

FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba

June 2003

Domestic Affairs

June 2: Havana Provincial Court has sentenced 14 Cubans and two Jamaicans to sentences ranging from five years to life imprisonment for the crime of drug traffic, Granma daily informed. Cuban Gerardo González Prieto and Jamaican Derrick Osmond Brooks were sentenced to life imprisonment after they were found guilty of continuously introducing and trading drugs in Cuba, while Osmond Brooks was also tried for counterfeiting public documents and bribery. According to Granma newspaper, González Prieto was working as a salesman in a disco and selling drugs, mainly cocaine. In this activity he involved other people, including some relatives. (Prensa Latina, 2/6/03)

June 3: Cuba's Supreme Court has upheld the prison terms handed down earlier this year to several dissidents, quashing the first attempt by relatives of the activists to get the sentences annulled, an outlawed Cuban rights group told the press. According to Elizardo Sanchez, spokesman for the banned Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, the Supreme Court's ruling targeted three dissidents out of an undetermined number who have appealed their sentences. (EFE, 3/6/03)

June 3: The Cuban opposition Christian Liberation Movement (MCL) issued a warning about the failing health of a jailed member currently on hunger strike to demand medical assistance. José Daniel Ferrer Garcia, went on a hunger strike to protest the prison authorities' decision to deny him medical treatment, according to a press release made public in Havana by the MCL. Ferrer, sentenced to 25 years in prison, suffers from acute amebiasis due to the condition of the water at the Pinar del Río prison, the press release added. Prison authorities, it continued, have thrown Ferrer into a punishment cell. (EFE, 3/6/03)

June 4: Several Cuban dissident groups announced the creation of a new platform to defend human rights on the island. The main objectives of this Coalición Diálogo Pro Derechos will be to seek the release of the 75 dissidents recently imprisoned and the promotion of a national dialogue on human rights. (Radio Martí, 3/6/03)

June 4: Cuban dissidents have said that a report by the human rights group Amnesty International recognizing 75 jailed colleagues as "prisoners of conscience" was welcomed but it would not result in reducing their sentences. (EFE, 4/6/03)

June 5: An organization of moderate opposition groups in Cuba warned the government about the consequences of locking up members of the "democratic left" and called the sentences received by 75 dissidents in April of this year "unjust". The Cuban Socialist Democratic Current (CSDC) said it is must be hard for the Cuban government to "sleep in peace" while it jails representatives of the social democratic left, which "is opting for political dialogue". In a long communique, Manuel Cuesta Morua, the secretary-general of the CSDC - which does not have legal status - said social democrats in Cuba maintain a position equally distant between the United States and the regime headed by Fidel Castro. (Notimex, 5/6/03)

June 5: Dissident journalist Manuel Vázquez Portal tells of rats, bad food and a tiny cell in a diary smuggled out of prison by his wife, providing a rare look at life behind bars in Cuba. Vázquez described his cell's furnishings as a rickety cot, a dirty mattress without sheets and pillows, a fetid toilet bowl. Rats scurry across the floor and water drips down the walls, he wrote. "The cell is a space of 1 1/2 meters wide by 3 meters long (about 5 feet by 10 feet)," Vázquez wrote in one entry. "A barred door partially covered by a plate of steel. A barred window, through which enters the sun's rays, the rain, the insects." (AP, 5/6/03)

June 6: Havana University's Center for the Study of the Cuban Economy, a Cuban economic think tank, has urged Communist authorities to stimulate a stagnating economy through more private initiative and less regulation of state-run businesses. The center's annual summary of the economy, introducing the papers from the February conference, praised efforts to forge an egalitarian society, but pointed out that "you can only distribute what you produce, growth is the order of the day." The think tank said the government should make the economy "more attractive to foreign investment (...) encourage development of (private) production and service cooperatives as a compliment to state industry ... eliminate regulations that block better use of productive potential," among other reforms. (Reuters, 6/6/03)

June 6: Cuba's first ephemeral art festival lasted barely an hour and a half, until the butter paintings and ice sculptures began to melt, the children ate the cupcakes hung from a tree and a grand piano went up in flames. There were sculptures made from flowers, paper and cardboard egg trays and blindfolded domino players, all competing for the best exhibit of transitory art in a square in Havana's inner city. A tower of ice with books inside, evoking the Alexandria library and lighthouse of ancient Egypt, melted in the tropical heat. Children swarmed around a tree, grabbing at chocolate cupcakes, which artists had hung like mobiles. The most elaborate entry was 'The Four Seasons,' a series of relief paintings made of butter by hotel chef Jorge Gonzalez, who copied the fruit and flower portraits of 16th Century Italian painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo. (Reuters, 6/6/03)

June 6: A Cuban web site on "banditry" is available. The web page was inaugurated in Sancti Spiritus by Jose Ramon Balaguer, member of the Political Bureau of the Cuba Communist Party. Balaguer noted the importance of this new source of information on "the attacks suffered by the Caribbean Island after the triumph of the Revolution in 1959", he said. According to the Cuban government, banditry was a terrorist method that in the 1960s cost Cuba more than 500 lives and major material losses. (Prensa Latina, 6/6/03)

June 6: Havana has announced its official candidature for the venue of the 2012 Olympic Games in an extraordinary meeting of the Cuban Olympic Committee (COC) in the city hall. The Cuban capital applied for the 2008 meet, but on that opportunity the International Olympic Committee (IOC) did not approve its candidacy. "On behalf of the people of the City of Havana I am making an official request for our beloved capital to be considered as the venue of the 2012 Olympic Games," declared Juan Contino, president of the Provincial Assembly of Peoples' Power. (Granma International, 6/6/03)

June 6: From the age of two months, breastfed babies are to be immunized with a Cuban vaccine (Hib) to fight B-type Haemophilus influenza, the bacteria that causes a significant percentage of meningitis, pneumonia and otitis cases and is responsible for the deaths of half a million children a year worldwide. Vincente Vérez Bencomo, a researcher at the Faculty of Chemistry of the University of Havana who developed the vaccine, told the press that the product will be administered to babies at two, four and six months after birth, with a booster dose at 18 months. The vaccine is currently in the final registration stage with the State Center for Medication Control (CECMED) after a total of six clinical trials. (Granma International, 6/6/03)

June 6: The Cuban government denied allegations that it is mistreating scores of dissidents imprisoned in recent months. "The Foreign Ministry can only say in all truthfulness that in Cuba there is a system of law in place that will prevent any violations of rights," Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque told the press. He was responding to complaints voiced by relatives of imprisoned dissidents, who say the prisoners are denied medical treatment and deprived of basic hygiene and potable water. (EFE, 6/6/03)

June 7: Many families of Cuban dissidents are speaking openly to the media in an attempt to draw attention to the plight of the political prisoners. The families aren't hopeful. The Cuban government hasn't bent to international pressure to release 75 dissidents, but instead has made

life more difficult for them and their families. Most of the prisoners who lived in Havana are being sent hundreds of miles away -- as far in some cases as Guantánamo and Santiago de Cuba. The prisoners from Santiago are sent, in some cases, to Havana or Pinar del Río. The trip for families can easily take 12-15 hours by bus and longer by train, if they can even book a reservation. (CNN, 7/6/03)

June 9: As many as 40 independent Cuban journalists, apparently undeterred by an intensified wave of repression, are challenging the government by filing regular news reports to foreign news outlets -- the same practice that resulted in long jail sentences for 75 dissidents in April. The persistent writers are among 121 journalists who have been receiving over-the-mail and electronic training from the International Media Center at Florida International University. Twenty-one of the IMC students are among the government opponents jailed during an island-wide sweep and sentenced to as many as 28 years during the recent summary trials. (The Miami Herald, 9/3/03)

June 9: The Cuban government has reiterated that attacks against police officers will not go unpunished and urged officers to show "professionalism" in their daily duties. In an unusual report on violent crimes, the Cuban official daily Granma cited several cases of attacks against police officers. (EFE, 9/6/03)

June 9: New findings on the Bellamar cave system have been considered as relevant and claimed as a National Monument. The cave is located at the midst of Matanzas city where ten years ago a group of speleologists discovered a narrow path that let them to a lengthy underground stretch of nine kilometers. Due to the rare shape and dimension of stalagmites and stalactites, this finding can not be compared to any others. During explorations sponsored by the group lead by Felix Rodriguez other findings were made such as terrestrial vertebrates and birds whose ancient age go back to millions of year. (AIN, 9/6/03)

June 9: Relatives of Cuban dissidents sentenced to long prison terms thanked the European Union for imposing sanctions on the communist regime in response to its abuse of human rights. An open letter signed by nearly a dozen wives of dissidents was released in Havana. It expresses the gratitude and "represents all the relatives of the convicted dissidents," Miriam Leiva, whose husband Oscar Espinosa Chepe, an independent journalist, received a 20-year term, told the press. Copies of the letter will be delivered in the next few days to the different embassies that represent the members of the EU in Havana, Leiva said. (EFE, 9/6/03)

June 12: Veteran dissident Elizardo Sánchez said that the consequences of the dispute between Cuba and the European Union "will be negative" for the island's interests and feared that the government would send more dissidents to jail. In an interview, the human rights activist was convinced that "most Cubans, including intellectual and government officials themselves, support full-fledged international economic and political relations." (Notimex, 13/6/03)

June 12: The opposition coalition Arco Progresista said in a statement that the situation created with the European Union isolates Cuba. "This is an unacceptable situation that greatly reduces the possibilities of communication and insertion of our country into the international arena," the group said. "It is important to reverse this course of action that can provoke a spiral of undesirable events," the dissident group added. (EFE, AP, 12/6/03)

June 14: The Cuban Communist Party (PCC) in the province of Sancti Spiritus announced that first secretary in this territory, Juan Antonio Díaz was replaced by Miguel Acebo Cortiñas. (Granma, 15/6/03)

June 14: Cubans marched, held ceremonies, watched special television programs and in other ways paid tribute to legendary leftist guerrilla Ernesto "Che" Guevara on the 75th anniversary of his birth. Around 100,000 people gathered in Santa Clara, the capital of central Villa Clara province, to honor his memory. Guevara, a physician by profession, was awarded an honorary

doctorate by Havana's Institute of Medical Sciences. Fidel Castro attended a cultural gala held at Karl Marx Theatre in Havana. (Reuters, Radio Habana Cuba, Prensa Latina, 14/6/03)

June 14: The main leaders of the Corriente Socialista Democrática Cubana have been warned that they could be detained and sentenced to long prison terms by state security if they continue with their activities. The Secretary General of the organization, Manuel Cuesta Morúa, has been banned from travelling to the eastern provinces. (Cuba Nuestra, 14/6/03)

June 16: Significant changes will be seen in Cuba's climate by 2050, according to forecasts by experts at the Cuban Institute of Meteorology and the Economy Ministry's Institute of Physical Planning. "The fact that our nation is an archipelago makes us one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change," said Carlos Rodríguez Otero, the head of a team that designed a project financed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to study drought. Projections indicate that temperatures in Cuba will rise, droughts will become even more frequent and longer-lasting on the eastern part of the island, and the rise in sea level caused by the melting of the polar ice caps will have a direct impact on tens of thousands of people in southwestern Cuba. (IPS, 16/6/03)

