focus on sanctions. Most Cuban-American exiles support a peaceful and gradual transition to democracy in Cuba, including possible amnesty for Cuban government officials, according to the poll. A 56 percent majority said they would favor an amnesty for Castro government officials who cooperated with a transition to democracy. Only 29 percent opposed such amnesty. (The Miami Herald, Prensa Latina, 16/5/02)

May 20: Jose Basulto, founder of the search and rescue group Brothers to the Rescue, filed a lawsuit against Fidel Castro seeking damages for the shootdown of two planes in 1996 that killed four people. He is asking for at least \$40 million in damages, which he said would be used to fund democratic movements in Cuba. Basulto said he wanted President Bush to encourage the U.S. Attorney in South Florida to indict Fidel Castro for murder in the shootdown. The lawsuit, filed on Basulto's behalf by public interest group Judicial Watch, was timed to coincide with President George W. Bush's visit to Miami. (The Miami Herald, 20/5/02)

Foreign Affairs

May 1: During his May Day speech, Fidel Castro challenged Latin American nations to match Cuba's literacy and infant mortality rates and again lambasted those countries that for the first time backed a U.N. resolution censuring his government's human rights record. "What a bunch of trash are many of those who appear to be sovereign leaders!" he told the crowd. "To those who stupidly repeat the imperialist refrain that there is no democracy and no respect for human rights in Cuba, I say no one can question that our country is today the most independent on the planet, the most just and supportive of other peoples, and also by a long stretch, the most democratic." Castro also criticized the Mexican government, and referred in detail the last events between the two nations. (Sun Sentinel, 2/5/02)

May 1: A group of 20 rafters that had been captured near the coasts of Florida and sent to the U.S. Guantánamo base arrived in Nicaragua. The transfer was in part a result of efforts by Republican members of Congress Lincoln Díaz Balart and Ileana Ros Lehtinen. Nicaraguan decision to grant refuge to the Cuban rafters was not motivated by U.S. pressure but rather was simply an act of "friendship", said President Enrique Bolaños. (El Nuevo Diario, Deutsche Press, 3, 4/5/02)

May 2: After half a century's absence by the British Royal Navy from Cuba, the British ship, Oakleaf, docked in Havana Bay on a six-day visit. Christopher John Fell, commander of the ship, expressed satisfaction about the visit to the Caribbean country to meet the Cubans. (Xinhua, 3/5/02)

May 3: The Cuban foreign ministry blamed Uruguayan President Jorge Batlle for the political strife that led to the break down of diplomatic relations and reasserted its solidarity and friendship with the Uruguayan people, stated a declaration published in the local press. (AFP, 3/5/02)

May 5: A senior Cuban government official is being deported to Canada after his political defection to the United States was rejected last week by a court in Buffalo. Leonardo Haza Martinez, a former top executive for Cubana Airlines in Toronto, has been detained for a month at

Buffalo's Federal Detention Facility, his lawyer said. Martinez was stationed in Canada for three years. Buffalo lawyer Matthew Kolken said an appeal will be filed to win Martinez's release from jail and his asylum in the U.S. "This has to be the first time a Cuban national has been denied admission to the U.S.," Kolken told the press. (Toronto Sun, 5/5/02)

May 5: The governments of Ecuador and Cuba signed a cooperation agreement to conduct literacy projects over the next six years, said the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education. (EFE, 5/5/02)

May 5: Cuban singer Pablo Milanes was warmly received by thousands of Salvadoran fans at his concert in this Central American capital. Milanes, a mainstay of the Nueva Trova Cubana movement, a folk-ballad style of music that became popular in the 1970's, played songs from his latest CD, Pablo Querido (Dear Pablo). In an interview published in a Salvadoran daily, Milanes said "I prefer to say I am revolutionary and not political," adding that politics "have shown me there are too many special interests and compromises." However he said there are genuine and honest politicians but "what happens is they become compromised along their way. Politics becomes the art of state, government and party relations and things always get tainted where principles sometimes are left out." (EFE, 5/5/02)

May 7: Italy's Forza Italia (FI) rightist coalition said that Italian aid to Cuba should be linked to the state of human rights on the Caribbean island. FI legislative representative Maria Burani Procaccini was referring to a 17.5 million-euro loan to Cuba for projects like repairing irrigation systems and ensuring the safety of food supplies in the provinces of Havana and Granma. [For more on this, see section Economy.] (EFE, 7/5/02)

May 9: The Spanish president of the European Union (EU) was hopeful that after the release from prison of Cuban opposition leader Vladimiro Roca other prisoners of conscience in the island would be freed as well. In a declaration, the EU welcomed the decision of the Cuban authorities to release Roca. [For more on Vladimiro Roca, see section Domestic Affairs. (Notimex, 9/5/02)

May 9: Canada's Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien, stated that his country's relations with Cuba have been normal for a long time, which is one of the main differences between Canada's and US's policies. After a meeting with Spanish President José María Aznar in the Palacio de la Moncloa, Chrétien explained that every time he travels to the U.S. he's asked why Canada has such relations with Cuba and "on one occasion I told them that they too will have to recognize Cuba some day, and that they would be welcomed at the hotels administered by Canadian companies in the island". In that sense, he added, Washington has a political problem, not Canada; and even the U.S. Chamber of Commerce at some point asked President Clinton to modify the policy towards Cuba. (Prensa Latina, 9/5/02)

May 11: Cuba's ambassador to Mexico, Jorge Bolaños, was a victim of armed robbery in a residential neighborhood of the Mexican capital, newspapers reported. An unidentified armed man accosted Bolaños and his chauffeur when they arrived at the diplomat's home, stealing a watch and a pistol kept in the car, according to the press. Bolaños declined to comment about the incident to reporters. (EFE, 11/5/02)

May 12: Chilean citizen Mauricio Hernández, imprisoned in Brazil for the kidnapping of the Brazilian publicist Washington Olivetto, confessed that in the '80s he received military instruction in Cuba to fight the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, according to a published interview. Hernández, who took part in an attempt on Pinochet's life in 1986 and the assassination of Senator Jaime Guzmán five years later, did not confirm whether he was in Cuba again in 1996, after escaping from a Chilean prison where he was serving two life sentences. (EFE, 12/5/02)

