

FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba

August 2002

Domestic Affairs

August 1: In an interview printed in "Nueva Palabra" (New Word) magazine, the Archbishop of Havana, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, said that "the Church cannot be asked to act as the opposition." He added that "it cannot be expected to take up a role that should fall upon a political opposition party that does not exist in Cuba." He also expressed regret that in Cuba "Catholics do not have access to the media, religious education at school is not an option that parents can choose for their children nor does the Church have the right to open Catholic schools." (World Data Service, 2/8/02)

August 4: Roberto Robaina talked publicly about his dismissal from the Cuban Communist Party -evidently with the approval of Cuba's communist leadership -for the first time in a CNN interview. Robaina confirmed that he recently was kicked out of the Communist Party and admitted: "I committed political errors and very grave ethical errors." But he noted that he was not arrested or charged with any crime. The international Press Center in Havana said that Robaina will not give any more interviews. (AP, 5/8/02)

August 5: A project for Cooperative Agricultural Enterprises will be analyzed by the Cuban Parliament. The legislative proposal will be submitted to the National Assembly (Parliament) for approval after two years of discussions by thousands of farmers who enriched the initiative with their criteria. (Prensa Latina, 5/8/02)

August 5: Scientists have discovered the vertebra of a dinosaur in the western Cuban province of Pinar del Rio, an expert from the Cuban Museum of Natural History said. The project, partially funded by the National Geographic Society, is part of a larger effort to identify dinosaur remains throughout the Greater Antilles. (EFE, 5/8/02)

August 6: "The Vendor," a marble statue by an unknown 19th century artist, was stolen from Matanzas' Sauto theater. The roughly five-foot statue was one of four artworks gracing the Smoking areas on both sides of the theater and is registered as a national monument. Another figure, "Farmworker," a six-foot statue depicting a woman holding sickle and a tree branch, was damaged during the theft, while two others were not. (EFE, 6/8/02)

August 7: After seven months since its implementation, the World Food Program (WFP) highlighted in Havana the progress made in a project aimed at alleviating malnutrition among population sectors in five eastern Cuban provinces. The WFP representative in Cuba, Germán Valdivia, asserted that, according to plan, nutritional assistance is being provided for disadvantaged social sectors of this island that every year imports about a billion USD worth of food it cannot produce. (Notimex, 7/8/02)

August 7: The dissident Cuban Liberal Democratic Party (PLDC) complained about a lack of official response to an effort to obtain authorization for two of its members to attend a European Parliament-sponsored Cuban seminar in Strasbourg. In a brief press release, the PLDC explained that it had sent Fidel Castro a letter on July 19 requesting that he intercede on their behalf before the Cuban Ministry of the Interior so that their delegates would be granted travel authorization. (Notimex, 7/8/02)

August 10: Seven hundred forty students from a training course for nurses graduated in Havana. In an aim to reinforce medical services in Havana, Fidel Castro announced that in the upcoming

college year, 1 500 further nurses will graduate, thus alleviating shortages of paramedical personnel in the capital's hospitals. (Granma, 12/8/02)

August 10: Cubans began reviewing the voter registration lists posted for the upcoming municipal elections in October. More than 8 million people are included on the lists, so that every potential voter can inform of mistakes in names and surnames and the corresponding corrections can be made. (Prensa Latina, 14/8/02)

August 13: The leader of Cuba's dissident group Christian Liberation Movement (MCL), Osvaldo Payá Sardiñas, has asked the government to publish the Varela Project, which calls for a referendum on peaceful democratic changes on the island. "We demand the release of the Varela Project in the state media, because the media are financed by the people," an MCL statement said. "We shall not accept any response that is not a referendum or the guarantee of citizens' human rights." In the name of the Steering Committee, Paya announced that he will continue to gather signatures "under any circumstances" for this initiative, which was presented on May 10 to the National Assembly (NA) after more than 11,000 signatures had been gathered across the country. After accusing Fidel Castro's government of trying to prevent the project from coming to light, Paya called "illegal" any decision by the NA on the bill "if the people do not first learn of it and have a chance to give their opinion openly". (BBC, 13/8/02)

August 13: Fidel Castro turns 76. spent his birthday visiting a newly reconstructed school and declaring that his socialist revolution will survive. "This birthday is very happy, perhaps the happiest I have known," Castro said in statement carried in the official daily Granma. Sending a message to those "who thought that the revolution could not survive," Castro spoke of his country's "heroic people determined to confront, resist and conquer." (AP, 13/8/02)

August 13: Fidel Castro has promised "profound attention" in the near future to the ailing health sector that, in his view, has been affected by the economic slump, the US embargo and "the inadequacy of certain cadres." During the reopening ceremony of over 200 schools built or renovated in Havana, he rejected that his government may have neglected that sphere which, he affirmed, would be focused on to "maintain the progress made and obtain further improvements." (Notimex, 13/8/02)

August 13: Computer classrooms have been set up in 75 kindergarten schools of the Santiago de Cuba province. This is part of a plan to bring computer training to all elementary schools in the country. (AIN, 13/8/02)

August 15: The Cuban Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto, acknowledged that the majority of governmental programs include among their goals the eradication of "vestiges of racial segregation" that certain individuals still attempt to perpetuate. Prieto, a member of the Politburo of the ruling Communist Party (PCC), spoke during the closing ceremony of the colloquium preceding the 8th National Rap Festival, Havana Hip Hop 2002. According to the excerpts from his speech, released by state-run National News Agency (AIN), the government official pointed out that the PCC is well prepared to address issues such as these "that still occur in our country." (Notimex, 15/8/02)

August 16: Black youths whistled and jeered at police at a concert of Cuban rap, a cultural movement that has grown substantially in the island. As rapper Papa Humbertico belted out criticism of racial discrimination and police harassment, the open air theater in the dormitory town of Alamar, packed with several thousand youths, filled with catcalls. Behind the rapper stagehands hung a banner that said "Social denunciation". (Reuters, 16/8/02)

August 19: Cuban Audit and Control Minister Lina Pedraza said that the struggle against indiscipline and corruption is being strengthened and she emphasized the role played by workers

in that endeavour. She reported that the leading deficiencies are found in the control of resources at warehouses, tangible assets, accounts receivable, contract deficiencies, double billing and the inadequate use of bank accounts. Asked about the existence of so-called "white-collar crimes" in Cuba, Pedraza said "there are none among senior officials but there are cases of corruption. "I would not call them white-collar crimes but there are some cases, some of which occurred because officials managed economic operations and others because they managed resources." (Prensa Latina, 19/8/02)

August 20: Following a large campaign against the dengue-carrying *aedes aegypti* mosquito, Cuban health authorities are once again on the alert against another dangerous insect, the *aedes vexans*, carrier of the West Nile virus, presently found in the United States. A local press release states that Cuban health authorities are taking precautionary steps on account of the outbreak of that virus in the neighbouring country, where it has taken a toll of more than 10 victims in several states. (World Data Service, 20/8/02)

August 20: Cuba's little-known government agency in Havana, Cubatecnica, is exporting "business managers" to work for capitalist firms abroad. Most of the approximately 400 Cubans contracted by Cubatecnica to work abroad are former top intelligence officials or relatives of senior government officials who obtained their jobs through thinly veiled blackmail, current and former agency employees say. Cuba is well known for sending thousands of doctors, teachers and sports coaches to work abroad under government contracts, helping other nations while bringing in hard currency desperately needed by the communist government. Yet far less is known about the Cubatecnica program, which contracts mid-level business managers, accountants and computer technicians to work for capitalist enterprises abroad. (The Miami Herald, 20/8/02)

August 20: A Cuban opposition group announced that it had initiated a nationwide campaign seeking feedback on a proposed charter of citizens' rights. Representatives of the initiative's sponsor, the Moderate Opposition Round-table (*Mesa de Reflexión de la Oposición Moderada*), said during a news conference that their ultimate goal was "respect for all rights in Cuba." The draft document currently circulating around the island "is for all Cubans, independent of their political opinion, condition or preferences," a spokesperson said. The initiative's 47 articles refer to individuals' rights, social and cultural duties, economic rights and responsibilities to the nation and Cuban community. According to Manuel Cuesta, one of the initiative's promoters, some 6 000 copies of the document are circulating around the island in an effort to gather reactions and feedback. (EFE, 20/8/02)