June 17: Cuba's forest resources maintained a growth rate of 1.3 percent over the past decade, becoming the only Latin American country showing an increase of forest resources. According to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, no more than 55 nations -- out of more than 200 under study -- have increased their forest resources. (Radio Habana Cuba, 17/6/03)

June 17: Over 80 Cuban education centers form the Net of Schools associated to the UNESCO, that promotes environment education, peace, cultural exchanges and human rights. (AIN, 17/6/03)

June 17: "Palabra Nueva", a magazine published by the Archdiocese of Havana, made reference to the sentences handed down to 75 Cuban political dissidents and the firing-squad execution of three young men who hijacked a passenger boat in Havana. The magazine also published a letter from Pope John Paul II to the Cuban government. (Cubanet, 17/6/03)

June 18: A group of Cuban women appealed to all "individuals of good will" to demand that the government of Fidel Castro releases dissident Martha Beatriz Roque, sentenced to 20 years imprisonment and whose life is in danger due to her failing health. (AFP, 19/6/03)

June 19: Human rights organizations and relatives of dissidents imprisoned in Cuba denounced the inhumane conditions in which they are being held, 90 days after the massive arrests. (AFP, 20/6/03)

June 20: Cuba's government announced it had replaced the transportation minister, and a relatively unknown Communist Party official was named to the key post overseeing the island's public transportation system. Outgoing transportation minister Alvaro Perez Morales "will be assigned to other duties," a short story reported in Granma, the Communist Party newspaper. It identified the new minister as Manuel Pozo Torrado, a 40-year-old engineer who oversaw construction, transportation and communications for the party. (AP, 20/6/03)

June 21: Cuba replaced a key minister as part of a major reshuffling of an economic team that has failed to revive its stagnant economy. A brief communiqué gave no reason for the naming of Central Bank Vice President Georgina Barreiro Fajardo as Finance and Prices minister, replacing Manuel Millares. (Reuters, 21/6/03)

June 23: Cuba's high court has upheld the 20-year sentence of independent journalist Raúl Rivero, who was among 75 Cubans sentenced to prison in a crackdown on the opposition this year, Rivero's wife said. Blanca Reyes said her husband's defense attorney told her that her husband's appeal had been rejected by the Supreme Tribunal, the island's court of last resort.

Among other prominent opponents of the government whose convictions were upheld were economists Oscar Espinosa Chepe, Martha Beatriz Roque, Hector Palacios, journalist Osvaldo Alfonso Valdes, and journalist Ricardo Gonzalez, who was tried with Rivero. Fifty of the sentences have now been upheld, said Carlos Menendez of the non-governmental Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation. (The Washington Post, AFP, 23/6/03)

June 24: Cuba stepped up its campaign against dissidents, launching a book about the activities of 12 agents who infiltrated their ranks and issuing a warning that many more were still working undercover. Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque said the book, "The Dissidents," based on interviews with the agents, "proved that so-called dissident groups were a creation of the United States." Pérez Roque called the agents, whose testimony helped send 75 democracy activists, independent journalists and others to prison in April, "heroes and heroines," saying, "the enemy (the United States) should know that there are many more still at work." The book by Cuban journalists Luis Báez and Rosa Miriam Elizande was quickly put together after the dissidents' trials. (Reuters, 24/6/03)

June 24: Esteban Lazo, the head of Cuba's powerful Communist Party in the nation's capital, has replaced one of the party's founders in a key national post overseeing ideology, the daily newspaper Granma reported. Lazo, 59, replaces José Ramón Balaguer, 71, a fellow member of the party's governing politburo, as head of the ideological department dedicated to preserving and promoting support for the government's communist principles. Granma, the voice of the Communist Party of Cuba, said the changes were made during a meeting overseen by Fidel Castro, who heads the party as first secretary. (The Miami Herald, 25/7/03)

June 26: Cuban dissident Osvaldo Payá issued an appeal for a campaign in favour of the release of the 75 dissidents held in prison in Cuba and for a referendum on the Varela Project led by him. (Radio Martí, 27/6/03)

June 27: Dissident leaders Elizardo Sánchez, Vladimiro Roca, Félix Bonné, René Gómez Manzano and Gustavo Arcos complained of a slander campaign enshrined in print in a book written by two journalists, Luis Báez and Rosa Miriam Elizalde, which was presented by Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. The dissident leaders all of whom identified as foreign mercenaries by moles infiltrated into their organizations by Cuban intelligence said the entire book consists of "claims made by individuals who falsely try to pass themselves off as members of the opposition". In a separate statement, the head of the Christian Liberation Movement, Osvaldo Paya noted that 42 of the 75 people jailed were associated with the campaign his group spearheaded calling for the peaceful, gradual and consensual constitutional reform of Cuba's one-party state. (EFE, 27/6/03)

June 28: A new hit movie is sweeping Havana, with rave reviews and long lines of film-goers. The movie "Suite Habana," by Cuban filmmaker Fernando Pérez, is said by some to already be considered a masterpiece. The interesting aspect of this particular film is the audio track -- which is practically without words, only the sounds of the Cuban capital. Critics say that the photography and sound effects accurately tell the story of a modern-day Havana. (Radio Habana Cuba, 28/6/03)

June 30: At the close of the genetic studies conference held in Havana, Fidel Castro stated that the research presented "allows Cuba to become a reference point in the themes of mental retardation and other disabilities." The works recently carried out in Cuba, from the psycho-social, psycho-pedagogical and genetic viewpoint, as part of a national program of assistance to handicapped people, have resulted in an important number of actions, highlighted Castro. There is the wish to apply and extend this work by 35,000 professionals with 100 percent of the differently-abled people of the island -a record, he noted- even to other parts of the Hemisphere, the Cuban leader said. (Prensa Latina, 30/6/03)

Economy

June 1: The 12th Caribbean International Fair opens its doors on Sunday, June 8: for five days in the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba, bringing together business people from 31 countries, as well as government representatives and trade promotion organizations. For the first time in the fair's history three events organized by the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) are to be run in parallel, with more than 30 member states taking part. The 4th Trade Promoters Forum (June 9), the 4th Business Forum (June 10-11), and the 12th ACS Committee for Business Development and External Relations (June 12) will contribute to bringing the nations of the region together to search for business opportunities, an exchange which is still considered to be too limited. (Granma International, 2/6/03)

June 2: Airport operator Fraport AG (G.FRP) said it concluded a cooperation contract with the Cuban aviation authority to build a business center in downtown Havana. As part of the contract, Fraport will also be involved in the operation and expansion of the Varadero and other airports in Cuba, Fraport said. An investment obligation isn't part of the contract, Fraport said. (Dow Jones, 2/6/03)

June 3: Cuban and Brazilian companies have come together to form the mixed-enterprise BRACIMEX -- designed to facilitate business exchanges and commerce between both countries. The new joint enterprise was officially opened on the occasion of the visit to Cuba of a delegation of 36 Brazilian business people. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/6/03)

June 3: Madrid-based Occidental Hotels & Resorts now manages the "Miramar" hotel in Havana, which was inaugurated early in 2000 and had been managed by the French hotels chain ACCOR under the "Novotel" brand name. (Hostelmarket, 15/6/03)

June 4: Spanish consultancy C. E. Consulting Empresarial in Madrid has signed an agreement with the Cuban Government to set up a joint company and start operating in Cuba. The company will be the first international consultancy brand which enters the Cuban market. Consulting Empresarial has 62 centres in Spain, of which five are company-owned and the rest franchises. (Spanish News Digest, 4/6/03)

June 4: Cuba produces six of the 13 medicines internationally registered to counteract AIDS, according to the vice president of the island's Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center, Francisco Machado. Machado, who is also the vice president of Heber Biotec Pharmaceutical Company, told the press that another six medicines -- designed to reduce damages from this disease -- would be tested over the next two years. (Prensa Latina, 4/6/03)

June 4: Canadian Sherritt International said it is looking at developing more near-surface nickel laterite deposits in Cuba, where it is already a large investor in oil and gas, agriculture and tourism. Dennis Maschmeyer, Sherritt's chief executive and president, told a conference in Toronto the company's plans to expand its Moa laterite nickel and cobalt project in Cuba looked more attractive with the prospect for both metals "extremely positive". Maschmeyer said consumption for stainless steel production was rising, led by China, which has left nickel supplies tight and pushed prices higher. (Reuters, 4/6/03)

June 5: Belgian brewing giant Interbrew SA's expansion plans in Cuba are on track at 1.5 million hectoliters (39.63 million U.S. gallons) a year, with plans to double output in the future, the head of the company's local operations told the official media. Interbrew, the world's No. 3 brewer, and the government have a 50/50 percent partnership in Cervecería Bucanero SA (CBSA), which operates a brewery in eastern Cuba. CBSA Director Gerry Burk said recent investments had increased capacity at the plant to 1.5 million hectoliters per year, from 600,000 hectoliters (15.85 million U.S. gallons) this time in 2002. Burk said planning continued to build another 1.5 million hectoliters brewery near Havana. (Reuters, 5/6/03)

June 6: The demise of a joint-venture between Lagoa Shipping and the Cuban government is seeing the Greek outfit lose ships. Yiota Gousas Athens Lagoa Shipping of Greece and the Cuban government are going their separate ways after dissolving a shipping joint venture. The changes have already seen three ships exit Lagoa's fleet and another three are set to be withdrawn with the dissolution of joint-venture company Millenium Shipping Co. (Tradewinds, 6/6/03)

June 8: Cuba has opened its doors to a Canadian businessman interested in doing business with Cuban fashion models. According to the June issue of Cigar Aficionado journal, businessman Dean Bornstein recently opened an office in Havana to represent more than 75 Cuban supermodels through a subsidiary of his Toronto-based company. (El Nuevo Herald, 8/6/03)

June 9: The Cuban government has said that it will pay down "to the last penny" what it owes Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), in reply to the "vulgar lies and slanders" made by "certain (Venezuelan) media" that claim Hugo Chávez's government give Castro's Cuba oil "for free". (Europa Press, 11/6/03)

June 10: Cuban citrus fruit company Citricos Arimao in Cienfuegos, central Cuba, has exported 500 tonnes of orange juice with organic certification to Europe, Arimao's director, Omar Gonzalez, said. Arimao processed 1,000 tonnes of fruit from a 70-hectare restructured area for the delivery, Gonzalez added. Arimao has an agreement with Swiss retail co-operative Coop in Basel, northern Switzerland, which manages 1,000 supermarkets in Europe. (News Digest, 11/6/03)

June 14: Canadian Occidental Hotels and Resorts has opened its first hotel in Cuba - the Hotel Occidental Miramar in Havana. The recently built, five-star hotel is located on 5th Avenue, adjacent to the financial district, in close proximity to Havana's convention centre and about 10 minutes from the Old Historic City. The Hotel Occidental Miramar will be featured in selected Canadian tour operator programs offering two-centre holidays, which combine a beach vacation with a stay in Havana. (The Toronto Star, 14/6/03)