May 14: An international journalists watchdog group asked former U.S. president Jimmy Carter to intercede with the Cuban government to release four jailed journalists. "Cuba is the only country in Latin America where there are journalists in jail," said Robert Menard, the secretary general of the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders in a letter to the former president. In the letter to Carter, Menard asks for the immediate release of journalists Bernardo Arévalo Padrón, Carlos Alberto Domínguez, Carlos Brisuela Yera and Léster Téllez Castro. The group also asked Carter to urge Cuban authorities to end the state monopoly on news gathering and distribution and to legalize independent press agencies in the Communist-ruled nation. [For more on Carter's visit to Cuba, see section US Cuba Relations.] (EFE, 14/5/02)

May 14: Fidel Castro requested a visa from the Spanish Embassy in Havana to attend the II European Union-Latin American and the Caribbean Summit to be held in Madrid. The Spanish government assumed that Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage's confirmation to attend meant that Castro would not go. (El País, 15/5/02)

May 15: The President of Mexico, Vicente Fox, stated that the events that clouded the relations between Mexico and Cuba "have been duly elucidated" and relations with the island are back to the way they've always been. "We do not foresee any change or crisis ahead, but the contrary", said Fox in a press conference at the European Parliament. (Notimex, 15/5/02)

May 15: Russia is in favor of the United States lifting its trade embargo on Cuba and of the countries re-establishing normal bilateral relations, the Russian foreign minister said. An official note released by Russia's Foreign Ministry underscores that former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's trip to Cuba will contribute to ironing out differences between Havana and Washington. "Russia shares the opinion expressed by Carter that it is time to normalize U.S.-Cuban relations and lift the U.S. embargo," the note added. [For more on this, see section Terrorism.] (EFE, 15/5/02)

May 17: The International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) in conjunction with its affiliate, the Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation expressed their support for the Varela Project, which calls for a referendum on political freedoms in Cuba. [For more on this, see section Domestic Affairs.] The FIDH said that it is "aware" of the "serious economic crisis" Cuba is experiencing "generated in part by the U.S. economic embargo whose firm condemnation should be reiterated." But it continued by saying that "all progress in the area of rights and individual liberties will only serve to reinforce democracy and allow the Cuban government to better confront this economic crisis." (EFE, 17/5/02)

May 17: The objective of the II European Union-Latin America Summit of creating a bi-regional strategic alliance might be an overstatement of what the meeting really accomplished, said Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage. The Cuban leader deemed useful this type of meeting, "however, a common strategy entails the willingness to challenge U.S. hegemonic positions, which is not the case of many of the statements", said Lage. (Prensa Latina, 17/5/02)

May 17: New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW), called for an end to the US embargo against Cuba, saying it hurts the Cuban people as a whole, alienates potential allies in efforts to bring about change in Cuba, and violates the rights of U.S. citizens by prohibiting them to travel to Cuba. "If the goal is to improve human rights conditions in Cuba, then the embargo should be ended," said Jose Miguel Vivanco, head of HRW's Americas Division. (Human Rights Watch, 17/5/02)

May 20: Amnesty International released a report reviewing the human rights situation in Cuba, where a number of fundamental rights continue to be denied against the backdrop of the United States' economic embargo. (Amnesty International, 20/5/02)

May 20: Cuba established diplomatic relations with East Timor and promised to contribute to the consolidation, broadening and deepening of friendly bilateral relations. (Granma International, 26/5/02)

May 20: The Spanish Presidency of the European Union welcomed the presentation before the Cuban National Assembly of the so-called "Varela Project". "The European Union hopes that it will be granted consideration by the National Assembly and that it will succeed in opening a debate in favour of the process of a peaceful transition towards a pluralist democracy and a reconciled Cuban society", indicated the official declaration. (El Nuevo Herald, 21/5/02)

May 22: The Mexican Ambassador to Cuba, Ricardo Pascoe, made known that in a mutual agreement both countries decided not to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Mexico-Cuba relations due to "the recent political tensions" between the two countries. (Proceso, 22/5/02)

May 23: Mexican immigration authorities said they are reviewing the legal status of eight Cuban "rafters" discovered off the coast of Mexico. Seven undocumented Cubans were detained near the coast of Cozumel, a Mexican island in the Caribbean, early this week, Mexico's National Immigration Institute (INM) announced. All the Cubans are being held at an immigration facility in Mexico City while their immigration status is examined, the INM said, adding that the Cuban Consulate had been notified. In a communique, the INM said Mexican law required the office to "notify (the immigrants) accredited consular representative in Mexico and, if they have no passport, to request that they be issued one or an identity/travel document." (EFE, 24/5/02)

May 23: A former Cuban intelligence officer accused of smuggling drugs, helicopters and submarines with the Medellín drug Cartel in Miami, is in detention in a South African jail waiting to be extradited to the United States where federal justice has been looking for him since 1997. Nelson Pablo Yester Garrido, 43 years old, was recognized by a viewer of the TV program "America's Most Wanted". (The Miami Herald, 23/5/02)

May 23: In a message sent to Cuban dissidents, Czech President Vaclav Havel congratulated them on the "Varela Project", said official sources in Prague. (AFP, 23/5/02)

May 23: Zambia's government said it would recruit medical doctors from Cuba to fill the shortfall of medical staff, mainly in rural parts of the country. A Zambian delegation will go to Cuba to recruit doctors to work in rural hospitals currently running without qualified personnel, health minister Brian Chituwo said. (AFP, 24/5/02)

May 25: The VII Panama-Cuba Interparliamentary Meeting took place in Panama City. A declaration signed by both delegations calls for increased interparliamentary relations. (Granma, 26/5/02)

Security

May 25: China is interested in taking over the Russian military base of "Lourdes" in Cuba which until recently had been operated by Russia, reports the Russian daily Izvestia in its front page. According to the newspaper, during his visit to Cuba former U.S. President Jimmy Carter attempted to persuade Fidel Castro not to let the Chinese get closer to U.S. coasts. (Notimex, 25/5/02)