August 21: The Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) has expressed concern over reprisals against a Cuban journalist imprisoned since 1997. The organization "will remain alert to any harmful action taken against journalist Bernardo Arévalo Padrón and will continue to pursue his release," said Rafael Molina, president of the IPA's Commission for Freedom of the Press and Expression. According to the IPA regional vice-president for Cuba Raúl Rivero, Arévalo, who heads the independent news agency Línea Sur Press (South Line Press), posted a letter from the Ariza penitentiary institution where he is being held denouncing that he fears for his life. (El Nuevo Herald, 22/8/02)

August 22: Economy and Planning Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez said Cuba is ready for the first stage of the Census, to be held in September. National Census director Juan Carlos Alfonso informed that 635 755 homes are listed, 20 000 more than reported during the prior control, and there are 78 508 streets, facilitating the work of census takers and supervisors. He reported that questionnaires and manuals, contained in an information supplement, are being distributed. Some 76 000 university students and professors will participate in this census. (Prensa Latina, 22/8/02)

August 22: The manioc, the main crop of Cuban indigenous peoples at the arrival of Christopher Columbus, will be cultivated by Cuban farms in order to confront the current economic situation, Agriculture Minister Alfredo Jordán informed. The Ministry created a program to plant 33,1 acres of manioc per 1 000 people. (Prensa Latina, 22/8/02)

August 22: The Spanish TV show "Infiltrados" (Infiltrated), hosted by Javier Nart, presented the Atlas news agency exposé "Drug-traffic in Havana." The tape captured the negotiation of three kilos of cocaine with one of the local drug-lords. Several videos introducing the viewers to the Cuban drug underworld and its political implications are followed by the taped report, made with a hidden camera, of the negotiation for the purchase of a certain amount of cocaine and the drug-lord's promise to deliver it to the Barajas airport in Madrid. (EFE, 22/8/02)

August 23: Commenting on an extensive school renovation program, Fidel Castro stated: "Nobody should fear the fact that there are millions of professionals (in Cuba) because this country in a not too distant future will live off its own intellectual output." In his 5th speech in less than a month on the renovation and general improvement of hundreds of schools throughout the country, Castro stressed that he also intends to put an end to juvenile delinquency in the nation as "it is not compatible with socialism." "The more schools we build, the better their programs and the better prepared the teachers, the fewer youths will end up in prison," said the communist leader. (World Data Service, 26/8/02)

August 24: Two men are searching for answers in the death of their father, a Spanish national stabbed while on vacation in Cuba. Jose Moreno died in the eastern Cuban province of Camagüey, his 26-year-old son, Andreas Moreno, said. "We don't have any details, only that he was stabbed with a steel blade in the heart," he said. "We don't know (...) where his belongings are." Cuban authorities informed relatives in Brazil about the death. Moreno was living with his second wife in Porto Seguro, Brazil, although he held a Spanish passport. The 66-year-old had been on holiday in Cuba alone. (EFE, 25/8/02)

August 30: The members of the dissident Varela Project, who are seeking to reform Cuba's laws through a referendum, ruled out their participation in the elections called by the government for next October, because they consider them antidemocratic. "Elections held in the same environment of intimidation as the so-called constitutional reform and in accordance with the current Electoral Law are illegitimate and unconstitutional," said the Management Committee of the Varela Project. In a press release entitled "Referendum First", they announced that they will not take part in the municipal elections on 20 and 27 October, but said they will respect the decision which each of the Caribbean island's more than 11 million inhabitants makes as to whether they vote. (BBC, 30/8/02)

August 30: At the conclusion act of the constructive works in 779 schools, Fidel Castro said that an "unusual educational revolution" is beginning in Cuba this school year. Castro said that the plans and works "of the greatest educational program in force" will continue to all the country, with which he forecast as a "true revolution" in the sector. (Prensa Latina, 31/8/02)

August 31: Assailants entered a home in a village in western Cuba and killed five people, including four members of a family, apparently by cutting their throats, relatives of the victims said. "It seems that they entered to steal (...) people here are very worried," said Camilo Martin, a cousin of one of the victims, Osmel Martin. Such crimes are rare in Cuba. (AP, 31/8/02)

Economy

August 2: Cuban authorities announced that free circulation of the Euro has been extended to two other major tourist resorts. Until then the European currency only circulated along with the U. S. dollar and the Cuban peso in Varadero. But Cuban Minister of Tourism, Ibrahim Farradaz,

informed the press of the decision to also allow the use of the Euro in Cayo Largo and Jardines del Rey, two other very exclusive tourist resorts. (World Data Service, 2/8/02)

August 3: Despite earlier assurances, state-owned oil company Petróleos de Venezuela has not resumed oil shipments to Cuba. The postponement reportedly has been caused by managers in the company who are adamantly opposed to such action until Cuba repays its debt. (Stratfor, 3/8/02)

August 5: International trading firm Crown Resources expects a decision from the Cuban government for a plan to revamp an unfinished Soviet-era refinery well below the cost of previous schemes. "Our analysis shows us that it is possible to do this because it is not such an old refinery," Crown's Chairman Alexey Kousmichoff told the press, adding a decision from the Cubans could potentially come within the month. (Reuters, 5/8/02)

August 5: Domestic criticism of Petroleos de Venezuela's (PDVSA) plan to resume shipping 53 000 barrels a day of crude oil to Cuba under preferential financial terms is based on politics and has no commercial motive, Venezuela's oil minister said. There's no reason to rectify the country's intention to deliver oil to Cuba because "our strategy is that with our energy supply we are going to help all the countries in our hemisphere," he said. (Dow Jones, 5/8/02)

August 6: A transport ship belonging to Cuba's state-owned maritime agency has been detained in Guinea over money owed to a small Canadian company. For two years, Mississauga-Ontario-based Adecon Ship Management has been pursuing the Cuban government in Canadian courts, seeking more than \$3-million. Adecon says Havana failed to pay after it financed ship operations for Cuba's maritime business. Last year, a Canadian Federal Court ordered Cuba to pay. But the Cuban government has ignored the ruling. (The National Post, 6/8/02)

August 8: Portuguese sources confirmed that a new direct route between Portugal and Cuba has started operating from the Jardines del Rey International Airport on Cayo Coco, a small, rocky island in central Cuba. Ricardo Figueredo, representative for the Portuguese travel agency Viajes in Cayo Coco, told the press that more than 150 tourists from the European country will be flown to Cayo Coco and Cayo Guillermo on weekly trips during the summer months. (BBC News, 11/8/02)

August 11: A Canadian tour operator has announced it will introduce air service between Florida and Havana in October. The Bahamasair charter flights, which will make an intermediate stop in Nassau, the Bahamas, will operate four times weekly. Passengers can book straight through from Miami, Fort Lauderdale or Orlando. Havana Flying Club of Toronto will handle sales and reservations, as well as hotel and tour arrangements in Cuba. Norway-based Scand-America Tours also is a partner in the deal. (Sacramento Bee, 11/8/02)

August 12: Cuba is significantly reducing sugar planting for the 2003/2004 crop as part of a restructuring of its sugar industry that involves closing dozens of inefficient mills and the transfer of plantations to other uses, an industry source said. The plan seeks to raise raw sugar output to 4 million metric tons a year and maintain production at that level. "Winter planting (July-December) was scaled back by around 50 percent because of the mill closings and our decision to plant on only the most productive land," said a sugar ministry official. The Sugar Ministry has not commented on winter planting plans, although Sugar Minister Ulises Rosales del Toro has said that sugar plantations would be cut by around 50 percent. (Reuters, 12/8/02)

August 14: French ambassador to Havana, Jean Levy, affirmed that Cuba is a significant trading partner for his country, despite bilateral exchange having decreased in the first five months of 2002, compared to the same period in 2001. In declarations to the weekly newspaper Opciones, Levy said that trade between the two nations from January to May 2002 decreased by 29 percent

in relation to the same period of 2001. However, he noted that this situation should change, and that an increase is expected in the rest of the year, since the island is one of the mainstays of France in their commercial exchange with Latin American countries. (Prensa Latina, 14/8/02)