June 18: Cuba has added a few more tonnes of sugar to this year's near record low harvest by keeping some mills open in June despite poor harvesting conditions and low yields, government sources and media reports indicated. Local analysts calculated production this season at slightly over 2.1 million tonnes of raw sugar, 40 percent below last year's 3.61 million tonne output. They said final output might near 2.2 million tonnes before the last mill closed by the end of the month. The Sugar Ministry has not said how many of the 79 mills that participated in the harvest are still open, but local analysts doubted it was more than a dozen or so. (Reuters, 18/6/03)

June 19: Cuban Vice-President Carlos Lage stated that the country has electrified irrigation in around 57,000 hectares devoted to different kinds of crops, thus contributing to save fuel, reported "Granma" newspaper. During a ceremony in Havana province to close the first stage of the program in the territory, Lage highlighted the nation's effort to guarantee an increase in vegetables and grains, even under conditions of scarcity and despite the national and international economic situation. The leader stated that over the last two months, Cuba's power situation has improved and it is expected to remain at an acceptable level of stability. (Prensa Latina, 20/6/03)

June 21: Drought is severely affecting various areas in Cuba's eastern region and meteorological predictions confirm that the trend will continue over the next few years. The amount of rain in Cuba has dropped in the last 10 years. May is the beginning of the rainy season in Cuba but the amount of rainfall has decreased in the provinces stretching from Camagüey to Guantánamo. According to reports the drought is so serious it is affecting the population's water supplies, agriculture, fishing and cattle raising. The level of the province's main reservoir, the El Rincon dam, is reportedly in a critical state with only 4.2 million cubic meters of water out of the 21.4

million capacity. (Radio Habana Cuba, 21/6/03)

June 21: The Investment Dealers Association of Canada (IDA) is probing several people in connection with the stock manipulation investigation surrounding Visa Gold Explorations Inc, a small company that hunts for sunken treasure off the coast of Cuba. Separately, Brant Securities Ltd. suspended trader Derek Reid, one of the people named in police search warrants related to Visa Gold, said Keith McMeekin, president of the Toronto brokerage firm. The IDA said it had already been investigating Mr. Reid for unrelated matters. And Paul Bourque, the IDA's senior vice-president of member regulation, said that would now be expanded to look at any involvement Mr. Reid may have had in the new controversy surrounding Visa Gold, (The Globe and Mail, 21/6/03)

June 23: Spanish charter operator Iberworld Airlines SA introduced regular flights to Cuba, on the Madrid-Havana route, it was reported. Iberworld is part of Spanish hotel chain Iberostar, a subsidiary of German tour operator Thomas Cook. (Spanish News Digest, 23/6/03)

June 24: This year's near record low sugar harvest is over in Cuba. Local analysts estimated Cuba's output at around 2.1 million tonnes of raw sugar, well below the 2.7 million tonnes planned and the lowest since 1933. "The harvest has ended after a difficult campaign," reported state-run Radio Rebelde, "due to resource shortages, the late opening of some mills, technical and weather problems." None of Cuba's 13 sugar-producing provinces met its target for the year. (Reuters, 24/6/03)

June 25: Some 30 locomotives, most of them more than 100 years old, are expected to "put some steam" into the second International Steam Engine Festival, which will take place in four Cuban provinces. Visitors from Europe and the United States have shown interest in attending the event, at which judges will rate the engines on mechanical condition, performance, speed and originality, among other categories. Cuban Deputy Sugar Minister Nelson Labrada said the festival would play a role in Sugar Ministry (Minaz) plans to diversify in response to the industry's financial woes. (EFE, 25/6/03)

June 30: Tourism, Cuba's main foreign exchange earner, has recovered from a post-September 11 decline that slowed the Caribbean island's efforts to pull itself out of economic crisis, the Tourism Ministry announced. A million tourists had visited the Cuba this year, a 16 percent increase compared with the same period in 2002, the ministry said. "Last year arrivals reached one million on July 29 (...) while in 2001, the best year to date for the industry, the number was achieved on June 30," the official business weekly, Opciones, said. Foreign companies, such as France's Accor and Spain's Sol Melia, manage the majority of five-star and four-star hotels in Cuba. (Gulf Daily News, 30/6/03)

Exile Community

June 1: Thousands of Cuban exiles in Puerto Rico voted in a referendum rather symbolic than real, to provide Cuban exiles with a new platform that helps bring them closer to their countrymen on the island. (El Nuevo Herald, 2/6/03)

June 3: A prominent Cuban exile leader has been arrested on an illegal immigration charge because he never applied for US residency. Ramón Saúl Sánchez, director of the Cuban-American group Democracy Movement, was arrested 36 years after he first entered the United States. Under guidelines tightened after the September 11 terrorist attacks, non-US citizens without proper immigration papers cannot obtain or renew a Florida driver's license. So Sánchez, decided to apply for permanent residence or a work permit and was given an appointment. That's when he was arrested. Sánchez could be deported, but because of hostile relations between the United States and Cuba, he probably will not be returned to his homeland. And under a 2001 Supreme Court ruling, the government cannot detain him indefinitely. (The Miami Herald, 5/6/03)

June 5: Miami-based Cuban exile groups welcomed EU sanctions against Havana. Cuban Liberty Council director Ninaska Perez told EFE she was pleased with the "initiative that confirms the only possible attitude towards dictators such as Fidel Castro." Mariela Ferreti, spokeswoman for the Cuban American National Foundation, told EFE that the sanctions leveled further encourage the island's internal opposition. (EFE, 5/6/03)

June 9: Secretary General of Cuba Independiente y Democrática, Huber Matos, said that the "ideal" scenario to restore democracy in Cuba and bring down Fidel Castro's regime would be a transition process and cautioned that the "greatest tragedy" would be the restoration of democracy through a U.S. military intervention. (ABC, 10/6/03)

June 10: A survivor of the 1996 shoot-down of two planes by Cuban fighter jets has asked a US court to award him nearly \$76 million in damages from the Castro government. José Basulto, founder of the Cuban exile group Brothers to the Rescue, filed documents asking for the amount, saying he deserved \$5,000 a day for the rest of his life for the mental pain and suffering the shoot-down has caused him. Basulto received a judgment against the Cuban government and its air force in January when they failed to show up in court and defend themselves against his suit. It was filed under a 1996 federal law that helps victims of terrorism sue foreign governments that support such violence. (The Miami Herald, 10/6/03)

June 10: The announcement of a cruise to Cuba catering to the Santería religious community revived the controversy among Miami's Cuban exiles about travel to the communist island and the appropriate attitude to take toward the regime of Fidel Castro. "This is about people who want to reap economic benefits using the respectable beliefs of others and who intend to profit from tourism tours disguised as religion," Ninaska Perez Castellon, head of the Cuban Liberty Council (CLC), told the press. "We don't have anything to say against people who announce these types of projects. They have the right to do so and to travel to Cuba as long as they abide by US laws," said Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) chief Joe García. (EFE, 10/6/03)

June 17: Two Miami radio hosts say they have fooled Fidel Castro by pretending to be President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela in a prank call. The two hosts of the radio programme El Vacilón de la Mañana (Morning Joker) spliced together clips from a Chávez speech and played them to trick Castro into thinking he was talking to the Venezuelan leader. Then they revealed themselves and called Castro a killer, reportedly prompting a tirade of abuse before Castro hung up. (BBC, 18/6/03)

June 19: Leaders of the Democracy Movement have asked for a Coast Guard permit to take their annual memorial for the 1994 sinking of a refugee boat to Cuba's shores, the group announced at a press conference. After the Coast Guard denied the Cuban exile group a permit that would have allowed them to leave a "security zone" in the Florida Straits during last year's memorial, group leaders are taking a different approach -- applying for a "cultural exchange" permit. (The Miami Herald, 20/6/03)

June 20: A reconciliation project at Florida International University seeks solutions to the thorny issue of how Cuba's record of human rights violations will be dealt with in a transition. The project, headed by FIU sociology professor Marifeli Pérez-Stable, comes at a time when particular attention has been paid to the island's human rights record, given the government's crackdown on dissidents and its execution of three men who tried to hijack a boat to the United States. "We need to have fresh thinking and fresh approaches to Cuban matters from within Miami," said Pérez-Stable, chairwoman of the task force that issued the report Cuban National Reconciliation. (Sun Sentinel, 20/6/03)

June 21: Cuba exile artists like Willy Chirino, Israel López "Cachao" and Donato Poveda, gave a concert in Miami for the families of political prisoners in Cuba. It is estimated that the concert will collect more than \$100,000 dollars, according to the organizers. (Notimex, 23/6/03)

June 24: Approximately forty dissidents and twice as many of pro Castro demonstrators marched simultaneously by the Cuban embassy in Paris. Former French minister Jean-François Deniau participated with the dissidents. (AFP, 24/6/03)

June 25: Fidel Castro "wants to end his four decades in power with a war against the United States," said oppositionist leader Huber Matos, who travelled to Argentina for the launching of his memoirs. In an interview published by the daily Clarín, Matos regretted "the ignorance of the Argentinean people and government officials" for the reception given to Castro during his visit to Buenos Aires. (El Nuevo Herald, 26/6/03)

June 25: A Cuban couple who are permanent US residents have been held more than 10 weeks by Cuban authorities, accused of espionage, the woman's sister said. A brother who lives in Cuba also is being held. The couple's two daughters, ages 7 and 15, are being cared for by relatives in Florida, hoping for their parents' return. The incident began April 8 when authorities detained Arcel and Maria Cardoso at a Cuban airport before they boarded a flight to their home in Miami, Florida, said Maria Cardoso's sister, Maricel Angulo. The Cardosos -- who arrived in the United States on a raft nine years ago -- had been visiting their hometown of Camaguey since March 27. (CNN, 26/6/03)

June 30: A new group of militant Cuban exiles has emerged in Miami, made up partly of veterans of the botched Bay of Pigs invasion who advocate a "multilateral military intervention" against the island's communist government. The National Cuban Congress, which claims 300 members, is the latest of dozens of anti-Castro groups in southern Florida, home to about 700,000 people of Cuban origin. The movement stands for "an international political, economic, diplomatic and touristic embargo" against the government of President Fidel Castro, and if that fails, "a multilateral intervention" similar to the US-led missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, said Antonio Calatayud, one of its leaders. (AFP, 30/6/03)

Foreign Affairs

June 2: Cuban Ambassador to the European Union, Rodrigo Malmierca, affirmed that his country would continue its relation with the bloc on the basis of political dialogue of mutual respect, notwithstanding the fact that Cuba withdrew its request to join the Cotonou Agreement. He also added that Cuba does not intend to interrupt any of the cooperation programs that both parties carry out jointly. (Notimex, 2/6/03)

June 3: The Cuban Medical Brigade (CMB) in Ghana, comprising 189 health professionals spread throughout the country, held its fourth national scientific workshop in Accra. It was part of efforts, to strengthen the relationship between them and their Ghanaian counterparts. The Cubans offer various services in areas such as surgery, gynaecology, pediatrics and cardiology. (The Ghanaian Times, 3/6/03)