May 25: According to the daily Russian newspaper Izvestia, talks between Russia and Cuba on the dismantling of the "Lourdes" spy base have reached a "dead-end". The newspaper reports that the reason for this is that Cuba is refusing to allow Russia to retrieve its eavesdropping equipment from the Lourdes spy base until Moscow pays up all past due rent on the facility. This

explains why several dozens of Russian soldiers and officers in charge of guarding the equipments as well as decodifiers still remain in the island. The deadline for the complete withdrawal from Cuba of the Russian military is kept in "secret". (Notimex, 25/5/02)

May 27: During an official visit to Cuba, Vietnam Vice-Minister of Defence, Phuong Quang Thanh, visited military bases, said official sources. The same sources also added that it is anticipated that the Vietnamese delegation will stop at the headquarters of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces in Havana. The high-ranking officer visited the island previously in 1996, accompanying the Minister Defence, Colonel General Phan Van Tra. (EFE, 27/5/02)

Terrorism

May 6: The Bush administration has accused Cuba of producing small quantities of germs that can be used in biological warfare (BW) and says Libya and Syria are also violating international treaties by making unconventional weapons. In a speech at the Heritage Foundation in Washington, John R. Bolton, the US Under Secretary of State for Arms Control, publicly alluded to conclusions that American intelligence agencies have reached in recent months after protracted internal debate. Cuba, Libya and Syria are pursuing or have the potential to pursue weapons of mass destruction in violation of treaty obligations, Bolton warned. "The United States believes that Cuba has at least a limited offensive biological warfare research and development effort. Cuba has provided dual-use biotechnology to other rogue states. We are concerned that such technology could support BW programs in those states. We call on Cuba to cease all BW-applicable cooperation with rogue states and to fully comply with all of its obligations under the Biological Weapons Convention", Bolton said. (CNN, The New York Times, 6/5/02)

May 6: During a daily press briefing, US Department of State spokesman, Richard Boucher, avoided to make comments on allegations made by Undersecretary of State for arms control on Cuba's production of small quantities of germs that can be used in biological warfare. Boucher was asked if he considered that Cuba was on the list of countries producing weapons of mass destruction, and his answer was: "The simple answer is what the President said about the axis of evil stands. He said it in his State of the Union. He listed the countries that are of greatest concern, and I'd leave it at that." (Office of International Information Programs, 6/5/02)

May 7: Responding to comments made by U.S. Undersecretary of State for Arms Control, John Bolton, the Libyan government denounced what it said are American charges that Cuba shared bioweapons technology with the north African country. Foreign Ministry spokesman Hassouna al-Shawish said that such "empty allegations" constitute terrorism. "This is no more than the usual ways that America uses to wage campaigns against people, by resorting to threat, terrorism and extortion." (JANA, 8/5/02)

May 8: The Cuba Project of the Center for International Policy, based in Washington, refuted Undersecretary of State for Arms Control's statements on Cuba saying that "John Bolton made a number of grossly misleading and unsubstantiated allegations concerning Cuba's attitudes toward terrorism and its supposed manufacture of biological weapons." (CIP, 8/5/02)

May 8: The Bush administration's accusation that Cuba has developed a limited offensive germ warfare capability has generated sharp reactions in the US Senator Bob Graham of Florida, who chairs the Senate Intelligence Committee, said he believes the charge may blunt congressional efforts to relax the U.S. embargo of Cuba. "I must say that I was sort of shocked," said retired Army General Barry McCaffrey, a former White House drug policy director who recently returned from Cuba, where he met with Fidel Castro. "I am happy to see that the administration has finally come forth with an acknowledgement of Cuba's capabilities," said Representative Bob Menendez, a Cuban-American Democrat from New Jersey. "Cuba's biotechnology industry is not just for medical reasons. (...) I think they could be making a variety of things, from anthrax to

smallpox to other agents." Meanwhile, William Delahunt, Democrat for Massachusetts, who is a leader of the Cuban Working Group, an informal congressional bloc opposed to the embargo, asked: "Where's the evidence?" "Accepting what they have to say as fact is high risk," Delahunt added. Arms control expert Milton Leitenberg, a senior research scholar at the University of Maryland, suggested that politics, more than concrete data, may have played a role in Bolton's accusation. (The Miami Herald, 8/5/02)

May 8: Referring to Bush administration's accusation that Cuba has developed a limited offensive germ warfare capability, former top scientist at the Cuban Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, José de la Fuente, who defected in 1999 and is now at Oklahoma State University, said scientists at the sophisticated facilities have done ground-breaking research in recombinant genetic engineering, leading to a hepatitis B vaccine and a clot-busting drug, streptokinase, used against strokes. "I heard no account of any effort for developing biological weapons in Cuba," said de la Fuente, who oversaw some 350 scientists as the center's research and development chief. More worrisome, de la Fuente said, is Cuba's transfer of recombinant technology to Iran, which has eagerly sought help from the Castro regime since the early 1990s. "Once that technology gets transferred, there's no control. The Iranians can use that technology for what they want," he said. A U.S. molecular biologist and close friend of de la Fuente, Harvey Bialy, who now teaches in Mexico, said he has spent long periods in Cuban genetic engineering labs and never "heard a whisper" about an offensive biological program. "What they [the Cubans] are doing is much worse. They sold to Iran all the things that Bolton said Cuba is doing," said Bialy, the former editor of the Nature Biotechnology academic journal. "What is going on in Iran is the most serious bioterrorist threat to the United States at this time." (The Miami Herald, 8/5/02)

May 9: Russian scientist Ken Alibek told the press that he couldn't understand why there wasn't an outcry about Cuba's biological-weapons threat. Alibek said that in the 1980s, he taught Cuban scientists much of what they know about weapons of mass destruction. "This work was to be used for developing biological weapons or biological agents," he told the press in Washington. "As a result, we helped Fidel Castro create biological weapons. It was such a stupid decision." In his book, Biohazard, Alibek says that against the advice of many Soviet scientists, then-Premier Leonid Brezhnev gave the technology to Cuba, after meeting with an enthusiastic Castro in 1981. "Within a few years," Alibek writes, "Cuba had one of the most sophisticated genetic engineering labs in the world, capable of the kind of advanced weapons research we were doing on our own." (The Miami Herald, 9/5/02)

May 10: Fidel Castro denied U.S. charges that his country was trying to develop biological weapons and challenged American authorities to offer evidence. Speaking live on state television, Castro called on U.S. officials to "present even the most minimum proof", something he said is impossible because such evidence "does not and cannot exist." (AP, 10/5/02)