August 14: Cuba will substitute wheat flour imports through an investment program that will allow for the milling of all the necessary cereal in the country to cover demands from its own economy, reported a specialized source. Teresa Tejo, deputy minister for the Food Industry, told the press that Cuba's wheat milling capacity surpasses 230,000 annual tons and a similar volume of flour is imported. The goal, she said, is that all the raw material be produced on the island in order to reduce costs and contribute to efficiency. (Prensa Latina, 14/8/02)

August 15: Canadian independent Pebercan has said its Canasi-7 developmental well onshore in Cuba's Block 7 has been successful. The company says the well, located on Cuba's north coast, penetrated three successive hydrocarbon pools. Production tests on Pebercan's Canasi-7 have shown oil flow of between 4,500 and 6,000 b/d, depending on choke size. The well was directionally drilled to a measured depth of 12,041 ft (3,670 meters), commencing on June 5th and completed on July 20th. Further production tests are under way. Pebercan is a Montreal, Canada-based oil producer whose major shareholders are French poultry magnate Gérard Bourgoïn, French actor Gérard Depardieu, and a number of smaller investors. It is one of several international companies finding modest success in Cuban exploration and production activities. (WorldOil.Com, 15/8/07)

August 15: Venezuela's supreme court has opened an investigation into a preferential oil sales agreement with Cuba that has been widely criticized by political foes of President Hugo Chavez, a court statement said. The deal, signed by the left-wing president and Fidel Castro in October 2000, has been denounced by government opposition groups since the Communist state fell behind in payments late last year. Opposition politicians have pushed for an investigation, alleging that the National Assembly never approved the deal as required for all such agreements with foreign governments. (Reuters, 15/8/02)

August 22: Cuba withdrew its proposal to renew exports of hawksbill turtle shells, which was to be discussed by the party states to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Cuba's initiative, which was to be voted on by the 158 signatory nations to the convention at the 12th CITES meeting, scheduled for November in Santiago, Chile, requested the downlisting of the population of hawksbill turtles inhabiting Cuban waters from Appendix I (a total ban on trade or hunting) to Appendix II (regulated fishing or hunting). Hawksbill turtles are the only source of commercial tortoise shell, also known as "carey" or "bekko," which is used in jewelry and ornaments. Although international trade in the species is banned, the turtles are still harvested for domestic trade in many countries, including in Cuba, Indonesia, the Solomon Islands and Fiji. (IPS, 22/8/02)

August 22: Profound changes will be implemented after the current re-structuring of the Cuban sugar industry, Minister Ulises Rosales del Toro said at a news conference. The island, ranked the world's fourth largest sugar exporter, plans to keep production at about 4 million tons a year but that could also drop depending on prices. "Production from this moment forward will be strictly tied to world supply and demand," Rosales del Toro said. "We are only going to mill the sugar that's profitable." The sugar minister revealed that this year alone lost sugar revenues from low-market prices and wasteful industry practices amounted to \$120 million - about 35 percent of real earnings. (NBC News, 23/8/02)

August 22: Cuba will fully honor its obligations on sugar deliveries to Russia even if reconstruction of the sugar industry, now underway on the island, will somewhat cut production of this foodstuff. This opinion was expressed by the Cuban Sugar Industry Minister Ulises Rosales del Toro, at a news conference in Havana. He emphasized that Havana guarantees

implementation of contracts, concluded earlier with some countries or foreign firms. Rosales del Toro called Russia and China among major importers of Cuban sugar. (TASS, 23/8/02)

August 22: Cuba is paying for 60 000 sugar cane workers to learn new skills as the country struggles to restructure its ailing sugar industry, officials said. The 60 000 workers will pursue technical studies while another 40 000 will move into agricultural or farming jobs, said Noel Casanaz, a spokesman for the sugar ministry, which employs about 420 000 workers. The sugar cane workers who will start taking classes will continue to earn monthly salaries between 300 and 1 000 pesos (11 and 38 USD). (AP, 22/8/02)

August 24: Cuban scientists plan to test new varieties of tobacco developed through genetic experimentation, the official press reported. The study will be directed by the San Juan y Martínez Experimental Station in Pinar del Río province, the country's most productive tobacco-growing region. The strains will be compared on the basis of their resistance to insects and diseases, yield per acre and leaf quality. (EFE, 24/8/02)

August 27: Venezuela will resume oil sales to Cuba in September after signing an agreement with the Communist-run island to restructure \$140 million in debt for crude sales, Venezuela's Energy Minister said. "Once this debt renegotiation is signed shipments will resume in September," Energy Minister Rafael Ramírez said in an interview with state television. Ramírez said the restructuring deal also cancels \$15 million outstanding from last year when the island restructured petrol debt after Hurricane Michelle. Venezuela's oil deal with Cuba has become a target for opponents of Chavez who disagree with preferential sales terms they say damage the nation's already faltering economy. (Reuters, 27/8/02)

August 27: Cuba is banking on being able to sign "a significant number" of new offshore oil and gas exploration contracts in a 43 243-square-mile area in the Gulf of Mexico just north of its westernmost provinces, according to information published in state-sponsored communist daily Granma. The area, which the Cuban government has designated as a "special economic zone," has been divided into 59 blocks that can be licensed for development to international energy concerns. The early efforts of foreign firms – such as Canadian Pebercan-- that are already actively drilling in the area have produced surprisingly hopeful results. Officials did not give a detailed breakdown on crude and gas production, but independent experts said that current crude production has already surpassed 55 000 barrels per day and could hit 60 000 b/d before the end of the year. Gas production, meanwhile, has surpassed the 52,97 million cubic feet per day mark. (Oil Daily, 27/8/02)

August 27: Cuba's 2002/2003 coffee crop will come in around 11 percent below the previous one, the official daily Granma said, without quantifying output for either harvest. Reuters estimated 2001/2002 coffee production at 15 million to 16 million kilograms of semi-processed beans, meaning the harvest just getting underway will produce around 13,4 million to 14,4 million kg. Granma blamed drought and said some processing centers were inoperative due to a lack of water. (Reuters, 27/8/02)

August 29: Welcoming Santo Domingo-Havana Flight 12, Koreena Bajwa, representative of Aerocontinente Dominicana airline in Cuba, advocated consolidation of multi-Caribbean destinations to develop tourism. There is a great future for multi-destination tourism in the region, because of traveler interest, which we are working to serve, particularly in the matters of routing and security, the Dominican official told the press. (Prensa Latina, 29/8/02)

Exile Community

August 1: A former psychiatric nurse in Cuba was convicted of illegally obtaining US citizenship by concealing that he administered electroshocks to Cuban dissidents in a hospital near Havana

over a decade. Eriberto Mederos, 79, had no reaction as the verdict was read. A dozen federal marshals, an unusually large number, were present in case of any outburst from spectators, who included ex-prisoners and Cuban human rights advocates who had accused Mederos of torture. (AP, 1/8/02)

August 8: The head of the Cuban Canadian Foundation group adamantly denied an allegation levelled by a Catholic bishop in Cuba that people in Toronto pressured young Cuban pilgrims to defect during World Youth Day. "That's not true, that's not true," insisted Ismael Sambra, president of the Toronto-based Foundation, which has assisted many of the young people seeking political asylum in Canada. "We don't encourage anybody to stay here." At least 12 Cubans contacted the Toronto-based group early on during the weeklong World Youth Day Celebrations and said they wanted to defect, said Ismael Sambra. An estimated 23 Cuban pilgrims defected during the gathering, most of them making their escape at the outdoor mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II on July 28. (Toronto Star, 8/8/02)

August 11: Pedro Sánchez, a Cuban-American soil scientist who pioneered methods for reviving tropical agriculture while saving threatened rain forests, was named the winner of the \$250,000 World Food Prize at ceremonies in Toronto. Mr. Sanchez, 62, is chairman of the United Nations Task Force on World Hunger, but the award recognizes his decades of work to improve agricultural yields from depleted soil while protecting the environment in South America, Southeast Asia and Africa. (The New York Times, 12/8/02)