June 3: The 4th International Convention on Environment and Development got underway at Havana's International Convention Center with the participation of over 200 delegates from 18 countries. Among the invited guests are the Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources from Venezuela, Ana Elisa Osorio, and the mayor of Santa Monica, California, Mike Feinstein. Cuba's Minister of Science, Technology and the Environment, Rosa Elena Simeón, officially inaugurated the event. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/6/03)

June 3: Amnesty International has called for the immediate release of 75 dissidents jailed in a recent crackdown by the Cuban authorities. Amnesty has compiled a 91-page report detailing what it says were summary and unfair trials and protesting the length of the jail terms. The human rights organisation accuses the government of applying "harsh, previously unused legislation against individuals peacefully exercising their legitimate right to free expression". Amnesty

International has added the 75 names to its list of "prisoners of conscience". Previously it listed only 15 people held in Cuba. (BBC, The Guardian, 3/6/03)

June 3: South African Foreign Affairs Deputy Minister Aziz Pahad and Fernando Remírez de Estenoz, Cuba's first deputy foreign affairs minister, jointly chaired the second consultative meeting between the two countries in Havana, the South African government said. The forum was established after South Africa and Cuba signed a declaration of intent in March 2000, with the aim of discussing bilateral, multilateral, and regional issues of a political nature. Mamoepa said the meeting enabled South Africa and Cuba to improve co-operation. (Business Day, 3/6/03)

June 3: The authorities of the southeastern Brazilian state of Rio de Janeiro have adopted the Cuban model as part of their educational programme, in a bid to eradicate illiteracy in the state, an official source said. The state news agency, Agencia Brasil, indicated that Rio de Janeiro and Cuba began an experience exchange in the area of education in order to eradicate illiteracy from that region of Brazil. (Notimex, 5/6/03)

June 5: The Executive Committee of the Centrist Democrat International (CDI), presided over by Spanish President José María Aznar, approved a resolution demanding the Cuban government to "immediately cease its acts of violence, repression and terror." (Europa Press, 5/6/03)

June 5: The European Union has decided to impose several diplomatic sanctions against Cuba, because of its violation of fundamental freedoms and breaking the moratorium on the death penalty. The measures are a last-minute initiative from Greece in the twilight period of its six-month period as the EU's Presidency holder. The Greek Presidency made a short but sharp statement, saying that the EU will re-examine its relations with Cuba and several sanctions, like limiting high-level visits to Cuba. "The EU, deeply concerned about the continuing flagrant violation of human rights and of fundamental freedoms of members of the Cuban opposition and of independent journalists, being deprived of their freedom for having expressed freely their opinion, calls once again the Cuban authorities to release immediately all political prisoners", said the statement. (EUObserver, 6/6/03)

June 6: Cuba rejected European diplomatic sanctions over political repression on the island and said the European Union was bowing to pressure from the United States, Cuba's archenemy. "It is sad but there is no question that the European Union has been unable to formulate its own policy on Cuba," Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque told reporters. "It has given in under pressure to the aggressive US policy against Cuba," he said at a ceremony launching Havana's candidacy to hold the 2012 Olympic Games. The Cuban Foreign Ministry accused the European Union of being superficial in its analysis of recent events in Cuba. Pérez Roque said that the European Union had over-reacted to events on the island and had failed to properly assess "the realities and complexities of the situation," including the increased hostility and the present dangers for Cuba's independence." (Reuters, Radio Habana Cuba, 6/6/03)

June 6: The 4th International Convention on Environment and Development wrapped up at Havana's International Convention Center, with over 200 participants from some 18 countries. Over the past four days, delegates discussed a wide range of topics, including the importance of environmental education and ways to clean up sources of pollution. (Radio Habana Cuba, 6/6/03)

June 6: Delegates from 10 area countries are meeting in Havana for the Cultural Regional Committee of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). This is the first time a reunion of this nature takes place in a Spanish speaking nation that is not member of the organization. The 28 ministers of culture, and representatives of Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados governments, among others, will debate results of the recent CARICOM Human Resources Council that analyzed the Cuban case. A workshop between Canada and CARICOM was also organized. Cultural centers from the Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica, members of Cariforum, will also report their results. Preparations for Carifesta, the most important event in culture and economy in the area, will also be reviewed. (Prensa Latina, 6/6/03)

June 6: Cuban singer Carlos Manuel Pruneda announced in Mexico his intention to defect, where he had travelled with his band to perform in several concerts. Pruneda's defection comes at a time when he was enjoying great popularity in Cuba. (El Nuevo Herald, 6/6/03)

June 6: Canada will ask the Organization of American States to consider taking non-economic measures against Cuba in response to a crackdown on peaceful dissent, Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham said. In a telephone interview, Mr. Graham said the OAS should follow the lead of the 15-member European Union, which said it would cut back political and cultural contacts with the government of Fidel Castro due to the crackdown. Mr. Graham said he would steer clear of proposing economic sanctions, in line with Canada's long-standing opposition to the US trade embargo against Cuba. "Cutting out high-level meetings is a good way of sending a signal," Mr. Graham said. "Economic sanctions punish the people. We want measures to punish the elite." (The Globe and Mail, 7/6/03)

June 7: Fidel Castro accused the European Union of joining Washington in ganging up on Cuba after the EU cut back diplomatic and political ties in response to a crackdown on dissidents. "We must all remain calm, because a gang, a mafia, has joined the Yankee imperialists (...) disgracefully serving the Nazi-fascist government of the United States," he told some 7,000 people in a rally in a working-class suburb of Havana. While Castro did not name the EU, the comments clearly referred to the EU's decision to put diplomatic sanctions on Cuba.

June 7: Speaking about the sanctions imposed by the European Union on Cuba, Diego Ojeda, spokesman for European External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten, denied that the EU had been influenced by Washington and said that the Commission was just as critical of the United States for using the death penalty. "The decision-making process is completely autonomous," he said. "When we sense a marked deterioration of the situation, we react accordingly." On Castro's language, Ojeda said: "Those words speak for themselves." (Reuters, 7/6/03)

June 7: More than 500 prominent persons of the Latin-American and European cultural and political scenes signed a open letter against "repression in Cuba" published in the daily El País of Madrid, demanding the "immediate release" of imprisoned dissidents. The letter was promoted by the Asociación Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana which publishes a magazine by the same name. (El Nuevo Herald, 7/6/03)

June 9: Vice-President of Argentina, Daniel Scioli, said that the recent visit of Fidel Castro to that nation should not be interpreted as a change of his country's position on human rights. "Today more than ever Argentina favours democracy, freedom of the press, private ownership and above all the defence of human rights," said the Vice-President. (El Nuevo Herald, 9/6/03)

June 9: The 3rd Congress for Culture and Development, on the relationship of art, heritage, identity and economy, is meeting in Havana with participation of over 800 delegates from 37 countries. This is the largest meeting of its kind, and was summoned by the Cuban Culture Ministry to debate ties between development and culture, in forums, plenary sessions and conferences. The nations with the greatest number of delegates are Venezuela, Mexico, Colombia, Italy, France, Brazil and Guatemala. Ministers of Culture from Guatemala, Mozambique, Mali, Haiti and Ecuador; vice ministers from Venezuela, Virgin Islands and Angola, as well as representatives from the UN, UNESCO, SELA (The Latin American Economic System), and the Andres Bello Covenant are attending. (Prensa Latina, 9/6/03)

June 9: The 4th Forum of an organization for commerce promoters of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), took place in the Meliá Santiago Hotel in Santiago de Cuba. (AIN, 9/6/03)

June 10: A controversy has erupted over a decision by South African health authorities to employ 50 Cuban engineers and technicians to service medical equipment in South Africa. "The Freedom

Front (FF) rejects the government's justification given for the recruitment of Cuban engineers to work in South Africa," FF spokesperson on labour issues Pieter Groenewald said. "This recruitment takes place while many South African engineers cannot find work because of affirmative action and have to find work overseas." (Independent Online, 10/6/03)

June 10: The World Association of Newspapers (WAN), which celebrated its 56th Annual Congress in Dublin, condemned the jailing of independent journalist and poet Raúl Rivero and 25 of his colleagues by Cuban authorities. (El Nuevo Herald, 11/6/03)

June 10: At the close of 33rd General Assembly of the Organization of American States, Secretary General César Gaviria agreed to have the human rights situation in Cuba discussed at the OAS. (Radio Martí, 11/6/03)

June 10: In a meeting with new Argentine President Néstor Kirchner, US Secretary of State Colin Powell received indications that Argentina will not condone human rights abuses in Cuba, despite earlier signs of tighter Cuban-Argentine ties. Cuba was among the few issues raised by Powell during his 50-minute conversation with Kirchner, said Argentina's Foreign Minister Rafael Bielsa, who was at the meeting. (The Miami Herald, 11/6/03)

June 11: The Castro government, usually at odds with its longtime political foe the United States, turned its ire on the EU. "Cuba calmly but firmly issues a warning to the European embassies and to local US government mercenaries (dissidents) that it will not tolerate provocations or blackmail," Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said, referring to the EU sanctions. "European embassies should be conscious of the fact that they will be failing to meet their obligations under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations if they allow themselves to be used for subversion against Cuba," Perez Roque said in his statement, broadcast live to the nation. "It's too much", said the Cuban foreign minister Felipe Perez Roque. "After exhausting its patience and capacity for dialogue and tolerance, Cuba feels obliged to reply to what it considers to be the European Union's hypocritical and opportunist behaviour", the foreign minister added. (Reuters, EUObserver, 11/6/03)

June 11: Fidel Castro has slammed the EU's decision to scale back its diplomatic ties with Cuba as "grossly insolent", calling the leaders of Spain and Italy "fascists and bandits" for spearheading the anti-Cuba measures. Castro appeared on Cuban television to blast the EU's unanimous decision to review its common relationship with Cuba because of flagrant human rights violations. Castro singled out Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar calling him "a little Fuhrer with a mustache and Nazi-fascist ideology." "They (Spain and Italy) deserve these protest marches," Castro said during the four-hour television special dedicated to the EU conflict. Castro hinted that the Spanish embassy has been acting in collusion with US interests and ordered a review of Cuba's 1996 treaty with Spain concerning the Spanish Cultural Center -- which he described as "Cuban property" -- because the center "has been used for everything except Spanish culture. "If their mission as diplomats in Cuba is simply to maintain relations with mercenaries in the pay of the United States, then they are not wanted here," Castro said "El Comandante", in the late night television address characterized by his poor diction which at times made it difficult to understand his words clearly, said of (dictator Francisco) Franco: "Franco himself was more astute, cautious, operated and kept an absolute tenacity with respect to Cuba." (EFE, ABC, 11/6/03)

June 11: Fidel Castro said that the European Union (EU) would have the responsibility for an eventual US bombing of Cuba, because it undersigned a declaration condemning the government of the Caribbean island. "I want the record to show that if such a thing occurs [US military attack], those principally guilty will be those who have underwritten this document", the president declared in a special live broadcast on national radio and television. (Prensa Latina, 12/6/03)