May 12: The President of Cuba's National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcón, said that Cuba would accept U.N. arms inspectors to visit its biotechnology programs, only if the United States and other countries agree to receive similar missions. In reply to questions from the ABC news agency Alarcón said that "when the United States accept to be inspected and when all countries be inspected, why wouldn't Cuba". (Notimex, 12/5/02)

May 12: Cuban scientists rejected accusations made by a high-level US government official about the alleged existence of a biological weapons production industry. "The basis of the teaching of this people says that war is not fought against the people; there has never been a military action that sacrificed civilians in the struggle of the Cuban people," said Dr Agustin Lage, director of the Molecular Immunology Centre. Lage appeared at the International Press Centre in Havana with other scientists to refute allegations to this effect made by the US undersecretary of state for arms control John Bolton. (BBC, 12/5/02)

May 13: US National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice told public television's "The News Hour With Jim Lehrer" that "there is plenty of reason to be very concerned about what the Cubans are doing in this area", referring to biotechnology. "Now how it is dealt with will depend in part on what Fidel Castro is willing to do," she said, alluding to likely inspections. (Washington Times, 14/5/02)

May 13: While visiting the Center of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology on the outskirts of Havana, Former President Jimmy Carter said that Bush administration officials who briefed him before his trip to Cuba never mentioned any concerns about Cuban involvement in developing biological weapons. Carter, speaking at a Cuban biological research center before an audience that included Fidel Castro, said: "There were absolutely no such allegations made or questions raised. I asked them myself on more than one occasion if there was any evidence that Cuba has been involved in sharing any information with any country on earth that could be used for terrorist purposes. And the answer from our experts on intelligence was no." Carter said he did not believe that Cuba was collaborating with Libya in biological research, adding that its scientific relations with Iran conform to international standards. (The New York Times, 13/5/02)

May 13: Lawyers for Posada Carriles, accused of masterminding a plot to kill Fidel Castro, said that their client's case has remained "in limbo" because of delays in Panama's judicial system. Panamanian authorities arrested Luis Posada Carriles and three other Cuban exiles last year on charges of plotting to assassinate Castro during an Ibero-American summit in Panama City. Panama later denied a Cuban request for Posada Carriles' extradition, saying the terror suspect must first serve a Panamanian prison sentence for possession of explosives, falsification of documents and conspiracy to commit a crime. (AP, 13/5/02)

May 13: Secretary of State Colin Powell appeared to back off an allegation by a senior U.S. official a week ago that Cuba was working to develop biological weapons. Powell, speaking to reporters on his way to a NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Iceland, said the United States was concerned the communist-run state "has the capacity and capability to conduct such research." Powell said: "As Undersecretary Bolton said recently, we do believe Cuba has a biological offensive research capability. We didn't say it actually had some weapons but it has the capacity and capability to conduct such research," he said. "Undersecretary Bolton's speech ... was not breaking new ground," he said. (Reuters, 13/5/02)

May 14: Cuba thanked U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell for his "effort to clarify" charges made a week ago by another U.S. official that Havana is developing biological warfare weapons. "We thank the effort of Mr. Powell to clarify what happened," said an official statement issued by the Cuban Foreign Ministry. (Deutsche Press Agentur, 14/5/02)

May 15: Russia hopes that the recent steps of the Cuban government, that allowed Jimmy Carter and his attendants to visit biological utilities in Cuba, will remove all concerns of US officials about the possible development of biological weapons in Cuba, the Russian Foreign Ministry expressed in a statement. (AP, 15/5/02)

May 16: The United States said Havana should open its laboratories to the international community. US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Havana could show it was complying with the Biological Weapons Convention by "opening laboratories up, allowing normal exchanges with other scientists and people in the field." However, U.S. policy opposes the introduction of spot inspections, which it says are easily defeated by any government bent on developing illicit weapons. Boucher said inspections in Cuba would be ineffective. "The dual-use nature of the technology means that a particular inspection (at) a particular moment of a particular place cannot necessarily prove or demonstrate that people are in compliance," he told a news briefing. (Reuters, 16/5/02)

May 21: The regime of Fidel Castro continues to harbor international fugitives suspected of terrorist activity and other violent crimes, while refusing to cooperate with countries seeking to extradite those fugitives, according to the State Department's annual "Report on Global Terrorism." The 2001 edition of the report charges that Castro's regime has allowed members of various terrorist organizations "to reside in Cuba as privileged guests" and "provided some degree of safe haven and support" to these criminals. In addition, the report says that during the past year, "numerous U.S. fugitives continued to live on the island, including Joanne Chesimard, wanted in the United States for the murder in 1973 of a New Jersey police officer and living as a guest of the Castro regime since 1979." The report omitted any reference to its reported biological warfare research. (Reuters, The Miami Herald, 21/5/02)

May 21: Ambassador Francis X. Taylor, US Department of State Coordinator for Counterterrorism, answering questions on Cuba after presenting the 2001 Report on Global Terrorism, stated that Fidel Castro hasn't renounced at all terrorism as "a legitimate political tool". Taylor also said that Cuba has been involved "in some way" in some biological research and has "shipped some dual-use technology to other countries." (US Department of State, 21/5/02)

May 21: Iran's ambassador to Havana denied U.S. government allegations that Cuba transfers technology to countries such as his for germ warfare, insisting that Cuba's scientific agreements with Teheran are purely for lifesaving technology such as hepatitis vaccines. "I fully reject the allegations made by State Undersecretary John Bolton," Ambassador Seyed D. Salehi told a news conference. (The Miami Herald, 21/5/02)

May 22: Cuba declared that it will continue being a friend and ally of the United States people, and of any other people around the world, in the fight against terrorism. In an editorial entitled Battle of Ideas, published in the official daily, Granma, the Cuban government criticized the inclusion of the Caribbean country in the annual list of countries supporting terrorism, issued by the U.S. (Xinhua, 22/5/02)