August 13: Accused Cuban torturer Eriberto Mederos failed to report to jail the day after his historic conviction by a Miami federal jury because he was too ill to surrender. Mederos, is reportedly being treated for cancer and may not survive until the scheduled sentencing on October 16, sources said. On August 1, Mederos became the first person convicted on a torture-related criminal charge in a US court. (The Miami Herald, 14/8/02)

August 18: The estranged daughter of Fidel Castro called for a continuation of the US economic embargo against Havana, as US lawmakers mull plans to ease sanctions against the island. Alina Fernandez, a former dissident and vocal opponent of her father, told Fox television that it was more important to tighten the screws on Cuba's Communist system -- to try to force its collapse -- than to attempt to reap economic gain from trade with the island. (AFP, 19/8/02)

August 21: A Cuban American anti-Castro activist disclosed that he traveled to Cuba to sign a petition known as the Varela Project, which asks for changes in the Cuban Constitution. Javier de Céspedes, president of the Hialeah-based Cuban Democratic Directorate, said he used his Mexican passport to enter the island undetected. He was born in Mexico in 1965 to Cuban parents and now is a US citizen. De Céspedes said he signed the petition at the home of Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas, the project's main sponsor. The Miamian said he also signed a document called Accord for Democracy while visiting the Capitol building in Havana. He described the accord as a set of guidelines for a transition to democracy in Cuba, "endorsed by the Cuban opposition both inside and outside the island." (The Miami Herald, 21/8/02)

August 21: The Spanish-language theater group La Ma Teodora is in Havana rehearsing Abelardo Estorino's play, *She Looks White*, for a three-day run in Havana, beginning in September. The project is cosponsored by the Council of Theater Arts of Cuba. After its Havana debut, the play will tour the provinces of Villa Clara and Matanzas. The cast includes two Miami-based actors, Pablo Durán and Michel Hernández, and four actors from the island. The visiting "group of exiled artists will share a brotherhood with other artists on the island through this play about Cubanness and nationality," Sarraín said. La Ma Teodora ran into difficulties in Miami in April when it tried to present a play featuring Cuban actress Verónica Lynn at the University of Miami's Koubek Center. At the last minute, the center canceled its contract with the group. The play finally went on at the Miami Light Project. (The Miami Herald, 21/8/02)

August 23: A man convicted this month of illegally obtaining US citizenship by lying about his treatment of Cuban dissidents died. Eriberto Mederos, accused by former prisoners of torturing them, died from cancer, said Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who had pushed for his deportation. Mederos, 79, was found guilty earlier this month at a federal trial in Miami. He was awaiting sentencing in October and faced up to five years in federal prison and revocation of his citizenship. Following his conviction, Mederos had been ordered to surrender to federal custody but then became ill and was hospitalized. (AP, 23/8/02)

August 25: Raúl Chibás, the brother of Eduardo Chibás, a former senator and one-time presidential candidate in Cuba who founded the Cuban People's Party (Orthodox) in the 1940's, died of cancer at South Miami Hospital. He was 86. Raúl Chibás fought alongside Fidel Castro during the revolution, but turned against him shortly after the revolution came to power. After Castro overthrew the government of Fulgencio Batista, Chibás rejected a position as minister of finance and was named president of the Western Railroad. But he had a series of confrontations with the new government and left Cuba in 1960, disappointed with the new regime. He said Castro had betrayed the democratic character of the revolution. Once in the United States, Chibas settled in New York, where he worked as a Spanish teacher at Herricks Junior High in Long Island. In the early 1980s, he moved to Caracas to be with two of his children who lived there. In 1991, he moved to Miami. In addition to his wife, Maria Luisa Bonafonte de Chibás, and daughter Gloria, Chibás is survived by his son Eduardo, in Caracas; daughter Marissa Chibás, an actress and teacher in Los Angeles; and daughter Diana Chibás of Pembroke Pines. (The Miami Herald, 27/8/02)

Foreign Affairs

August 1: Thirteen Cuban rafters rescued off the Honduran Atlantic coast will be granted refugee status in that country, said the Director of Population and Migratory Policy, Ramón Romero. He added that the rafters, who fled the island in search of freedom and better opportunities, would receive protection and monetary assistance from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (Notimex, 1/8/02)

August 3: Cuba will expand its air travel ties with Nassau (the Bahamas) and Santo Domingo (the Dominican Republic) as part of its strategy to attract foreign tourists flocking to these two Caribbean destinations. Sources from the Cuban Institute of Civil Aeronautics (CICA) informed that the airline Aero Continente Dominicana (ACD) had initiated the day before its weekly flights to Cuba, thus formally beginning its operations in the Caribbean. (Notimex, 3/8/02)

August 5: The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has initiated talks with its counterparts from Cuba and other Caribbean states to receive health professionals that may help the country cope with the deficit in its health sector, announced Prime Minister Patrick Manning. "We are talking with the Cuban Government as well as other islands so that they can provide us with doctors and nurses that can fill the void left by the emigration of (our) health workers," pointed Manning. (AFP, 5/8/02)

August 7: A Roman Catholic bishop said that Canadians pressured nearly two dozens young Cubans to stay behind in Toronto after Pope John Paul's recent visit. Of the 200 people who travelled to Canada with the Cuban church, 23 stayed behind, the last one on August 1, said Bishop Carlos Baladrón, president of the youth commission of Cuba's Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Never before has a church delegation been wrapped up in something similar," said Baladrón, a Vatican-recognized prelate from Cuba's eastern province of Guantánamo, who headed the delegation to Canada. "From our first days in Canada there were notable pressures by some people living there (...) exhorting the Cubans not to return to their country," Baladrón said in a written statement sent to international news organizations. He did not elaborate on who he believed was exerting the pressure. "The Church respects people's choices in matters as

personal as the decision to emigrate," the bishop said. The Cuban Catholic Church, however, cannot fail to "express its regret at this situation that affects our families, all of society and the Church itself," the bishop said. "Most of the youths now back in Cuba are already sharing their rich experiences at World Youth Day, which boosts their commitment to their Church and enriches their testimony of faith and hope in the places where they work or study, despite the difficulties that, like any Christian or Cuban, they may encounter in our country," Baladron said. (Canadian Press, EFE, 7/8/02)

August 7: The Cuban Minister of Justice, Roberto Díaz Sotolongo, representing that Caribbean state, attended the ceremony of transfer of political power in Bolivia. (Notinet, 8/7/02)

August 7: A press release from the Cuban Embassy in Venezuela rejected "vehemently the innuendoes" of Caracas mayor, Alfredo Peña concerning an alleged Cuban Government supply of weapons for the groups that attacked members of the Military Police on January 23. In the communiqué the Cuban embassy demands that the metropolitan mayor reverse his statements, or otherwise produce evidence to support them. (El Universal, 7/8/02)

August 7: Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, arrived in the Colombian capital to attend President-elect Alvaro Uribe Vélez's inauguration ceremony. (Notinet, 7/8/02)

August 8: Vladimiro Montesinos, former head of the Peruvian intelligence service, revealed during his trial for corruption that he maintained close contacts with the CIA Director, George Tenet, with the goal to spy on the telephone traffic of the embassies of Cuba, Russia, China and Arabian countries. This phone tap operation was conducted with special intercept equipment donated by the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to the counter-intelligence department of the Peruvian National Intelligence Service (SIN). (AFP, 8/8/02)

August 8: The European Union (EU) is being criticized by the official Cuban media for being subservient to US interests. Europe was the latest subject of discussions of Cuban TV's daily show the Round Table which divulges government opinions on different issues within the framework of the "battle of ideas" put forward by Fidel Castro. (World Data Service, 8/8/02)

August 11: The most dangerous countries for assaults, reported by Canadians, were Mexico, Cuba, Colombia and the United States. The number of assaults, thefts and civil disasters such as explosions, coups and insurrections, reported by Canadians traveling in foreign countries jumped dramatically in 2001, Foreign Affairs Department records reveal. (National Post, 11/8/02)