June 11: EU spokesman, Diego de Ojeda, declined to specifically address Cuba's charges, instead repeating the bloc's current stance toward the island. "Our main objective is to integrate Cuba back into the community of democratic and market economy nations, of which Cuba is an

exception in her neighborhood," De Ojeda said. "In the best interest of both Cuba and ourselves and Cuban citizens, we need Cuba to at the very least respect a minimum standard of the most basic human rights." (AP, 12/6/03)

June 11: In response to her Cuban counterpart's allegations, Spanish Foreign Affairs Minister, Ana Palacio, said that the EU's common positions are adopted by "consensus". "I reserve any comment on such opinions since ours is a common position reached by consensus," she added. (Europa Press, 11/6/03)

June 12: Fidel Castro led hundreds of thousands of people in a march outside the Spanish Embassy to protest what he sees as Europe's alignment with US policies toward the communist island. Surrounded by security men and his closest aides, the 76-year-old Castro led a river of people past the white, colonial Spanish mission. The demonstration lasted about two hours but Castro stayed for only about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, a few kilometres away, Castro's brother and designated successor, Defence Minister General Raul Castro, headed a march outside Italy's Embassy. One sign showed Italian Prime Silvio Berlusconi with strings attached to his hands. "Berlusconi: are you, or are you not a puppet?" it said. (The Globe and Mail, 12/6/03)

June 12: In his three-hour speech at the closing of the 3rd International Congress of Culture and Development, Fidel Castro praised the "exceptional human virtues" of his Venezuelan counterpart, Hugo Chavez. In Castro's opinion, Chávez has only one fault: to want to help the poor. "I am a Chavez' follower and I know him very well", said the president, commenting on a cable in which White House National Security Council Special Envoy to Latin America Otto Reich holds Chavez responsible for Venezuela's economic problems. (Prensa Latina, 13/6/03)

June 12: With a letter sent to Italian defence minister Antonio Martino, senator Giovanni Crema - president of the inter-parliamentary union - resigned from the presidency of the bilateral section "Italy-Cuba friendship". "I acknowledged that, following the last tragic events, there is no possibility to communicate frankly". "My availability, as a democratic socialist, to take part in initiatives to help the Cuban people ferry across to a democracy respecting human rights is still intact, but it cannot be fruitful without a credible interlocutor". (AGI, 13/6/03)

June 12: Fidel Castro said that Europe should keep its mouth closed, because the mute do not speak, alluding to what he defined as the European Union's (EU) double morality regarding Cuba. The president spoke at the closing of the third Culture and Development Congress that took place in Havana, with the attendance of 800 delegates from 50 countries and 17 international organizations. Castro warned that massive demonstrations outside the Spanish and Italian embassies were just the beginning of what he called a "proper response" to a European Union declaration against his government. "The declaration, the sanction, the punishment by the European Union make it necessary for us to initiate a proper response," Castro said in his speech. (Prensa Latina, EFE, 13/6/03)

June 12: Fidel Castro's accusations and threats are "unacceptable", said a leading member of Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia party. The Vice-President of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Darío Rivolta, said "Cuba has everything to be part of the civilized world, but its dictator Fidel Castro, a serial killer using terror as a political weapon, stands in its way." (AFP, 12/6/03)

June 12: Former head of the Spanish government Felipe González said "Fidel is pathetic. Now he's like Franco when he was dying." González also thinks that "the Cuban transition will not be very dramatic." (Radio Martí, 13/6/03)

June 12: The Italian Foreign Ministry summoned Cuban ambassador in Rome, María de los Ángeles Flores, to express its "deep indignation" over Fidel Castro's offensive statements against Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. The Secretary-General at the Italian Foreign Ministry, Giuseppe Baldocci, said that Castro's statements were beyond compare, which the Italian government

along with most Italian political forces find unacceptable. Baldocci asked the Cuban Ambassador to remind her superiors "their responsibilities for safeguarding" the Italian diplomatic mission in Havana, their staff and the many Italian citizens who travel to Cuba on business and pleasure trips. (Encuentro en la Red, 13/6/03)

June 12: During a meeting with the press, Spanish Deputy Prime Minister and Economy Minister Rodrigo Rato denied accusations made by the Cuban Government against Spain. "The Cuban government is free to organize demonstrations in front of any embassy, but instead it should guarantee respect for human rights and better conditions for its citizens." He added that Spain "is a friend of Cuba." "What we want to see is a change in position on certain matters that clearly violate the rights of Cuban citizens," he said. (Radio Martí, 13/6/03)

June 12: Franco Frattini, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, said that "Castro's statements were threatening, saying that these ambassadors might not enjoy our acceptance anymore." "It is clear that our government must act as well as Europe", added Frattini. (Radio Martí, 13/6/03)

June 12: The President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Pierferdinando Casini, described as "shameful" Castro's attack against the governments of Spain and Italy. (Radio Martí, 13/6/03)

June 12: Intellectuals participating in a conference in Havana condemned the sanctions announced by the European Union (EU) against Cuba. In an international round table program in Havana, some of the delegates to the 3rd Congress on Culture and Development, like Brazilian Thiago de Melo, Spanish Jaime Losada, Chilean Volodia Teitelboim, and Canadian Keith Ellis stated their opinions. Among those present in the international round table program were Armando Hart, member of the Council of State and Cuban Minister for Culture Abel Prieto. (AIN, 12/6/03)

June 13: European Union Commission President Romano Prodi said that the EU's sanctions against Cuba were "absolutely inevitable" because of the communist government's recent behavior. Commenting to reporters in the southern Italian city of Lecce, Prodi justified the EU's measures, which were fiercely criticized by the Cuban government, and said "there was no way to avoid them." (EFE, 13/6/03)

June 13: The Spanish coalition Izquierda Unida (IU) asked the European Union (EU) to maintain an independent policy from the US concerning Cuba that favors political dialogue and international rights. In a communiqué issued in Madrid, IU expressed its opposition to the content of the recent EU declaration criticizing Cuba for human rights violations and which applies measures to pressure it. (Prensa Latina, 13/6/03)

June 13: Fidel Castro's government took its first major step in its anti-Europe campaign, taking control of the Spanish Embassy's cultural center. In 1995, Spain and Cuba agreed to establish a Spanish Cultural Center in the Cuban capital. The center, which opened in 1997, has been run until now by the Spanish International Cooperation Agency. Castro announced that he would give instructions to rescind the agreement and turn the Spanish Cultural Center into one that would bear the name of poet Federico Garcia Lorca, who was killed by fascists during the Spanish Civil War. (The Toronto Star, EFE, 13/6/03)

June 13: The Mexican ambassador to Cuba, Roberta Lajous, stated that "México is into Cuba as much as Cuba is into México", at an event commemorating the 40th anniversary of relations between Cuba and Mexico, organized by Cuban-Mexican Friendship Society. When condemning the US blockade against the island, she said "in our historic memory there is the bitter remembrance of such injustices, and that is why my country has been a bridge to Cuba. It is and it will be so, because Mexicans want it like that", she confirmed. (AIN, 13/6/03)

June 14: The First Vice-President of the Spanish government, Mariano Rajoy, refused to comment on Cuban government accusations against Spanish premier José M. Aznar saying they

"speak for themselves." (El Nuevo Herald, 14/6/03)

June 14: Fidel Castro snubbed the visiting leader of Portugal's Communist party because of the latter's criticism of a recent crackdown on dissidents on the communist island, Portuguese media reported. Portuguese Communist party sources told the weekly Expresso newspaper that Castro's refusal to meet with Carlos Carvalhas was a punishment for his vocal condemnation of the crackdown. (AFP, 14/6/03)

June 14: India's State Minister for International Affairs Shri Digvijay Singh is in Havana invited by his Cuban counterpart Felipe Pérez Roque. (Radio Habana Cuba, 14/6/03)

June 16: European Union foreign ministers said recent anti-European demonstrations in Havana were "unacceptable" and reiterated their demand that Cuba end its brutal crackdown on democratic protesters. The 15 ministers said they had continuing "grave concerns about the serious deterioration of the human rights situation" in Cuba, adding recent protests against the EU, led by Fidel Castro, did not help. "The behavior of the Cuban authorities toward the EU, its member states and acceding states (were) unacceptable," the ministers said in a statement. They added that they would "continue to monitor" the situation in Cuba, and especially how Cuban opposition leaders and supporters were being treated. Beyond saying that they had started a "review of relations" with Cuba, the foreign ministers did not discuss whether the EU should impose economic or further political sanctions against Castro. (AP, 16/6/03)

June 16: Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini added his voice to the chorus of protest against Fidel Castro following his recent attacks on the European Union. The minister stressed he was in favor of urgent humanitarian aid to Cuba, but opposed to any kind of financial help that would "encourage the regime to continue along its current path". Frattini made his comments ahead of a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Luxembourg which will discuss further action against the Cuban government following its latest crackdown on dissidents. (ANSA, 16/6/03)

June 16: Spanish Foreign Minister Ana Palacio reiterated that Madrid would not be drawn into a verbal battle with Fidel Castro over the EU's decision to slap political sanctions on the communist island for rights abuses. "With respect to certain statements (from Cuba) aimed against two states -- Italy and Spain, the position of the (Spanish) government is to not enter into a spiral of verbal abuse," Palacio said upon arriving at an EU meeting of foreign ministers to discuss the bloc's relations with Cuba. (EFE, 16/6/03)

June 16: Belgian Foreign Minister Louis Michel rejected any implementation of EU sanctions against Cuba, calling instead for more political dialogue between Europe and the communist island. "I am not in favor of sanctions (...) not for Cuba or any other country," Michel stressed. (EFE, 16/3/03)

June 16: Cuba's Ambassador to Spain, Isabel Allende, has demanded that her country be treated equally and with respect by the European Union. During a news conference at the Cuban Embassy in Madrid, Havana's representative noted that her country's relations with Spain have always been based on mutual respect, non-intervention in the internal affairs of each country and the right of self-determination. The Spanish government is solely responsible for the deterioration of relations with Cuba, the ambassador said, (Radio Habana Cuba, Xinhuanet, 17/6/03)

June 16: Spain's Foreign Ministry summoned the Cuban Ambassador to that country, Isabel Allende, to express the discomfort of Spanish authorities over the recent behaviour of the Castro regime. (ABC, 17/6/03)

June 16: The lower house of the Polish Parliament called upon the government of Fidel Castro to respect the human rights of its citizens. The resolution was passed 330 votes to 9, and 65 abstentions. (Radio Martí, 16/6/03)

June 16: The European Union's top foreign affairs representative said that the situation in Cuba was dramatic and becoming downright "grotesque." "Unfortunately, there's not much we can do," Spain's Javier Solana told reporters, referring to possible EU measures to end the crisis in Europe's relations with the Caribbean island. According to Solana, "there would have to be profound changes in Cuba, a country that is becoming very difficult to understand, even for people who can see the bigger picture." Regarding changes that might be adopted in the upcoming review of the EU's common policy toward Cuba, Solana has said that it "would be difficult to make it harsher," vowing to reject any decision "which could imply actions affecting the Cuban people." (EFE, 17/6/03)