May 24: The commander of U.S. military forces for Latin America and the Caribbean said that he has seen no evidence that Cuba is producing biological weapons from its biomedical research program. "The Cubans do have a very active R&D [research-and-development] program," said Army Maj. Gen. Gary Speer. "They pride themselves on their biomedical advances and it kind of fits into the purpose for which that is used." But he said he first learned from news reports about an allegation by a senior U.S. diplomat responsible for arms proliferation and terror issues that linked the research-and-development project to biological weapons. Speer also said he didn't know why John R. Bolton, Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, chose to raise the issue in a speech at the Heritage Foundation on May 6 -- days before former President Jimmy Carter's five-day trip to Havana. The general said he was "surprised he raised the subject." (The Miami Herald, 24/5/02)

May 25: In a speech focussed on US government allegations that Cuba transfers technology to countries for germ warfare, Fidel Castro told a rally of several hundred thousand people that Americans should never fear an attack by Cuba and can always count on this communist country's support in the war against terrorism. (AP, 25/5/02)

May 31: The UN Conference on Disarmament heard Cuba accuse the United States of lying about alleged attempts by Cuba to prepare biological weapons and to provide technology of dual use to "rogue" states. Ambassador Jorge Iván Mora Godoy of Cuba said the Government of the United States had lied, once again, when accusing Cuba of carrying out a limited offensive work of investigation and development of biological War and of having providing technology of dual use to other states that the United States described as "rogue". (UN Information Service, 31/5/02)

US-Cuba Relations

May 1: Although Cuban-Americans account for fewer than a third of Florida's Hispanics, they will likely continue their virtual monopoly on Hispanic political power in Congress and the state legislature under new district maps drawn this year. All three of the congressional seats, all three of the state Senate seats and all of the 11 state House seats designed as majority-Hispanic districts will most likely go to Cubans who, as Republicans, controlled the map-making process in both legislative chambers. (Palm Beach Post, 1/5/02)

May 1: Two members of the US Congress, angry that no charges have been filed against Cuban Interests Section officials in Washington who attacked anti-Castro demonstrators two years ago, have questioned whether the Clinton administration blocked any prosecution in the case. Representatives Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, both Florida Republicans, asked Attorney General John Ashcroft in a letter whether President Clinton's efforts to appease the communist regime of Fidel Castro had resulted in the case being dropped. (The Washington Times, 1/5/02)

May 3: Cuban American musician Sebrina Maria Alfonso was invited to conduct the Cuban symphony orchestra by its artistic director, Leo Brouwer, and participate in a cultural exchange that includes offering master music classes to the Cuban musicians. "One of the most important things about this exchange is people are overlooking what our governments are fighting over and simply working together to communicate art," said Alfonso. "This is a human-to-human and cultural contact." (AP, 3/5/02)

May 3: Cuban People's Power National Assembly (Parliament) President Ricardo Alarcon denounced that the existence of over 200 classified documents in the case of his five fellow countrymen imprisoned in the US under espionage charges is delaying the appeals process in an Atlanta Court. During a lecture given at Havana University, Alarcon explained that the current situation of the prisoners who were sentenced by a Miami court is "discriminatory and shameful." They are jailed in different US states and are being treated as common prisoners. "They are not common prisoners, but political prisoners," stated the parliamentary leader when referring to the status of the five Cubans sentenced in the US for threatening that country's national security. (Prensa Latina, 4/5/02)

May 6: Nine hundred dozen organic eggs, produced in New Hampshire will be among the first eggs to be supplied to Cuba by Radlo Foods, LLC, according David Radlo, President of the Watertown, MA, based food company. Earlier this month Radlo Foods announced that it will be the first American egg producer and exporter to do business with Cuba in over 40 years. Now, the family-owned company will be including organic eggs as a part of the 10 million egg order it will fulfill during 2002. (PRNewswire, 6/5/02)

May 6: The U.S. State Department reversed its decision of granting a U.S. visa to the wife and younger daughter of René González, one of the five jailed Cubans accused of espionage in the United States, to travel to the US. (Trabajadores, 6/5/02)

May 6: A federal court charged nine Cubans with entering the U.S. territory illegally with false Spanish passports. The four women and five men were taken to court to be advised of their rights. If convicted of carrying false passports, they could face up to 10 years in prison, Assistant U.S. Attorney Hugh Mabe said. If they are convicted, however, they are still eligible for legal residency in the United States after serving their sentences, said Ivan Ortiz, an Immigration and Naturalization Service spokesman. (The Orlando Sentinel, 7/5/02)

May 7: The Cuban government denied a high-ranking U.S. State Department official's reported assertion that Cuban planes landed in Venezuela during the coup that briefly deposed President Hugo Chavez last month. In an official statement, the Foreign Ministry challenged Otto Reich, assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, to publicly prove his assertion,

reported by some news organizations, that four Cuban planes had traveled to Caracas on April 12. (AP, 7/5/02)

May 8: Sixteen members of the House and Senate have joined together in what is called the Congressional Cuban Political Prisoners Initiative to call attention to political prisoners in Cuba. "Each of us, as members of Congress, have symbolically adopted a Cuban person who has been jailed for their love of freedom, and for their love of democracy," said Republican Congressman Chris Smith, a member of the House International Relations Committee. "Each month we will feature a new prisoner, each month we will highlight a new name and a new life story, to strike down that big lie that there are no political prisoners in Cuba." Congressman Smith said anyone in Cuba demanding respect and rights of freedom of expression and association are "brutalized, tortured and imprisoned." (Voice of America, 8/5/02)

May 8: Police identified a Cuban woman whose body was found floating off Key Largo on April 29 and ruled her death an accidental drowning. Iralys Arzuaga was identified by clothing, jewelry and recent dental work, said Miami-Dade police spokesman Detective Juan DelCastillo. Arzuaga left Cuba on April 25 in a boat with an undetermined number of other people, DelCastillo said. "It appears that none of them made it to the United States alive," he said. (AP, 8/5/02)

May 11: The United States has said the initiative known as Varela Project, sponsored by internal Cuban dissidents, calling for a referendum on changes in the island constitutes "the first day of a peaceful transition to democracy" in Cuba. The Head of the U.S. Interests Section in Cuba, Vicky Huddleston, denied allegations that the initiative was sponsored by the government of President George W. Bush. [For more on this, see section Domestic Affairs.] (Notimex, 11/5/02)

