

FOCAL's Research Forum on Cuba

Chronicle on Cuba

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Highlights

Domestic Affairs: Hurricane Ike crosses Cuba forcing some 2,600,000 Cubans to find shelter. Opposition organizations call for unconditional international solidarity with hurricane victims and ask the Cuban government to accept any assistance offered. The Cuban Housing Institute says over 200,000 homes nationwide were damaged by the hurricanes. The Government tries to curb corruption and theft of state-owned resources amidst shortages caused by the passing of hurricanes Gustav and Ike.

Economy: Cuba's central bank tells creditors the country's foreign debt increased by \$1.1 billion in 2007 to \$16.5 billion. The Cuban Ministry of Finances and Prices announces an increase of 60 % on gasoline and diesel prices. The Cuban Government reports that losses from hurricanes Gustav and Ike have cost about \$5 billion dollars. Cuban agriculture officials say they expect a six-month food crisis. More than 5,000 people have applied to farm idle plots. Cuba announces price freezes at all farmers markets.

Exile Community: Miami-based exile groups ask the US Government for a temporary lift of sanctions against Cuba to facilitate humanitarian aid. Consenso Cubano says the Cuban and the US governments should not politicize the relief effort to victims of the hurricanes. Humanitarian groups and scores of Cuban-Americans pressure President Bush and Congress to suspend the US embargo of Cuba to aid hurricane victims.

Foreign Affairs: Cuba reports that has received 230 offers of aid from 63 nations and institutions amounting to US\$ 30.5 million. Canada provides assistance to people affected by the hurricanes. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin makes his second visit to Cuba in two months. The Cuban government accepts the resumption of formal political dialogue with the European Union. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez visits Cuba before and after an international tour. Cuban First Vice-President participates at the 63 Period of Sessions of the UN General Assembly. Cuba continues its health and education collaboration programs.

Security: Russia is in talks to build a space centre in Cuba. The chief of South Africa's National Defense Force leads a military delegation on official visit in Cuba.

US-Cuba Relations: In four occasions the US reiterates its offer to send humanitarian aid to Cuba. Fidel Castro says Cuba has too much dignity to accept aid from the US, and says the US is spreading lies for claiming that it has granted 250 million in "farm sales"

to Havana. The Cuban Foreign Ministry presents its annual draft to the UN General Assembly on the US embargo against the island.

Lo más relevante

Asuntos domésticos: El huracán Ike cruza sobre Cuba y fuerza a unos 2,600,000 cubanos a buscar refugio. Organizaciones opositoras hacen un llamado a la solidaridad internacional sin condiciones con las víctimas de los huracanes y apelan al gobierno para que acepte cualquier ayuda que se ofrezca. El Instituto Cubano de la Vivienda dice que más de 200,000 casas fueron dañadas por los huracanes. El gobierno trata de poner freno a la corrupción y a robos de recursos del Estado en medio de la escasez provocada por el paso de los huracanes Gustav y Ike.

Economía: El Banco Central de Cuba dice a los acreedores que la deuda externa del país a crecido de 1,000 millones en 2007 a 16,500 millones. El Ministerio de Finanzas y Precios anuncia un incremento de un 60 % en los precios de la gasolina y el diesel. El gobierno cubano informa que las pérdidas por los huracanes Gustav y Ike han costado cerca de 5,000 millones de dólares. Funcionarios cubanos de la agricultura dicen que esperan una crisis de seis meses en los alimentos. Más de 5,000 personas han solicitado tierras ociosas. Cuba anuncia un congelamiento de los precios en todos los mercados agropecuarios.

Comunidad de exiliados: Grupos de exiliados basificados en Miami le piden al gobierno de Estados Unidos un levantamiento temporal de las sanciones contra Cuba para facilitar la ayuda humanitaria. Consenso Cubano dice que el gobierno de Cuba y el de Estados Unidos no deben politizar los esfuerzos de ayuda a las víctimas de los huracanes. Grupos humanitarios y decenas de cubano americanos presionan al Presidente Bush y al Congreso a una suspensión del embargo sobre Cuba para ayudar a las víctimas de los huracanes.