August 14: Four young acrobats from a Cuban artistic troupe who defected in Aruba remain in custody by the local authorities and could be deported back to Cuba in the next few days. The delegation from Circuba --the Cuban state-run Circus company-- returned to Havana but Andrés Caballero, Omar Blanco Tur, Juan Carlos Iglesias Herrera and Eric Llanes chose to remain in Oranjestad to seek employment in that city. But immigration authorities broke into the place where the defectors were rehearsing and arrested them with instructions for their immediate deportation. The procedure has as yet been delayed following protests from local citizens. (El Nuevo Herald, 14/8/02)

August 14: Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva, a longtime critic of the US role in Latin America, rejects speculation that he would form a political alliance with Venezuela and Cuba to promote anti-American sentiment in the region. Still, da Silva said, he considers himself "a friend of Cuba" who would demand the island's inclusion in the US-proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas. In his first public reaction to claims by US conservatives that he would form an "axis of evil" with Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, the veteran leftist leader said in written responses to the press that such forecasts see the world "as if we were in the midst of the Cold War era." Asked whether, in addition to condemning the US economic sanctions on Cuba, he would criticize the

lack of democracy on the island, he said, "I don't hide the fact that I consider myself a friend of Cuba, and an admirer of the Cuban people". "Naturally, the fact of being a friend of Cuba doesn't mean that I or the Workers Party agree with everything they [the Cubans] do. In one of my last trips, I had the opportunity to tell Fidel Castro publicly that, for us, in Brazil, Cuba is not a model, just as the United States, France or other countries aren't our models." (The Miami Herald, 14/8/02)

August 15: Five Cubans attempting to reach US soil by boat arrived at the island of Roatán in the Honduran Caribbean, an official source reported. Honduran Director of Migration Ramón Romero said that the five Cubans reached Roatán on the same boat that in late July dropped 13 passengers in Guanaja, another Honduran Caribbean island. The official indicated that the number of Cubans, whose status in the country is yet to be decided, grew to 18 between July and August. (EFE, 15/8/02)

August 16: A judge in Aruba allowed four Cuban acrobats to remain on the Caribbean island, where they requested political asylum last weekend, a Cuban exile organization said in Miami. "We are here to announce the good news that the four Cubans in Aruba will not be deported." Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) head Joe Garcia said at a press conference. The four are Andres Caballero, Omar Blanco Tur, Juan Carlos Iglesias and Eric Llanes. Aruba immigration authorities asked the judge to deport the Cubans to Havana, but their attorney filed an emergency motion that prevented their repatriation. (EFE, 16/8/02)

August 16: A Cuban man who was allegedly denied entrance into the United States jumped from Brownsville B&M Bridge after authorities unsuccessfully attempted to convince him to climb down. But Ricardo Belon, 28, who had been coaxed from the center of the bridge to a location over land on the US side, fell only about eight feet before landing on a Cameron County sheriff deputy. He was taken to a local US hospital and his condition was unknown, Deputy Eleazar Avalos said. Belon and a companion, Jorge Ugarte, 36, fled Cuba to Mexico and believed they would receive political asylum in the United States, Ugarte said. (The Brownsville Herald, 17/8/02)

August 20: A Dominican who received training in Cuba in the 70s has been identified as the mastermind in the abduction of a businessman from the north of the country for whom a \$1,5 million ransom was paid. 61 year-old Rafael Villa Cartagena, who trained in Cuba alongside the late Dominican Col. Francisco Alberto Caamaño, organized the kidnapping of businessman Juan Capellán Díaz, said the National Police. (Reuters, 19/8/02) **August 20:** Armenian Foreign Affairs Minister Vartan Oskanian began a three-day official visit to Cuba to sign projects to increase bilateral links. According to the agenda, Oskanian will meet with Public Health and Foreign Trade ministers Damodar Peña y Raúl de la Nuez. He will also sign a collaboration agreement at the Cuban Foreign Ministry. (Prensa Latina, 20/8/02)

August 20: Some 800 individuals will comprise the Cuban delegation for the 19th Central American and Caribbean Games, a top official of the National Sports, Physical Education and Recreation Institute (INDER) of Cuba confirmed. INDER director Humberto Rodriguez said that several Olympic and world champions will go with the Cuban delegation for the Games in El Salvador to be held in November. (Xinhua, 21/8/02)

August 22: Scheduled sentencing of Canadian businessman James Sabzali for violating the US trade embargo against Cuba has been moved to October, according to lead prosecutor US Assistant Attorney Joseph Poluka. A yet-unheard initial appeal of the conviction is itself rescheduled for September. "The continuances are merely to accommodate the schedules of the defence attorneys," said Poluka in an interview. Sabzali, a former resident of Hamilton now living in suburban Philadelphia, was found guilty in early April of violating the US Trading with the Enemy Act for selling water purification supplies to Cuba on behalf of the Pennsylvania-based

Bro-Tech Corp and its international subsidiaries. He is the first Canadian found guilty of violating the US embargo against Cuba. (Canadian Press, 22/8/02)

August 22: Cuban National Institute of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation (INDER) President Humberto Rodríguez called the sports collaboration his country has with Guatemala as positive. Rodríguez commented that during his stay in the Central American nation he will sign a collaboration agreement with local sports authorities that continues an exchange program currently in force. Fifty-two technicians in about 20 disciplines are working in 21 of the 22 Guatemalan departments, and the number of specialists is expected to increase to 60. (Prensa Latina, 22/8/02)

August 23: Members of the Ernesto Che Guevara Solidarity Brigade with Cuba have organized a campaign in Canada to promote information on the five Cubans imprisoned in the US. Asked about the five Cuban prisoners, brigade coordinator Nino Pagliccia said that there was little information on them in Canada and that country's press does not pay much attention to the news on Cuba. (Prensa Latina, 23/8/02)

August 23: Granma International accuses Ismael Sombra, president of the National Cuban-Canadian Foundation (CCNF), of owing his presence in Canada to the work of the CIA. Sombra is "a new speaker" on Cuba committed to cultivating in Canada a vision of the Cuban revolution in correspondence with Washington's interests, the paper said. (Prensa Latina, 23/8/02)

August 24: A Canadian travel club has begun marketing an Orlando-based trip to Havana. But some are warning that unsuspecting travelers could be breaking the law by visiting the communist country. The US Treasury Department, which regulates travel to Cuba, has taken note. "We are looking into it," department spokeswoman Tasia Scolinos said. Beginning in October, the Havana Flying Club will offer round-trip flights originating out of Orlando, Fort Lauderdale and Miami. The Havana Flying Club does not require travelers to show they have authorization to go to Cuba. "It is their decision to travel or not," said Lissette Edward, marketing director of the company. "We only provide them with this flexible and hassle-free way to travel to Cuba." (Sun Sentinel, 24/8/02)

August 25: Masvingo provincial governor Josaya Hungwe has threatened junior doctors with dismissal and to replace them with Cuban doctors. Addressing Zimbabwe Medical Association (ZMA) doctors at their Annual General Meeting in Masvingo last week, Hungwe said junior doctors should show appreciation for life instead of greed for money. A few weeks ago, the doctors went on an indefinite strike that forced the government to review their working conditions. "The government will fire doctors who dare strike in future and replace them with professionals from Cuba. We will not even hesitate to take any other drastic measures against them that we see fit," said Hungwe. (All Africa Global Media, 25/8/02)

August 25: Mexico's PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) foreign affairs secretary, Gustavo Carvajal, arrived in Cuba to participate in a COPPPAL conference. We came to prepare for the meeting of the Permanent Conference of Latin American and Caribbean Political Parties, and to analyze themes that will be debated in the meeting in October, Carvajal told the press at Jose Marti International Airport. (Prensa Latina, 25/8/02)

August 26: Cuba plans to stick to its position on assistance to the Third World and the right of poor nations to pursue development at the 2002 UN World Summit on Sustainable Development, which began in Johannesburg, the press reported. The Cuban agenda is expected to focus on the need for environmental policies, particularly those tied to rationality, adequate use of natural resources and social, economic and environmental interaction, official Cuban newspapers reported. (EFE, 26/8/02)