May 12: Former US President Jimmy Carter arrived in Havana for a six-day visit to the island. Fidel Castro went to Havana's international airport to meet his U.S. guest and his entourage. During his speech at the airport, Castro said that Carter, who oversaw the re-establishment of diplomatic exchanges between the two countries and made it possible, for a short time, for Americans to travel to Cuba freely during his presidency in 1977-1981, had proved his sincerity in the past. Speaking in Spanish at the airport, Carter said there were "differences on some of these issues" with Cuban leaders, "but we welcome the opportunity to try to identify some points in common and some areas of cooperation." (Xinhua, 12/5/02)

May 12: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and Former US President Jimmy Carter met for talks that focused on the present status of bilateral relations. Perez told a press conference that Cuba would not be hostile to the United States despite a 40-year U.S. trade embargo imposed on the Caribbean island. He hoped the two countries could realize the normalization of bilateral relations on the basis of mutual respect and tolerance. (Xinhua, 12/5/02)

May 12: Fidel Castro and Former US President Jimmy Carter shook hands for a second time, during the official welcome the Cuban Head of State offered him at Havana's Palace of the Revolution. At the conclusion of the official talks, attended by the US delegation and some Cuban top officials, including Vice-President Carlos Lage, Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon, and Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, the politicians dined together at the Palace of the Revolution. (Prensa Latina, 12/5/02)

May 13: Former US President Jimmy Carter attended a breakfast meeting with two opposition leaders in Havana. Carter asked two leading dissidents, Elizardo Sánchez and Oswaldo Paya, to brief him on the finer points of the Varela Project, a petition drive signed by more than 11,000 Cubans who favor wide-ranging government reforms. [For more on the Varela Project, see section Domestic Affairs.] (Sun Sentinel, 14/5/02)

May 13: Fidel Castro and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter spoke to more than 8,000 young people from 24 countries who are studying at the Latin American Medical School. Carter went on to comment on the Carter Center's health care efforts in over 66 nations, observing that the visit to the school of medicine is very special for the Carter Center, and stressing that this was a joining together of hearts to alleviate human pain. Carter thanked the Cubans for having taken that path. (Prensa Latina, 14/5/02)

May 14: Visiting a school for social workers in Havana, former US president Jimmy Carter said: "In the United States, we believe that it is very important to have absolute freedom of expression and freedom of assembly," Carter told the students, citing two liberties that nearly all human rights groups find lacking in Cuba. (AP, 14/5/02)

May 14: The director of Cuba's bulk food importing agency Alimport, Pedro Alvarez, encouraged US farm producers to press for normal access to the Cuban market and said he would seek a new visa to visit the United States. "We should be doing over 50 percent of our imports with the United States due to proximity," Alvarez said. (AFP, 15/5/02)

May 14: US President George W. Bush vowed to support any Cubans who "demand freedom" and denied that former president Jimmy Carter's landmark visit to Cuba had complicated US policy towards Havana. "My message to the Cuban people is: 'Demand freedom and you've got a President who stands with you,'" said Bush. "I appreciate President Carter's focus on human rights. I think that's important in Cuba, in a place where there is no human rights," Bush said. Referring to US policy toward Cuba, Bush added: "And that is that Fidel Castro is a dictator and he is repressive. And he ought to have free elections. And he ought to have a free press. And he ought to free his prisoners. And he ought to encourage free enterprise." (AFP, 14/5/02)

May 14: Former US president Jimmy Carter, visited a Cuban agricultural cooperative asking questions about profits and division of labor. Carter arrived at the farm, which has hosted four other current or former heads of state, after an early morning tour of an AIDS treatment center. During a short presentation by the cooperative's president, Alfredo Acosta, Carter heard about the farm's production of a variety of crops, including fruits, vegetables, and flowers. (The Sun Sentinel, 15/5/02)

May 14: Speaking in Spanish in a live, uncensored broadcast former U.S. president Jimmy Carter, urged the U.S. administration to lift its ban against Cuba and take the first steps toward normalizing relations between the two countries. Now is the time to improve bilateral relations and to change the style of thinking and talking on both sides, Carter said in his speech, "U.S. and Cuba: Toward the 21st Century" at Havana University. The speech by the former president was unprecedented, and amounted to a carefully balanced appeal for America to drop its embargo, and for Cuba to join the democracies of the Western Hemisphere. (Xinhua, AP, EFE, 14/5/02)

May 14: Major trade legislation faced an uncertain future after the US Senate brushed aside a strong appeal from the White House and refused to give the president the full authority he wants to negotiate international trade agreements. The Senate voted to retain its right to carve out of future trade deals any provisions that would weaken U.S. laws that protect American workers and industries from unfair foreign competition. Before it goes to House-Senate negotiation, the Senate bill faces numerous other sensitive amendments, including measures to extend benefits to retired steelworkers and ease restrictions on commerce with Cuba. The Senate is expected to spend another week on the measure. (AP, 15/5/02)

May 14: USA-Cuba Sports Experiences and the World Amateur Athletic Congress have entered into an agreement designating USA-Cuba as the exclusive representative for the WAAC in the U.S. The WAAC, with representatives in Venezuela, Mexico, Cuba, Panama, Italy, Costa Rica, Japan, and now the U.S., was created to foster sportsmanship and good will through amateur

athletics. USA-Cuba will represent this international organization in developing athletic competitions whereby U.S. teams can both host and travel to international events. (BW Sports Wire, 14/5/02)

May 15: Forty members of Congress called for unrestricted U.S. travel and increased trade with Cuba as the first steps in an overhaul of a decades-old foreign policy that they feel has failed to topple Fidel Castro or deliver democracy to the island. Reflecting growing congressional dissatisfaction with the hard-line U.S. approach toward Cuba, the appeal from 20 Republicans and 20 Democrats came one day after former president Jimmy Carter delivered a speech in Havana urging closer relations between Cuba and the United States, and the lifting of the travel and the economic embargo. "For over forty years, our policy toward Cuba has yielded no results," said Representative Jeff Flake, Republican-Arizona, a House International Relations Committee member. "Castro hasn't held free and fair elections, he hasn't improved human rights, and he hasn't stopped preaching his hate for democracy and the U.S. "I think it's safe to say that our current policy has failed," Flake said. "It's time to try something new." (The Washington Post, AP, 15, 16/5/02)