June 17: Former Czech President and dissident Vaclav Havel wants to become actively engaged in protection of human rights in Cuba, Foreign Minister Cyril Svoboda told journalists. Czech diplomacy intends to provide material aid to the Cuban opposition suppressed by the regime of Fidel Castro, Svoboda said. "We want to increase the interest of the world community," Svoboda said. (CTK, 17/6/03)

June 17: Algerian Foreign Minister Mohamed Cherif Abbas has arrived in the Cuban capital to begin an official visit to the island. The African official was met at Havana's José Martí International Airport by retired General Rafael Moracén Limonta and other high-ranking Cuban representatives. (Radio Habana Cuba, 17/6/03)

June 17: A US federal judge has granted a motion for a retrial for Canadian salesman James Sabzali, convicted last April for violating the US embargo against Cuba, because of prosecutorial misconduct. In a 31-page ruling, Justice Mary McLaughlin wrote she was "very concerned" by "inflammatory language (. . .) strewn throughout the (prosecutor's closing) argument." Declaring that "it is never proper to throw around such inflammatory language in a criminal trial," McLaughlin wrote that a prosecutor's "repeated" charges of defence lying served to "stir up the jury" and had "no place in the argument of an Assistant United States Attorney." The US Justice Department undertook a five-year investigation that resulted in a three-week trial. (Canadian Press, 17/6/03)

June 17: Havana has ruled out any visits by Mexican lawmakers seeking to meet with dissidents about the state of human rights on the Caribbean island, Cuban Ambassador Jaime Bolanos said. (EFE, 17/6/03)

June 17: Venezuela's education minister defended a plan to use Cuban volunteers for a nationwide literacy program, saying the government only wanted to use Cuba's successful experience in teaching people to read. Critics say the plan is aimed more at indoctrinating Venezuelans with socialist ideals than making them literate. (Orlando Sentinel, 17/6/03)

June 18: Austrian and Cuban Justice ministers Dieter Bohmdorfer and Roberto Diaz, respectively, will sign a cooperation memorandum in this sector to strengthen links between both nations. Bohmdorfer and his delegation met with Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage, Attorney General of the Republic Juan Escalona, and Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon. The visitor also met Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. (Prensa Latina, 18/6/03)

June 18: Fidel Castro has accepted an invitation to visit India, but the date has not been set, the Indian foreign ministry said. India's junior foreign minister Digvijay Singh invited Castro during a visit to Havana. "He has accepted the invitation. Dates are being worked out through diplomatic channels," foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna told reporters. (AP, 18/6/03)

June 18: The 64th Latin American Civil Aviation Commission Executive Committee meeting (CLAC) began its meeting at the Cuban tourist resort of Varadero Beach, to analyze the situation of the services of air navigation in this region. According to Cuban newspaper Granma, the event will discuss aircraft security and protection, services to customers, the organization of airports and professional training for its personnel and the airlines. (Prensa Latina, 18/6/03)

June 19: In an article published in the weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur*, former French socialist Prime Minister Laurent Fabius criticized France's "silence" in the wake of the human rights violations committed by the government of Fidel Castro, whom he described as a "dictator." (Notimex, 19/6/03)

June 19: Several members of the European Parliament (MEP) are calling on EU leaders to pursue a yet tougher course against Fidel Castro's regime. In a letter to the three EU presidents (of the Parliament, Council and Commission) and to the EU's chief for foreign affairs, Javier Solana, a group of MEPs headed by Portuguese conservative MEP, José Ribeiro e Castro have asked the EU to step up contacts with Cuban dissidents. As a show of solidarity with the Cuban opposition MEPs have asked leaders to contact, Oswaldo Payá, a leading dissident in Havana and invite him to meet with the leaders at the highest level. This would also allow Mr Payá to personally inform Europeans about the current situation on the island. (EUObserver, 19/6/03)

June 19: In a report titled "The Internet under Surveillance", Reporters Without Borders devotes a chapter to the difficult situation of internet users on the island where Internet access is restricted and tightly monitored and where access permits must be obtained and equipment is rationed. The internet in Cuba is a very limited affair, notes the report. (Radio Martí, 19/6/03)

June 20: Fidel Castro Diaz-Balart, son of Fidel Castro, is in Lebanon to promote the sharing and development of expertise and knowledge in scientific and educational fields. Castro, a nuclear physicist, visited Speaker Nabih Berri at his residence and discussed the special relations that bind Cuba and Lebanon. (The Daily Star, 20/6/03)

June 20: A cold war has broken out at a librarians' conference in downtown Toronto as accusations fly that pro-Castro elements within the American Library Association are trying to silence debate over Cuba's crackdown on independent libraries. The ALA has "secretly manoeuvred to have only pro-Cuban voices" on a discussion panel, said Robert Kent, a co-founder of the Friends of Cuban Libraries and a librarian with the New York Public Library. He also stated that "the extremists within the ALA are going to try to pack the meeting to exclude people who might be critical of the Cuban government." (National Post, 20/6/03)

June 20: The European Union heads of state or government have condemned as "totally unacceptable" the recent behaviour of Cuban authorities regarding the EU and expressed concern over "the violation of fundamental freedoms in Cuba." The 25 EU heads of state or government thus support the position adopted by their foreign ministers, ratifying at the same time the punitive measures and diplomatic sanctions announced on June 5. (El Mundo, 21/6/03)

June 20: France decided to reassess its cooperation with Cuba given the human rights situation on the island, announced the spokesman for the French Foreign Ministry, Francois Rivesseau. In a press conference in Paris, the spokesman said the decision was taken nationally in the wake of the latest developments in Cuba. (Radio Martí, 20/6/03)

June 21: The Cuban government placed a billboard-sized reproduction of Pablo Picasso's Spanish Civil War mural "Guernica" in front of Spain's embassy in Havana. "Right here a monument to Spanish culture will be erected," reads a banner above the artwork, while on the bottom part - in large block letters - is the word "antifascist." (EFE, 21/6/03)

June 21: Fidel Castro congratulated counterpart Hugo Chavez for the literacy program he is launching in Venezuela, predicting that its results would have "an impact on the hemisphere and the world." The literacy plan, which draws heavily on Havana's own educational models and calls for participation by Cuban teachers and advisers, has drawn sharp criticism from opponents of Venezuela's left-wing populist president. "I congratulate you (...) for your immense wisdom and courage in fighting to draw millions of people out of the darkness," said Castro's message to Chavez, which was cited in the front pages of the official press and read on state television.

"Venezuela could attain in 10 to 15 years what it took Cuba 44 to achieve," he added. (EFE, 21/6/03)

June 21: The 12th National Conference in Solidarity with Cuba finishes in the Brazilian capital after approving a solidarity action plan for the next 12 months. During the third day of the conference, some 200 delegates from 20 Brazilian solidarity groups discussed ways to improve their work and prepare for next year's meeting which will take place in August. They also announced preparations to celebrate the 50th anniversary on the attack against the Moncada Garrison on July 26th, the date which marks the beginning of the Cuban Revolution. (Radio Habana Cuba, 21/6/03)

June 23: Clara Chepe Núñez addressed Kofi Annan in a letter asking him to "very urgently" appeal to the Cuban government so that her son gets the medical treatment he requires, in a Havana hospital. Oscar Espinosa Chepe was sentenced to 20 years in jail during the crackdown on dissidents last April. (Radio Martí, 23/6/03)

June 24: The daughter of Latin America's most-recognized revolutionary, Che Guevara, said that revolution still isn't easy. "We don't say others should do what Cuba has done," said Aleida Guevara, celebrating the 75th anniversary of Guevara's birth in his native country, Argentina. "Every people has to choose its path and decide if it wants to change its society or not," she said. "A society that is different can help achieve important things for a people like ours," she said. "A lot of people don't like Cuban society. Young people have decided to leave and we can't blame them. It's not easy. I tell you sincerely, it's not easy." (News 24, 25/6/03)

June 24: The European Commission considers Cuba's ratification of the lengthy sentences imposed on dissidents a sign that Cuban leaders do not understand the damage that suppression of free speech does to the island's international image. A spokesman for the European Commission said the court action constitutes "a confirmation that the Cuban regime has still not understood that [its behavior] is very harmful to its international image and its relations with the European Union." (EFE, 25/6/03)

June 24: The national coordinator of Italy's Green Party, Angelo Bonelli, began a hunger strike for the release of a group of Cuban dissidents from prison and to protest against the ratification by Cuba's Popular Supreme Court of the harsh sentences imposed on them. (AFP, 24/6/03)

June 24: Trinidad and Tobago Foreign Minister Knowlson Gift is heading a trade mission of Trinidad and Tobago companies, which will call for the strengthening of relations with Cuba. (Prensa Latina, 25/6/03)

June 24: Sergio Corrieri, president of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), continues making solidarity contacts in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's second most important city. Corrieri and Israel Sosa, leader of the Cuban Young Communist Union, gave a conference on different aspects of the Cuban reality to students from the State University of Rio de Janeiro. (Prensa Latina, 25/6/03)

June 25: A joint committee of Cuban and Colombian officials was set to meet in Bogotá to review progress made on cooperation agreements the two countries signed last year in Havana, the Colombian Foreign Ministry said. It said the evaluation would be made by top officials from the foreign ministry and Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation (MINVEC). (EFE, 25/6/03)

June 25: To mark the 100th day since the round-up of dissidents, Reporters Without Borders announced the launch of an awareness campaign targeted at French tourists going to Cuba this summer. To complete the picture of press freedom violations in Cuba, Reporters Without Borders is releasing the findings of investigations into the working conditions for foreign correspondents in Havana and for the Catholic press, the only privately-owned press tolerated by the government.