August 26: Mexican Foreign Secretary, Jorge Castañeda, told Chilean newspaper "El Mercurio" that "there are no feelings" involved in his country's relations with Cuba, which are moving "toward a cold normalization, that is functional for both countries." Castañeda pointed that "we had an unpleasant episode, yet rather positive from the perspectives of domestic policy and of the projection of the new Mexican foreign policy." "Our position was very clear, a strong message was sent both within the country and abroad which proved rather beneficial for President (Vicente) Fox's government," he reminded. (Notimex, 26/8/02)

August 27: Two of Cuba's best fencers failed to return to the island after world championships in Portugal, a spokesman for the Cuban Embassy said. The fencers, Elvis Gregory and Iván Trebejo, did not show up when the Cuban team left Lisbon, Mercedes Martinez, the embassy's charge d'affaires, told the press. "They did not join the delegation" on its return, she said. "We don't have any information on where they are." Portugal's Interior Ministry had no immediate information about the pair. They had taken part in the World Fencing Championships in Lisbon. (ABC News, 27/8/02)

August 27: The initiative launched two years ago concerning Cuba's willingness to send 4 000 of its doctors to Africa to fight AIDS was renewed by Rosa Elena Simeón, minister of Science, Technology and the Environment (CITMA) at the Sustainable Development Summit taking place at the Sandton Conventions Center, Johannesburg. (Granma, 27/8/02)

August 27: The Paraguayan government will contribute the remaining \$32, 000 USD required by the 52 Paraguayan doctors who received their degrees in Cuba but lacked enough funds for their trip home. The incumbent of the Secretariat of Repatriation, Enrique Rojas Macedo, indicated that "the government will cover the missing amount required for the (students's return) airfare" which they were supposed to pay for themselves. Next, both governments will establish the legal status of the wives and children of the Paraguayans who got married in the course of their studies. These relatives are Cuban and are awaiting authorization to leave the Caribbean island, explained the official. (AFP, 27/8/02)

August 28: Mexico's Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) International Relations secretary, Gustavo Carvajal, concluded his three-day visit to Cuba to prepare for the COPPPAL meeting in Havana, October 24-26. Before leaving, the COPPPAL member (Latin American and Caribbean Political Parties Permanent Conference) told Prensa Latina that the meeting will address such topics as confronting poverty and the region's social situation, with participation of representatives from the 29 countries' 55 parties and European and other international guests. (Prensa Latina, 27/8/02)

August 28: British tourists traveling to Cuba may be prevented from using their credit cards because of US sanctions against the Caribbean island. HFC, Beneficial and Marbles - the card brands of US card giant Household International - have written to their British customers warning that their plastic will not be valid in Cuba. The British subsidiaries of other US banks are also, without fanfare, blocking transactions in Cuba by their customers. More than one in five UK cards cannot be used on the island. Even cards from major British banks such as Abbey National and Alliance & Leicester cannot be used there because they are outsourced to MBNA, the US card issuer that claims 14 per cent of the UK market. "What we are telling card-holders is that their cards will not be able to be used in Cuba and this is because of an American directive," said Martin Rutland, communications director of HFC. MBNA made clear it had no option but to refuse transactions with Cuba. "We are not doing this by choice. We are bound by US law." (Financial Times, 28/8/02)

August 28: Dominican President Hipólito Mejía reiterated his gratitude to Cuba, for its aid in preparing human resources, while welcoming Cuban sports trainers at the national palace in Santo Domingo. Mejía received the 37 technicians, who are training Dominican athletes for the

2002 Central American and Caribbean Games and the 2003 Pan American Games. (Prensa Latina, 28/8/02)

August 29: Cuba is advocating for the growing use of renewable energy at the World Summit on Sustainable Development that is taking place in Johannesburg, South Africa. Cuba's position is based upon the need to reduce the use of fossil fuels, that when burned produce atmospheric pollution by multiple gases as well as global warming. The Cuban delegation is also insisting in that industrialized nations will provide financing and new technologies to the Third World, on the basis of preferential treatment and concessions, in order to reduce the gap on the use of energy. (AIN, 29/8/02)

August 30: Thousands of people throughout the world hope that the Earth Summit II in South Africa will conclude with a signal of cooperation, responsibility and seriousness to fulfill commitments, expressed the Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. Traveling to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, Perez Roque told the press that millions of people want to fulfill the commitments assumed 10 years ago during the first meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Perez Roque said that poor countries expect the developed nations to have the political will to assume new commitments to save humanity with enormous differences, in allusion to the horrifying figures whereby 15 percent of the world population receives the benefits of the 86 percent of resources. (Prensa Latina, 31/8/02)

August 30: Mexican Ambassador to Cuba, Ricardo Pascoe, announced the cancellation of the events scheduled for next September 15 and 16 in Havana to celebrate Mexican Independence. In a note released to the Mexican press, Pascoe informed that the Foreign Affairs Secretariat "has instructed us not to organize or participate in any kind of celebration." For that reason, "I wish to inform you that the scheduled events (...) will be cancelled," added the letter signed by the Mexican diplomat. (Uno Más Uno, 30/8/02)

August 30: The Mexican Foreign Office denied having cancelled the celebration of the national holiday in its embassy in Cuba, scheduled for September 15 and 16. Nevertheless, it acknowledged having instructed "all its diplomatic missions" to seek private funding "to pay for the party." According to sources in the Foreign Affairs Secretariat "the Foreign Office instructed all its embassies and consulates to seek funding for the celebrations by themselves, basically in the private sector, as there is no budget (for such events)." (EFE, 30/8/02)

Security

August 22: Workers are scrambling to retool Russia's military spy post at Lourdes, into a top-flight computer science academy for Cuba to develop and market hardware and software, university sources said. "It's going to be the country's most modern university, and it is going to have 2 000 resident students who will study and learn to create computer programs and systems which will then be marketed," said one of the sources. The new computer science campus includes the entire former military base from which Moscow used to glean some 75 percent of its strategic information on the west. The idea for the prestige facility is Fidel (Castro)'s, and it should be ready for the next school year in early September. (AFP, 22/8/02)

August 30: The Russian military has completed the withdrawal of equipment from Russia's electronic intelligence center in Lourdes, Cuba, a news agency reported. It has taken two weeks and about 10 flights of heavy-lifting AN-124 military transport planes to bring the bulky equipment back to Russia, the Interfax-Military News Agency said, quoting an unidentified Defense Ministry official. Defense Ministry and air force officials refused to comment on the report. (AP, 30/8/02)

Terrorism

August 7: Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Pérez Roque indicated in Bogotá that Havana is willing to cooperate in the event of a peace process between the government of Colombian President Alvaro Uribe and the guerillas. "I bring the message from the Cuban government that we are willing to maintain, as with the government of (exiting President, Andrés) Pastrana, our contribution (...) in favour of a peace process that allows Colombia to resume its path," affirmed Pérez Roque. (AFP, 7/8/02)

August 12: Embargo advocates in the Bush administration and Congress are pushing a new line: that the island nation 90 miles from Florida has become a dangerous "comfort station" for terrorists. They maintain that while the United States has been mobilizing a global war on terrorism, Fidel Castro has been providing shelter and possibly aid to Basque separatists, Irish Republican Army members, leftist Colombian guerrillas and perhaps Iranian agents and others. They contend that in light of the Sept. 11 attacks, the United States needs to hold a firm line against a country that could become a terrorist incubator like the onetime Taliban-run Afghanistan. (Los Angeles Time, 12/8/02)

August 15: The Bush administration has attacked growing congressional support for lifting sanctions against Cuba by arguing it is a possible terrorist threat to the United States. Otto Reich, the State Department's assistant secretary for the Western Hemisphere, laid out a case against overtures to Cuba and Fidel Castro. "Castro has supported terrorist groups in every country in this hemisphere except Mexico," Reich told reporters. "So he is a terrorist." "He arrived in power by the use of force, and he remains in power by the use of force, and we do not know what capabilities he may have that may pose a threat to the United States." (Omaha World Journal, The Columbus Dispatch, 16,18/8/02)