May 15: President Bush's spokesman said that U.S. trade with Cuba would "prop up an oppressive regime," turning aside calls from former President Carter and some lawmakers who want economic restrictions lifted. "The president believes that the trade embargo is a vital part of American foreign policy and human rights policy toward Cuba," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer told reporters. "Trade with Cuba does not benefit the people of Cuba. It is used to prop up a repressive regime." (Reuters, AP, 15/5/02)

May 15: Former US president Jimmy Carter visited La Castellana Psychopedagogical Medical Center and the Solidarity with Panama School, two centers for children with different disabilities. (Prensa Latina, 15/5/02)

May 15: Jimmy Carter took to the pulpit of a little Havana church to speak of the power of God. Carter's talk during an enthusiastic service at the Ebenezer Baptist Church followed an hour-long meeting with more than 40 Protestant clergymen from 22 denominations. (AP, 15/5/02)

May 15: Showing his interest in housing problems and the Cuban standard of living, former US President Jimmy Carter toured the community of Las Guásimas, in western Havana. (Prensa Latina, 15/5/02)

May 16: Former US President Jimmy Carter met in Havana with senior representatives of the Catholic Church in Cuba. According to sources from the Conference of Catholic Bishops, the talks of approximately one hour centred around the life and work of the Catholic Church in Cuba as well as other issues introduced by Carter. (AFP, 17/5/02)

May 16: Former President Jimmy Carter met with more than 20 dissidents and urged them to keep up the fight for democratic change and human rights. Although Carter did not speak to the media after his three-hour session with the Cuban opposition leaders, the meeting gave a fresh round of publicity to the Varela Project. [For more on this, see section Domestic Affairs.] (The Atlanta Journal, 16/5/02)

May 16: Two Cuban cancer researchers were rejected for U.S. visas needed to attend a scientific conference in Florida, Cuba said. In a statement read over government television, the Foreign Ministry called the U.S. denial "an attack on science and on Cuban scientists." There was no immediate U.S. confirmation. In Washington, a State Department spokesperson declined to comment on the issue. (AP, 17/5/02)

May 17: Jimmy Carter ended a historic visit to Cuba sharply at odds with the Bush administration over how to deal with Fidel Castro. The former president said limits on tourism and trade often hurt Americans more than Cubans. "I think an American private citizen or an American company should have the right to visit any place on earth and the right to trade with any other purchaser or supplier on earth," Carter told a news conference immediately before leaving Cuba. "I see the embargo and travel restraints as an imposition on the human rights of American citizens," he added. Carter said at the end of his six-day visit that the trip was unlikely to bring about changes in the one-party Communist state, but at least it gave Cuban dissidents a voice for the first time. He also added that dissidents he met with "expressed deep concerns" that any direct help from the United States would help Mr. Castro discredit their efforts. (AP, CNN, Japan Today, The New York Times, 17/5/02)

May 17: A container ship docked in Havana harbor, chartered out of Jacksonville, Florida, with tons of frozen Michigan turkeys sold to Cuba by a trading company in Georgia, along with hundreds of thousands of eggs from the American Northeast. The shipment is the latest in a series of American food imports to Cuba. (Los Angeles Times, 17/5/02)

May 17: The National Minority Business Council, Inc. (NMBC), said it firmly supports former President Carter's visit to Cuba as a gesture toward normalizing trade relations with the island, and called on the Bush administration and Congress to begin hearings on a five-year phase out of the decades-old embargo. (PRNewswire, 17/5/02)

May 17: Tulane University canceled a conference on Cuba's environment after the State Department denied travel visas to eight participants. Cuban researchers and members of Cuba's Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment and its Ministry of Tourism were expected to be among the participants in the conference. The State Department would not comment on the Cubans' case except to cite a 1985 administrative ban on visits by Cuban government or Communist Party officials. The ban can be waived on a case-by-case basis. (AP, 17/5/02)

May 18: Fidel Castro affirmed that new U.S. plots against Cuba are under way. In a message addressed to Cuba solidarity groups in Spain and read to a massive rally by the Vice-President of the Cuban Council of State, Carlos Lage, Castro said that "the most recent attacks of the U.S. government against the island, like the slanderous accusations that Cuba produces and transfers biological weapons, or the unrelenting efforts to condemn Cuba every year at the UN Human Rights Commission, seem to aim at paving the way for future and more evil and sinister plans against Cuba." (Granma, 19/5/02)

May 19: As a way of providing "political cover from the world community to some very courageous people," U.S. Senator Bill Nelson plans to introduce a Senate resolution supporting the Varela Project, a petition drive by Cuban dissidents seeking democratic changes through the communist nation's constitution. Fidel Castro, "as a dictator, will do what he wants, but this is the first time that we've seen [Cubans] step forward and say that things have got to change," Nelson said following a private luncheon at the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables. [For more on the Varela Project, see section Domestic Affairs.] (The Miami Herald, 20/5/02)

May 20: President Bush said he won't lift the Cuban trade embargo unless Fidel Castro releases political prisoners, conducts independently monitored elections and accepts a list of U.S. conditions for a "new government that is fully democratic." "Freedom sometimes grows step by step, and we will encourage those steps," the president said at the White House, outlining his new U.S. policy, Initiative for a New Cuba, on Cuban Independence Day. He then flew to Miami, where he delivered a similar message. Cuba is scheduled to hold National Assembly elections next year. Bush said Cuba must open those elections to independent observers to ensure they are fair. "All elections in Castro's Cuba have been a fraud," Bush said. "The voices of the Cuban people have been suppressed and their votes have been meaningless. That's the truth." "Full normalization of relations with Cuba, diplomatic recognition, open trade and a robust aid program

will only be possible when Cuba has a new government that is fully democratic, when the rule of law is respected and when the human rights of all Cubans are fully protected," Bush said. "Well-intentioned ideas about trade will merely prop up this dictator, enrich his cronies and enhance the totalitarian regime," Bush said in Miami. "It will not help the Cuban people." Seeking to balance his hard-line policy, the president outlined administration actions designed to make life better for the Cuban people. One initiative would resume direct mail service to and from Cuba. The president said the United States would offer scholarships in the United States for some Cuban students and professionals who "try to build independent civil institutions in Cuba," as well as some for family members of political prisoners. (AP, CNN, 20/5/02)