(Reporters Without Borders, 25/6/03)

June 26: Fourteen female members of parliament of the Italian Leftist Democrats party proposed a motion to Parliament requesting the release from prison of Cuban dissident Martha Beatriz Roque, sentenced to 20 years in prison by the Fidel Castro regime. (AP, 26/6/03)

June 26: The mother of dissident Oscar Espinoza Chepe sent a letter to Angelo Bonelli, Executive Coordinator of Italian Green Party, asking him not to continue on hunger strike. "You have deeply moved me with your action", said Clara Chepe, but "You will add an extra sorrow to the ones I already have", she added. (Cubamet, 26/6/03)

June 27: The United Nations' top human rights official for Cuba has urged Fidel Castro to pardon the peaceful dissidents, union organizers and independent journalists sentenced to over 1,000 years in jail, terms that were ratified by Cuba's Supreme court. Special human rights representative Christine Chanet confirmed that she had forwarded that request to the Cuban leader after the high court confirmed sentences slapped in summary trials on 50 of the 75 individuals who were condemned to an average 20 years apiece in jail. (EFE, 27/6/03)

June 27: Canadian flute player Jane Bunnett and a group of Cuban musicians won the Jazz Award granted by the Jazz Journalist Association. The award, in the category of Latin Record of the Year, acknowledged the musical work in the CD "Cuban Odyssey", released by the recording house Blue Note. Renowned Cuban Latin jazz musicians, such as singer Bobby Carcassés, who also plays several instruments, percussionists Tata Güines and José Luis Quintana (Changuito), and piano players Guillermo Rubalcaba and Hilario Durán, took part in the recording. (Prensa Latina, 28/6/03)

June 27: Two agreements for academic cooperation -- the only of their kind in Latin America -- have been signed in Mexico City between the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and the Havana Higher Institute of Medical Sciences (ISCMH). The agreements, to develop joint doctoral programs in biomedical sciences and nursing, will include a student exchange program, granting academic degrees and a program of joint tutors. (Radio Habana Cuba, 27/6/03)

June 27: Ecuadorian National Sports Secretary Luis Tapia has confirmed that eleven scholarships have been awarded to Ecuadorian indigenous young people to study in Cuba. According to the sports secretary, the young students will specialize in physical education at Havana's International Sports School, where students from a number of Latin American countries are studying. (Radio Habana Cuba, 27/6/03)

June 27: The government of Fidel Castro has sent a reassuring message to Spanish and Italian businesspeople amid the recent spat with the European Union. The head of Cuban diplomacy, Felipe Pérez Roque, met with about a hundred Spanish businesspeople to assure them that the current state of relations with the Aznar government does not have anything to do with their business relations. These "will not be affected", he added. (El País, 28/6/03)

June 29: The Czech government wants to give Vaclav Havel a permanent job as a good-will ambassador. Havel's assignment will be something dear to his heart: rallying support around the world for democracy and human rights in Cuba -- something of a pet cause among Czech politicians, many of whom were once anticommunist dissidents. He would also help resolve disputes between the Czech Republic and the EU. (The Boston Globe, 29/6/03)

June 29: Former Beatle Paul McCartney is considering holding a concert in Cuba next year, and is sending his agents to the island to work out the details, the Juventud Rebelde newspaper has reported. Cuban authorities, including Culture Minister Abel Prieto, have already approved the concert, the paper said. McCartney travelled to Cuba with his children in January 2000, to find out more about the island's traditional music. (ABC, 29/6/03)

June 30: Hugo Chávez paid a visit to Cuba, but the trip was kept secret until an official announcement was made, after the Venezuelan president had already left the island. State-run Cuban television said that Chavez had met with Cuban leader Fidel Castro about bilateral projects and visited Venezuelans in Cuban hospitals for specialized medical care. The statement said: "The brief visit to the island of the head of the Bolivarian revolution highlighted once more the ties of brotherhood and solidarity between the peoples of Bolivar and Marti." (AFP, 30/6/03, El País, 2/7/03)

Security

June 2: A Vietnamese military delegation arrived in Havana, headed by General Lieutenant Le Van Dung, chief of the General Political Direction of the Army and Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of that country. The delegation's visiting schedule includes military units, teaching centers and meetings with Armed Forces leaders as well. (AIN, 2/6/03)

June 3: Army General, Raúl Castro Ruz, Minister of Revolutionary Armed Forces, greeted Lieutenant General, Le Van Dung, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Viet Nam and chief of the Political General Direction of the Popular Army. The meeting was held during official talks carried out at Armed Forces' headquarter between the Vietnamese military delegation and Chief Vice minister of Major General State, Body Army General , Alvaro López Miera. (AIN, 3/6/03)

June 26: Cuba complies with all atomic energy safety standards, according to a senior official of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). "Cuba is in compliance with the established norms, which is encouraging not only for us but for its own population as well," said Ana María Cotto, deputy director general of IAEA. (AP, 26/6/03)

Terrorism

June 6: Plans for an execution chamber at the Guantánamo Bay naval station in Cuba are being studied by the US military as it prepares to bring suspected al-Qaida and Taliban terrorists to trial later this year. The execution chamber could be part of a permanent prison at the US Navy base where the military is holding about 680 detainees captured during the war in Afghanistan, according to plans being developed by the commander of the prison camp. (Sun Sentinel, 6/6/03)

June 24: It is reported that in a hearing with the Senate Intelligence Committee on prewar reports, senior intelligence expert, identified by several officials as Christian Westermann, made it clear that he had felt pressure from John Bolton, the under secretary of state for arms control and international security. He said that pressures originally dated to a clash the two had over Mr. Bolton's public assertions last year that Cuba had a biological weapons program. Mr. Westermann argued those assertions were not supported by sufficient intelligence. Mr. Bolton declined to comment on the matter. Mr. Westermann also declined to comment. (The New York Times, 24/6/03)

US-Cuba Relations

June 2: Two Cuban planes used in two separate hijackings earlier this year were auctioned off for \$19,000, with the proceeds going to help pay off a \$27.1 million settlement awarded to the ex-wife of a Cuban double agent. Two friends from Colorado successfully bid for the titles to the Soviet-era Antonov AN-24 once operated by Cubana de Aviacion and Aerotaxi DC-3. Wayne Van Heusden, an aircraft owner from Frederick, Colo., paid \$12,500 for the 1950s era DC-3. His friend Matthew Overton, a mechanic and pilot from Greeley, Colo., paid \$6,500 for the Antonov. (AP, 2/6/03)

June 2: The United States is concerned about the health of several political prisoners in Cuba, according to a statement issued by State Department Deputy Spokesman Philip Reeker. Reeker said that several of the 75 Cuban dissidents arrested and sentenced to long jail terms in March 2003 are ill and require immediate access to adequate health care. He called on the Cuban government to immediately release all 75 of the political prisoners or, at a minimum, provide them with the necessary health care, cease the inhumane treatment of these prisoners and allow humanitarian organizations to monitor their treatment. (Washington File, 2/6/03)

June 3: So far, at least 372,158 people have signed a declaration that criticizes the US war in Iraq and defends Cuba's crackdown on dissent as a necessary measure in the face of an imminent US attack on the island. Everyone from legendary ballerina Alicia Alonso to Grammy-winning musician Chucho Valdes to the Cuban Esperanto Society to the Cuban Association of Cocker Spaniels has joined a campaign that's been labeled in Havana as the Worldwide Anti-Fascist Front. As the numbers multiplied, Cuba published six special newspaper sections containing the names of thousands of architects, accountants, nutritionists, engineers, chemists, geologists, comedians, gym teachers, designers and others. (Chicago Tribune, 3/6/03)

June 3: Kevin Whitaker, coordinator of the Cuban Affairs Office of the US State Department, reaffirmed his support to the Cuban people and reminded that both Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Colin Powell have expressed on several occasions that the United States has no military objective in Cuba. "The United States respects Cuba's sovereignty", he added. Whitaker also pointed out that the US continues committed to the migratory accords which stipulate that only safe, legal and orderly migration from Cuba will be accepted. (Radio Martí, 3/6/03)

June 3: Amnesty International wants the US government to rethink its embargo against Cuba, a measure the group said has not helped improve human rights. "We recognize that the embargo is an ineffective mechanism for promoting human rights, and the organization is gravely concerned that in some situations it has contributed to abuses," said Dr. William F. Schulz, executive director of Amnesty International USA. (AP, 3/6/03)

June 3: The danger of a US military attack against Cuba is real and should not be underestimated, according to an article that appears in the Cuban newspaper Trabajadores. Lázaro Barredo writes that Washington "is running out of choices in its stubborn, warmongering policy regarding Cuba." He points out that the United States is currently "in a state of arrogant euphoria," thinking it has the right to carry out a policy of unilateral, "pre-emptive" wars. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/6/03)

June 3: Five Cubans attempting to reach the coasts of Florida illegally were intercepted by the US Coast Guard. (EFE, 3/6/03)

June 4: The judicial process to which five Cubans accused of espionage are submitted in the United States is an attempt to hide the past, present, and planned future terrorist actions of that country against Cuba, Cuban Congressional president Ricardo Alarcón denounced. At the opening of an exhibit of the cartoons of Gerardo Hernández, who is one of the Cubans sentenced for spying in the US, Alarcon pointed out that lack of information about the case is the Achilles' heel for the liberation of the five men, imprisoned for allegedly endangering national security of the United States. (Prensa Latina, 4/6/03)

June 5: Attorneys for six Cuban men accused of commandeering a DC-3 in March from Cuba's Isle of Youth to Key West are asking a federal court to order the U.S. government to press Cuba to give defense lawyers a tour of the tiny airport from which the plane departed. Given the rocky state of relations between the United States and Cuba, however, it's not clear whether U.S. diplomats ordered to try to persuade Cuba to cooperate would get very far. (The Miami Herald, 5/6/03)

June 5: The United States asked Cuba to remove barriers to orderly emigration in semiannual talks on the issue, the State Department said. The US government presented Cuba with a list of 636 people denied exit permits by Fidel Castro and demanded that they be allowed to emigrate to the United States. Kevin Whitaker, coordinator for Cuban affairs in the U.S. State Department, presented the list at talks at the US Mission to the United Nations aimed at promoting orderly migration between the two countries. The talks happen every six months. The accords were designed to provide for orderly emigration from the communist island to the United States. Cuba, for its part, said it would request a detailed analysis of several recent incidents involving migrants to the United States. The Foreign Ministry's statement did not specify which incidents, but they are likely to include the hijacking of two Cuban commercial airliners and a ferry. (AFP, AP, 6/6/03)

June 6: A Cuban rafter confined in the Guantánamo Naval base, has been denied access to counsel and relatives, and hasn't even been informed that Panama has offered him political asylum, denounced Judicial Watch. According to the organization, immigration authorities of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have not allowed lawyers to contact their client Ramón Aguilar Hernández, a rafter who was caught before reaching the coasts of Key Largo. (El Nuevo Herald, 7/6/03)

June 6: The United States and Cuba have clashed over migration policy during the latest round of talks under a 1994 pact aimed at ensuring safe and legal migration. Cuban and US diplomats met at U.N. headquarters in New York, where Cuba accused the United States of cutting back on issuing visas. Rafael Dausa, a senior Cuban foreign ministry official, said the 1994 agreement calls for the United States to issue 20,000 entry visas a year to Cubans who want to emigrate. So far this year, he said only 1,200 visas have been issued. Mr. Dausa said the US aim is to encourage Cubans to migrate illegally through hijackings and dangerous human smuggling schemes. But US spokesman Richard Grenell said Cuba has failed to grant exit visas to 636 Cubans who already hold US entry visas. (VOA, 6/6/03)

June 8: US Secretary of State Colin Powell, in Santiago de Chile for a meeting of foreign ministers from the western hemisphere, said he hopes the United States and the European Union can forge a common front to encourage Cuba to permit dissent. Powell told reporters while en route that he planned to address the Cuba issue "rather directly" when he speaks to a meeting of Organization of American States foreign ministers. The rest of the world is now starting to take note of Castro's increasingly poor human rights. "I will point out once again that Castro's Cuba remains an anachronism in our hemisphere and it is not getting better," Powell added. (AP, AFP, 9/6/03)