August 27: The United States has accused Iraq, Iran and Cuba of seeking to exploit a proposed ban on biological weapons to aid their own weapons of mass destruction programs. Earlier this year, the Bush administration rejected a revised draft of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), Middle East Newsline reported. The international treaty bans the development, production, stockpiling and acquisition of biological weapons. "Countries such as Iran, Iraq, and Cuba have fought the hardest for free access to the technology, knowledge, and equipment necessary to pursue biological weapons," Under Secretary of State John Bolton said. "Their argument was simple: as states parties to the BWC they should be allowed free trade in all biological materials." In an address to the Tokyo-American Center, Bolton, responsible for State Department policy on arms control and international security, said Cuba maintains "at least a limited, offensive biological warfare research-and-development effort. Terrorist groups are actively seeking the knowledge, equipment, and material necessary for biological weapons." More than a dozen countries are said to be pursuing biological weapons, officials said. They include Cuba, Iraq, Iraq, Libya, Syria and North Korea. (World Tribune.Com, 30/8/02)

US-Cuba Relations

August 1: An attorney representing two young Cubans who crossed the US border at Niagara Falls after they defected from a Cuban religious group visiting Canada predicted their release from detention by US immigration officials. Osvaldo Castillo González, 27, and an unnamed young woman -- whom Buffalo, New York, attorney Stephen Tills identified as Castillo's girlfriend and a doctor -- both had their "credible fear" interviews. The questioning, required of those asking for political asylum, seeks to determine whether they have a legitimate fear of persecution in Cuba. He said that in addition to the general police state in Cuba and "lack of freedoms," the two would likely face reprisals because of their defection attempt -- which is an embarrassment to the Castro government -- if they were returned.

August 2: State Department spokesman Charles Barclay described trips to Cuba such as the one taken by Tampa's Mayor Dick Greco and Bay area business leaders as "inappropriate."

Other administration officials said privately that dictator Fidel Castro "used" the group to exploit differences in US opinion on a 4-decade-old trade embargo. (The Tampa Tribune, 3/8/02)

August 5: Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura will travel to Cuba in September. The governor made the announcement during a radio interview. Ventura will travel at the invitation of the organizers of a food and agribusiness exhibition being held in Havana by American companies from September 26 through September 30. The exhibition has been licenced by the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the US Department of the Treasury, which has to give permission to American firms for contacts with Cuba. Illinois Governor George Ryan, made a five-day visit in October 1999. In July this year, North Dakota Governor John Hoeven led a visit with the North Dakota Farm Bureau and other farm groups. (Saint Paul Business Journal, Saint Paul Pioneer Press, 5/10/8/02)

August 7: The US Coast Guard repatriated six Cuban migrants after picking them up in a raft 40 miles south of Key West. The men were taken aboard a Coast Guard cutter and interviewed by Immigration and Naturalization Service agents, who decided to return them to Cuba. The men were taken to Bahía de Cabañas, Cuba. (AP, 7/7/02)

August 9: US authorities repatriated four Cubans who were intercepted while trying to reach the Florida coast. The US Coast Guard said the Cubans were trying to cross the perilous Florida Straits in a rowboat, when they were spotted some 80 kilometers (50 miles) southeast of Key West. (EFE, 9/8/02)

August 12: A former Cuban ambassador to the United Nations, who recently defected, shares the Bush administration's view that congressional attempts to end curbs on Americans' travel to Cuba, if approved, would be an economic windfall for Cuba and a "gift for Fidel." Alcibiades Hidalgo, who arrived in South Florida in July, said the US economic embargo against Cuba aggravates the island's problems, but he believes Castro's socialist policies are principally to blame. "The embargo has not worked for 43 years. It is a formula for getting rid of Castro that does not work," Mr. Hidalgo said. However, if the US lifted the embargo, it would be a political triumph for Fidel. If the travel restrictions are lifted, Castro would receive an economic benefit immediately and the result would be to prolong the regime." Recent moves on Capitol Hill to relax the embargo are misguided, he said, adding that there should be no change in US policy without some economic or political reforms in return. "As long as there are no reforms improving the level of life for the Cuban people, there should be no friendly discussions toward Castro," he said. He added that widespread economic problems on the island could produce an uprising against Fidel Castro and his system. Hidalgo said many aspects of daily life in Cuba could produce a "social explosion" at any time. (The Washington Post, The Washington Times, 13,20/8/02)

August 13: Supporters of five Cuban agents convicted in an espionage case are beginning a campaign in the US aimed at winning them a new trial. National Lawyers Guild president Bruce Nestor said that his group wants to build a groundswell of support for the men in a case that he says was politicized by the US government. A group called the National Campaign to Free the Five has begun speaking tours and rallies around the country to bring the case to the public, said Gloria La Riva, who represents the campaign. Los Angeles, New York, St. Louis, Chicago, Cleveland and Miami are among the cities targeted. Attorneys have filed notices of appeal with the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta.

August 13: House Majority Leader Dick Armey (Republican-Texas) declared that the United States should drop its embargo of Cuba and allow American citizens to travel to the communist island. He said that he has backed the embargo in recent years out of a sense of loyalty to fellow Republicans Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Lincoln Díaz-Balart. (The Miami Herald, 13/8/02)

August 14: Twenty-nine Cuban immigrants were found by US authorities in the Keys area, while another 31 were deported back to the island. According to the US Border Patrol, the group -- made up of 16 men, 10 women and three children-- was found in the Dry Tortugas National Park area. Their arrival is suspected to be the result of a human smuggling operation returning from the coastal town of Mariel, west of Havana. (El Nuevo Herald, 15/8/02)

August 15: Anti-Castro activists in US Congress are struggling hard to preserve an embargo against Cuba that has lasted more than 40 years. "We're working hard and we know the odds are against us. It's like David vs. Goliath," said Cuban-born Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Republican-Florida. Pro-embargo lawmakers have a big ally in Bush, who has threatened a veto. But a veto would have consequences beyond Cuba. The proposals to ease the embargo are part of a Treasury and Postal spending bill. A veto would affect billions of dollars of unrelated programs. "We know we're asking the president for a lot," Ros-Lehtinen said. Pro-embargo lawmakers can no longer count on the rock-solid Republican support they once enjoyed. "The coalition of the traditional leftists, big business and farm states is a difficult coalition," said Steve Vermillion, an aide to Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Republican-Florida. (AP, 15/8/02)

August 15: Fidel Castro announced that he would persist in his struggle for the return of the five Cubans convicted in the US on charges of espionage, whom he called unfaltering heroes and patriots. Castro expressed conviction that the Cubans, who are serving sentences ranging from 15 years to life in prison in different US correctional institutions, "will return to the bosom of the grateful homeland that does not forget them and will not relinquish the fight for their return." (Notimex, 15/8/02)

August 15: Easing economic sanctions on Cuba would threaten US businesses and national security, a Bush administration official said. For several years, limited cash trade has been allowed with Cuba. Despite a veto threat, Congress is poised to further erode the economic embargo, effectively lifting the ban on travel to Cuba. That would be a mistake, said Otto Reich, head of the State Department's Western Hemisphere affairs bureau. Castro wants to lure US businesses into extending credit to the impoverished country, Reich said. Cuba previously has bought goods on credit from other countries, then refused to pay its debts, he said. "(Castro) thinks that the United States, which is the big enchilada as far as credits are concerned, that we are going to provide the credits that are going to enable him to pay back all these other guys," Reich said. (The Columbus Dispatch, 16/8/02)

August 15: A federal jury has found a man guilty of conspiracy and two counts of smuggling for his role in a two year operation that secretly carried 99 people, including his wife and child, from Cuba's coast to the Florida Keys. Yoel Gonzalez Acosta, 31, was found guilty in Key West after being indicted in December with six other men for working in a profit-driven migrant smuggling ring. The operation was run by Jorge "Bombino" Aleman and charged thousands of dollars per person to illegally bring Cubans to South Florida, prosecutors said. (AP, 16/8/02)