May 20: US President George W. Bush spoke with presidents Vicente Fox, Ricardo Lagos and Fernando Henrique Cardoso "to explain to them his announcement of a new initiative toward Cuba", said the White House spokesperson Ari Fleischer. (EFE, 20/5/02)

May 20: During a Cuban television program, Cuban National Assembly president Ricardo Alarcon criticised US president George Bush for pandering to the "terrorist mafia" in Miami, as he called the vehemently anti-Castro Cuban exile community there. Alarcon also chided the US president for "having the nerve" to raise the issue of free elections in Florida - where Bush was handed victory in 2000 after one of the most controversial votes in US history. Alarcon hit back at Bush's comments during a Cuban television programme called The Round Table. In a reference to the US presidential election in November 2000, in which Bush's White House victory hinged on a disputed result in Florida, he said: "You have to have a nerve to go to Miami and speak of honest and clean elections." And he described the Bush speeches as "a gesture of thanks and gratitude" towards the large anti-Castro Cuban community in southern Florida for their support of his brother Jeb. (BBC, 20/5/02)

May 20: Three Senate Democrats criticized President Bush's vow to keep the trade and travel bans on Cuba in place. Senator Barbara Boxer of California said she supported the trade embargo, now 40 years old, during the Cold War era, but "It certainly doesn't make sense now." She and senators Christopher Dodd of Connecticut and Byron Dorgan of North Dakota praised the recent historic trip to Havana by former President Jimmy Carter, supporting his recommendation that the embargoes be lifted. "The specific package of proposals announced by the administration is much ado about nothing, quite candidly," Dodd said. (CNN, 20/5/02)

May 21: Members of Central United Methodist Church reaffirmed their 1999 decision to travel to Cuba without a license. Three of the six church members who traveled to Cuba in January 1999 have received notice from the Office of Foreign Assets Control – a branch of the U.S. Treasury Department-- that they might be fined up to \$7,500 each for traveling to that country without a permit. No formal hearings have been held in the case. Sandra Edlund, a church member and an attorney, said the group would fight the fines. (Journal Sentinel, 21/5/02)

May 21: The U.S. Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, Hans Hertell, handed in to the Dominican government the "Initiative for a New Cuba", by means of which the U.S. President, George W. Bush, calls on the Cuban President to take the necessary steps toward democracy. "I hope that the Dominican Republic will lend us its support in this new initiative", said Hertell after a meeting with Dominican Vice President, Milagros Ortiz Bosch. (EFE, 21/5/02)

May 21: President Bush met at the White House with former President Jimmy Carter to discuss Mr. Carter's recent trip to Cuba, a White House Official said. Jeanie Mamo, a White House spokeswoman, said that Mr. Carter offered Mr. Bush "reflections on his trip." The White House released no other details of the meeting. (The New York Times, 22/5/02)

May 22: The U.S. Department of the Treasury has granted the Georgia Department of Agriculture a license to travel to Cuba, Tommy Irvin, Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture, announced. "The

license is for the purpose of organizing fact-finding missions on behalf of Georgia's agribusinesses who are currently selling to Cuba or would like to sell there," said Commissioner Irvin. "We have led two successful fact-finding missions to Cuba. This will facilitate further missions," said Irvin. "As the nation's leading producer of poultry, much of the interest has been in that industry, but there has also been interest in our turfgrasses, timber, and our other products. (PRNewswire, 22/5/02)

May 23: Activities against the Cuban government, in Mexico and other countries, could widen according to U.S. officials since President George W. Bush announced that he would increase what he defined as "direct assistance to the Cuban people through non-governmental organizations." Although officials would not detail the new anti-Castro efforts, particularly in Mexico, members of the White House staff said that their government hopes to increase financing for groups opposed to Castro in Cuba, as well as in countries such as Mexico and Spain. (La Jornada, 23/5/02)

May 24: US President George W. Bush should seek to boost people-to-people relationships through cultural exchanges with Cuba to improve strained ties, former US president Jimmy Carter wrote in The Washington Post. "There is little doubt that further reforms are thwarted by harsh demands from Washington or Miami, which alienate Cubans and create the perception that any further moves by the Cuban government would be a sign of weakness," Carter wrote in the opinion piece. "The challenge now is to find common ground in dealing with Cuba, on which Congress, private groups and the administration can cooperate," Carter added, arguing: "The key is to enhance people-to-people relationships, primarily through cultural exchanges." (AFP, 24/5/02)

May 24: The owner of a boat used to smuggle Cuban migrants into the U.S. has been convicted of conspiracy to smuggle illegal aliens - the first time the owner of a smuggling boat has been convicted, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office. Miguel Humberto Armas-Plasencia, 47, was convicted of conspiring to bring illegal aliens into the U.S. He could be sentenced to five years during a sentencing hearing July 11. Earlier, Mario Vilan-Polier, 36, Pedro Arrieta, 31, and William Gonzalez, 26, were convicted of conspiracy and 22 counts of smuggling, using Armas-Plasencia's boat. "This is the first time since we really began pursuing these cases aggressively that we have reached beyond the actual smugglers," said Guy A. Lewis, U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Florida. (AP, 25/5/02)

May 25: In a speech focused on U.S. government allegations that Cuba transfers technology to countries for germ warfare, Fidel Castro told a rally of several hundred thousand people that Cuba does not fault Americans for their government's restrictions on the communist island and recognizes that many U.S. citizens support improved relations. "Our struggle is not and never will be against the people of the United States," Castro said during the morning rally in the provincial capital of Sancti Spiritus, about 215 miles southeast of Havana. (AP, 25/5/02)

May 30: Another spy for Cuba has been arrested in Miami, the federal Immigration and Naturalization Service and FBI said. The arrest was part of the continuing Operation Royal Flush, which resulted in the FBI arrests and convictions of 10 other Cuban spies who were operating in South Florida. Jailed this time was Juan Emilio Aboy, 41. The joint INS-FBI investigation that led to his arrest concluded Aboy was an agent of the Cuban Intelligence Service, was taught espionage there and had used his skills after entering the United States. (Sun Sentinel, 30/5/02)