June 9: Five Cuban men convicted of spying in the United States have spawned a loyal following in the United States, led by activists who have long supported the Cuban revolution. "Quite a number of us across the country who work together in support of Cuba's right to exist formed the National Committee to Free the Five Cuban Political Prisoners," said Gloria La Riva of San Francisco, one of the founders. "The reason we picked a long name is because we want people to know that they're prisoners in the US and that they're political prisoners." Those activists have had rallies, collected donations, pored over legal documents, participated in news conferences about each appeal in the case and maintained a Web site for the men, who they think were only trying to protect their country by infiltrating Cuban exile groups in Miami. They have advocated for the men with the same fervor as the Cuban government, something that irks Cuban exiles, who say the men were a threat to the United States. (Sun Sentinel, 9/6/03)

June 9: Secretary of State Colin Powell challenged Organization of American State foreign ministers to join the United States in finding ways to "hasten the inevitable democratic transition in Cuba." Powell told his 34 colleagues from Latin America and the Caribbean that any such steps would be consistent with the OAS Inter-American Democratic Charter, approved in 2001. The charter, Powell said in a speech, "declares that the people of the Americas have a right to democracy. It does not say the peoples of the Americas except Cubans have a right to democracy." Powell criticized the March crackdown on Cuban dissidents, saying these activists

were merely seeking to "act on their basic human rights." He also protested what he called the "harsh sentences" meted against them. The Cuban issue generally has been off-limits for the OAS. (AP, 9/6/03)

June 11: The United States has cited 15 nations, including NATO allies Greece and Turkey, for failing to adequately fight sex trafficking, opening the way for possible sanctions. In addition to Greece and Turkey, the nations affected are: Belize, Bosnia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Georgia, Haiti, Kazakhstan, Liberia, Burma, North Korea, Sudan, Suriname and Uzbekistan, the State Department said in its third annual "Trafficking in Persons" report. (Townsville Bulletin)

June 12: "Infamous, crude, and cynical," is the way Fidel Castro categorized the US State Department report placing Cuba on a list of countries trafficking in people. At the closing of the III International Culture and Development Congress in the capital, Castro reacted with indignation to the accusations in this document, which states that "minors in the Caribbean country are victims of tourist industry sexual exploitation." (Prensa Latina, 12/6/03)

June 13: Rodolfo Dávalos, distinguished Cuban lawyer, said that the correct way to proceed in the case of the five Cubans imprisoned in US since 1998 (the Five) would be to annul the entire legal process. "If reason and justice are really imposed in Atlanta, according to law, everything ruled should be thrown out starting from the first denial for a change of venue for the trial," said Dávalos, interviewed by the local press in Matanzas. (Prensa Latina, 13/6/03)

June 14: The Mississippi State Port at Gulfport shipped Southern yellow pine to Cuba. Ships have left Gulfport since December 2001, with frozen chickens to Havana. The most recent shipment left, this time with lumber. (Biloxi Sun, 14/6/03)

June 15: Eight Cubans were spotted on the beach in Florida and were taken into custody by US Border Patrol agents, officials said. Officers recovered a 19-foot boat and believe the migrants may have been smuggled to shore, although that was still under investigation, Border Patrol spokesman Keith Roberts said. Witnesses saw the seven men and one woman and called police, who in turn contacted Border Patrol officers, Roberts said. The migrants were being held for questioning in Pembroke Pines, officials said. (Las Vegas Sun, 15/6/03)

June 17: US aggression is ultimately to blame for Cuba's much-criticized crackdown on dissidents, the country's ambassador to Canada says. "We're threatened by the United States," Carlos Fernandez de Cossío told the press. "The day we have peace, Cuba will be very different than it is today." Cossío argued the crackdown is a matter of self-defence, given a US leadership that has become aggressive after terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, and elsewhere. (The Toronto Star, 18/6/03)

June 17: US officials have denied permission for travel to Cuba to organizers of last year's unprecedented US Food and Agribusiness Exhibition in Havana, as part of the Bush administration's reply to the dissident crackdown on the island. In a letter made public, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, which issues the travel licenses, stated that two travel requests were denied "based on foreign policy guidance received from the Department of State." Exhibition organizers had applied for separate licenses to travel to Cuba to organize a second food and agricultural fair in Havana as well as a healthcare exhibition. (The Miami Herald, 18/6/03)

June 17: The worldwide dispute over rum hit Washington as the US Congress considered a bill that would bring a longstanding trademark dispute between Pernod Ricard, the spirits company, and its rival Bacardi to a federal court. At stake is control of the Havana Club brand name, a foothold in the potentially lucrative US market for Cuban rum and worldwide trademark protocols. The bipartisan measure would repeal an obscure, Bacardi-backed passage of a 1998 appropriations bill, Section 211, that halted a pending trial to award the Havana Club trademark and send the dispute back to federal court. (Havana Journal, 18/6/03)

June 19: Two Cuban veterinary inspectors are on a tour of several U.S. livestock farms to make arrangements for the first cattle sales to Cuba in more than forty years. (El Nuevo Herald, 19/6/03)

June 21: Cuba's national libraries director accused the United States of bankrolling small, independent book lenders in the island nation to undermine its communist government. As part of a crackdown on Cuba's dissident community, fourteen people who ran small libraries from their homes in Cuba were arrested in March and given hefty prison terms. Cuba says the dissidents were arrested for accepting US government money, a charge US officials and the dissidents deny. "The independent libraries have (...) demonstrated they are receiving money to subvert the institutional order of Cuba," Eliades Acosta said at a book convention in Toronto. (The Globe and Mail, 21/6/03)

June 21: One of Cuba's most popular musical groups, Los Van Van is on a tour of the United States and is scheduled to perform in eight cities. (Radio Habana Cuba, 21/6/03)

June 23: The US Supreme Court refused to hear a Justice Department appeal of a ruling that limited how long the government may detain certain immigrants stopped at the nation's border while attempting to enter illegally. The appeals court said the 2001 ruling, which involved immigrants already residing in the United States, would also apply to "excludable aliens" who had been apprehended at the US border. The case involved Mario Rosales-Garcia and Reynero Carballo, Cuban nationals who had been stopped at the border as they attempted to enter the United States illegally as part of the 1980 Mariel boatlift. They then were granted immigration parole. After committing various crimes, their paroles were revoked and the US government sought to deport them. Cuba refused to accept them, and US immigration officials detained them. (Reuters, 23/6/03)

June 24: Ricardo Alarcón, President of the Cuban parliament stated that the country will overcome perils of a North American aggressions, with unity and patriotism. Alarcon explained that the improvement of Cuban society is of the foremost importance, mainly in its daily duties, avoiding indiscipline and denouncing the enemy's intention. The mission of the islands' intellectuals is to help the people to understand the great challenge the island has for long faced right from the moment it came up as a nation struggling against hegemony from the mightiest power on earth at present. (AIN, 24/6/03)

June 24: Twenty Cuban migrants landed on an island in Biscayne National Park and were turned over to immigration officials, a Coast Guard spokeswoman said. The 15 men and five women landed at Boca Chita Key and appeared to be in good condition, said Anastasia Burns, a Miami-based Coast Guard spokeswoman. (The Miami Herald, 25/6/03)

June 24: A group of sixty specialists coming from thirty universities of the United States have gathered to take active part in the Fifteen Conference of Philosophers and Scientists that had already began in Havana City. Cliff Durand , professor of Social Philosophy and general coordinator of the North American delegation warned of serious dangers for Cuba and South nations because of the policy making of a bunch of Conservatives that are ruling the fates of the Northern nation after the September 11 aftermath. (AIN, 24/6/03)

June 24: Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage released the report "Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record 2002-2003", saying it covers "our work in some 92 countries -including Cuba-with especially problematic and persistent human rights violations." (Washington File, 24/6/03)

June 26: Executives from US travel agencies have founded the Association of Travel Related Industry Professionals (ATRIP), which aims at defending the right to travel freely and announced that they will fight to end the ban on travel to Cuba. (AFP, 26/6/03)

June 26: A wealthy Topsfield woman whose ugly custody battle escalated into an international child kidnapping saga when her ex-husband whisked their two children away to Egypt on a private jet was reunited with her son and daughter after a two-year ordeal that spanned three continents. Cornelia Streeter finally laid eyes on her children after Cuban authorities arrested Anwar E. "Nuri" Wissa Jr. on his yacht in Havana's upscale Marina Hemingway and took the children into custody. Twelve hours after Wissa's arrest, Streeter arrived in Havana and was reunited with Henry, 9, and Victoria, 7, who had been living on the boat. (The Boston Globe, 27/6/03)

June 26: About 65 Dominicans and 10 Cubans landed in a motorboat on a small Puerto Rican island and were being held by authorities, US officials said. The 32-foot (10-meter) wooden boat was having mechanical troubles when it landed on Isla Mona, 40 miles (65 kilometers) west of the main island of Puerto Rico, US Border Patrol agent Roy Hoats said. A US Coast Guard helicopter took two of the migrants -- a pregnant woman and a man complaining of ankle pain -- to a hospital in Mayaguez, on the US territory's western coast. The rest of the migrants, who have been in the custody of the Puerto Rico Natural Resources Department on Mona Island, were to be brought to Mayaguez for immigration proceedings, Hoats said. No further details were immediately available. (CNN, 27/6/03)

June 28: The Philadelphia Boys Choir performed at Havana's Amadeo Roldan Theater together with the children's section of the Cuban National Choir. The Philadelphia group, comprising 88 children and teens and 20 adults, first visited Cuba in 2000. (EFE, 28/6/03)

June 28: The Cuban virtuoso Latin-jazz pianist Chucho Valdés will be playing at the Jazz Gallery, at 290 Hudson Street, in New York. Mr. Valdés, who lives in Havana, was scheduled to play a week at the Village Vanguard, along with two other engagements, but had to cancel because he did not have his visa. (The New York Times, 28/6/03)

June 29: Five Cuban migrants on a homemade craft made it to land in the Florida Keys and were taken into custody by the US Border Patrol. The men used oars and a hand-sewn sail to guide a 12-foot boat into shallow water near the Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo. Once there, they abandoned the craft and scattered into the mangroves. Border Patrol agents picked up the men. They appeared to be in good health, agent Joe Castillo said. (AP, 30/6/03)

June 30: US President George W Bush reminded supporters that he supported a "free Cuba" without Fidel Castro in power, as he made his first reelection stop in Florida, a key state in the 2004 contest. For his Little Havana audience, the president sprinkled in a few phrases in Spanish and denounced Cuban dictator Fidel Castro. "Under the current leadership in Cuba, there will never be freedom," Mr. Bush said, drawing a standing ovation. "We believe freedom is the future of every country. We believe in a free Cuba." He criticized Castro again at a \$2,000-a-plate roast beef luncheon at a Miami airport hotel where the president banked \$1.8 million, according to Bush-Cheney campaign spokeswoman Nicolle Devenish. She said Mr. Bush would collect \$1.2 million more at an evening fund-raiser in Tampa. (The Australian, The Washington Times, 1/7/03)