August 15: One of two brothers accused of hijacking an airliner in New Orleans in 1980 and forcing the pilots to land in Havana was denied bail, a day after his arrest. The FBI arrested Miguel Angel Aguiar Rodriguez, 55, at an immigration office in Miami after receiving a tip that the Cuba native had made an appointment to apply for permanent residency. The FBI believes his brother, Roberto Teodoro Rodriguez, died in Cuba. (AP, 16/8/02)

August 16: Cuba will appeal to the UN General Assembly, for the 11th time, for support to end the 40-year US blockade on Cuba. Prensa Latina News Agency had access to a report sent by Havana to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan for discussion and vote by this organization, denouncing the harmful consequences for Cubans of this policy. The Island will present the "Need to End the US Economic, Trade and Financial Blockade on Cuba" during the 57th Session of the UN General Assembly, which begins in September. (Prensa Latina, 16/8/02)

August 18: A new shipment of food from the United States arrived in Havana aboard the vessel "Mar Caribe Monrovia." The shipment, sent by the international Marsh Supermarket chain, contains four containers of margarine, butter, cereals and tomato sauce worth \$ 100,000, which adds to the sales made to Cuba in January 2002 of 1,000 metric tons of lard. This purchase by the Cuban government forms part of a sales agreement between Cuba and Marsh, which so far totals \$ 750,000, but the island's government hopes that this figure will increase in the future, Pedro Alvarez, president of Cuban food importer ALIMPORT, told the press. (EFE, 18/8/02)

August 18: Leading the charge to end the Eisenhower-era embargo against Cuba are Kansas farmers and lawmakers from other farm states. They call the decades-old bans on trade and travel relics of a failed policy and demand that Cuba be opened to Americans. Jerry Moran, Republican-Hays, is pushing for more agricultural trade. Senator Pat Roberts was one of the first lawmakers to visit Cuba and meet Castro. And former Agriculture Secretary and Wichita congressman Dan Glickman went to Havana, continuing the promotion of Kansas products he said would benefit from advanced Cuba trade. (The Wichita Eagle, 18/8/02)

August 19: For the second time in the last 40 years, 200 US companies will display their products in Havana. The industrial fair will take place in September, with the approval of Cuban authorities and the authorization of the US Treasury Department. The show is organized by PWN Exhibition International, LLC in Westport, Connecticut, the same enterprise that coordinated the first such exchange in a February, 2001 medical fair in Havana. (New York Transfer, 19/8/02)

August 20: Another group of US young people arrived in Havana to study medicine at the Latin American School of Medicine, which opened in 1999, 12 months after Hurricane Mitch hit Central America. Rev. Lucius Walker, who came to Havana leading the group of 23 youth from 12 US states, told the press that this is a new step to strengthen relations between both peoples. (Prensa Latina, 21/8/02)

August 20: A group of 36 Cuban migrants landed on an island off Tavernier in the Upper Keys, Florida. The migrants -- 22 men, 11 women and three children -- arrived on Dove Key near mile marker 91, a US Border Patrol spokesman said. Members of the group said they departed Cuba's Villa Clara province in a 31-foot, white speedboat with two outboard engines. The migrants said they paid smugglers \$5 000 each for the trip. (The New Herald, 21/8/02)

August 23: Cuba said it is ready to cooperate with the United States to fight the West Nile virus (WNV) outbreak that has claimed 11 lives and left 251 people infected in the US since January. "In our country sanitary vigilance measures and cautious bird observation have been adopted, and controls of human contagion have been taken," the Cuban government said in a statement. "The Cuban government is at the disposition to cooperate in any sense with sanitary authorities from the United States and any other country from our hemisphere in research and other necessary efforts to face this new challenge to human health," it said. (Xinhua, 23/8/02)

August 24: Federal and local authorities are investigating the link between the disappearance of a boat filled with at least 20 Cubans and four bodies found off the coast of Florida in recent days. The Coast Guard ended its search for the 24-foot vessel, which reportedly left Cuba carrying between 20 and 25 people. No survivors have been found. US Coast Guard spokesman Tony Russell said a body was found in the waters off Cape Cañaveral. Russell said the Coast Guard was searching for one overdue vessel that may have come from Cuba with migrants aboard, but stressed that it was too early to know whether the discovery of the remains was connected to the fate of those aboard the missing boat. FBI Miami spokeswoman Judy Orihuela said agents were investigating but had no additional details on the case. "We have reports that people are missing from Cuba," Orihuela said. "We're just looking into it right now." The loss of life could rival the worst Cuban smuggling disaster in history – the disappearance of 29 migrants last November. (AP, The Miami Herald, 26/8/02)

August 25: US livestock will be on display late next month as part of the first food and agribusiness exhibition to take place in Havana in decades. It was organized specifically for US companies that hope to get a piece of the expanding Cuban market. The trade show -- the first to be held on the island since Fidel Castro assumed control of Cuba -- will include some of America's agricultural giants, suggesting that President Bush will face intensified pressure from supporters of normalized relations between the two nations. (The Miami Herald, 25/8/02)

August 26: A Cuban was ordered to be sent to New Orleans for trial on charges that he and his brother hijacked a Delta Air Lines flight to Havana 22 years ago. US Magistrate Judge John O'Sullivan ordered Miguel Angel Aguiar Rodriguez to be jailed until trial as a risk of flight and danger to the community. "By his own actions, he's shown if he wants to get someplace, he'll get there," the judge said in rejecting a bail request. Air piracy and kidnap charges in the 1980 hijacking indictment carry a possible life sentence. (AP, 27/8/02)

August 26: The US embargo on trade with Cuba is likely to be history within a few years, according to Representative John Boozman, the only Arkansas Republican in the US House of Representatives. There are enough votes in the House to relax or get rid of the embargo now, Boozman told members of a civic club. But he said the Republican leadership that controls the House won't let the matter come to a vote. His support for an end to the embargo marks a difference between Boozman and Republican President Bush, but puts him in tune with many farmers and business executives in Arkansas. (AP,27/8/02)

August 28: The Bush administration, convinced that Fidel Castro's regime could collapse at any time, has begun developing plans to help Cuba manage a change in government and nudge the aging president's successor toward a US-style system. Administration officials say they are trying to chart how they would react if the Cuban leader's death, for example, opened the way for a leadership more sympathetic to the United States. And they are considering what they would do if it set off a mass migration toward Florida that the United States would have to head off. From President Bush down, the administration "has come to a realization that we need to be more vigorous in thinking through what we would do in any number of contingencies," said a senior administration official who asked to remain unidentified. "We have a number of interests in play." (Los Angeles Times, 28/8/02)

August 29: Citing a lack of "basic freedoms" in Cuba, Governor Jeb Bush urged Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura to reconsider his plans to attend a trade exposition in Havana next month. "While I don't expect you to cancel your trip, I strongly believe doing so would be the right thing to do," Bush said in a letter to Ventura. "I encourage you to consider other options as you look for opportunities to expand international trade for your state." But a spokesman for Ventura said the Minnesota governor did not agree with Bush's "isolationist approach" and would not alter his plans. (CNN, 30/8/02)

August 30: Seventeen Cuban migrants abandoned by smugglers on an uninhabited island in the lower Bahamas have been rescued, the US Coast Guard said. "Abandoning these migrants with little food or water and leaving them is a grossly inhumane act," said Coast Guard Lt. Tony Russell. "Smugglers have no regard for the well-being of their human cargo, only their own financial gain." The 17 Cubans found on Cay Sal island in the Cay Sal Bank chain, which is located between Cuba and the majority of other Bahamian islands, included 12 men, three women and two children, according to Petty Officer Anastasia Burns. None needed hospitalization. (Sun Sentinel, 30/8/02)

August 30: Cuban and United States lawyers have been meeting in Havana to discuss issues related to the bilateral Family and Inheritance Laws affected by the Torricelli and Helms-Burton Acts. An official government statement said that the meeting would also allow for an evaluation of business opportunities in Cuba, the free trade zone system and the present situation of Cuban tourism industry. Also the topics being discussed include law as practiced in Cuba, protection of

intellectual property and relations with the southern US state of Florida. The three-day meeting is being attended by nearly 100 lawyers, 60 of them coming from the US, including some of Cuban origin. (Caribbean Media Corporation, 30/8/02)

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