Asuntos exteriores: Cuba informa que ha recibido 230 ofrecimientos de ayuda de 63 naciones por un monto de US\$ 30.5 millones. Canadá ofrece asistencia a la población afectada por los huracanes. El Viceprimer Ministro ruso Igor Sechin realiza su segunda visita a Cuba en menos de dos meses. El gobierno cubano acepta la reanudación del diálogo político con la Unión Europea. El Presidente venezolano Hugo Chávez visita Cuba antes y después de una gira internacional. El Primer Vicepresidente cubano participa en el 63 Período de Sesiones de la Asamblea General de la ONU. Cuba continúa sus programas de colaboración en salud y educación.

Seguridad: Rusia sostiene conversaciones para la apertura de un centro espacial en Cuba. El jefe de las Fuerzas Nacionales de Defensa de Sudáfrica encabeza una delegación militar en visita oficial a Cuba.

Relaciones Cuba-Estados Unidos: En cuatro ocasiones EEUU reitera su oferta de envío de ayuda humanitaria a Cuba. Fidel Castro dice que Cuba tiene mucha dignidad para aceptar ayuda de EEUU, y dice que este país miente cuando afirma haber aprobado \$250

millones de dólares en “ventas agrícolas” a La Habana. El Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores presenta su propuesta anual ante la Asamblea General de ONU sobre el embargo de EEUU contra la isla.

Domestic Affairs

September 1: The National Secretariat of Cuban Workers Federation (CTC) called on workers throughout the country to start a massive and democratic discussion on a draft bill on Social Security. The action is in tune with a decision taken earlier this year by the Cuban Parliament that, during the months of September and October, all Cuban workers should discuss and give their opinions on the draft bill, which will be submitted to approval by the parliament next December. Over 3,400,000 union members will hold meetings at work centers to actively and consciously express their criteria and concern on the draft bill (*ACN*, 1/9/08).

September 2: Cuban dissidents urged President Raul Castro's government to break with past practice and welcome any offer of international aid after Hurricane Gustav left a trail of destruction in western Cuba. "We appeal to the Cuban Communist Party and Cuban authorities to responsibly put aside all ideology; human values must be put before anything else," the outlawed Cuban National Liberal Party said in a statement. Gustav tore across western Cuba damaging more than 120,000 homes, and devastating the Isle of Youth. No deaths in Cuba were immediately reported though there were many injuries. "We urge the international community, the United Nations and especially Europe and the United States to help Gustav's victims" in Cuba, the party statement added. Cuba's state media have said they expect aid from Russia and Venezuela. Back in 2001 after Hurricane Michelle slammed Cuba, the United States offered help. Havana voiced thanks for the gesture and instead requested it be allowed to buy food and medicine despite the US trade embargo in place against the Americas' only communist-ruled country (*AFP*, 2/8/08).

September 2: Representatives of Cuba's internal opposition appealed to the international community to help the island recover from the devastation wrought by Hurricane Gustav and urged the country's communist government to set aside its usual unwillingness to accept such aid. The call came from the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation and the Liberal Party - neither of them recognized by the government - and from independent journalist Miriam Leiva. In an "urgent appeal," the dissident human rights commission asked the international community to offer Cuba emergency assistance and exhorted Gen. Raul Castro's government "to accept international aid, including that from NGOs and private individuals." Leiva, a founder of the Ladies in White group comprising relatives of political prisoners, said that the magnitude of the destruction caused by Gustav requires "emergency humanitarian aid from governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, individuals and all Cubans living abroad" (*EFE*, 2/9/08).

September 3: Former Cuban leader Fidel Castro said that Hurricane Gustav hit Cuba like a nuclear bomb and left authorities struggling to feed people on the hard-hit Isle of Youth. In a column published in official daily Granma, he said Gustav, which slammed into western Cuba, had damaged or destroyed 100,000 houses and dealt a blow to agriculture. He said television shots from the Isle of Youth, which is 40 miles (64 km) off Cuba's southwestern coast "reminded me of the desolation I saw when I visited Hiroshima," referring to the Japanese city destroyed by a US nuclear bomb in 1945 at the end of World War Two. "Now the battle is to feed the hurricane victims," Castro wrote, saying that only two of 16 bakeries on the island were functioning. Castro warned that recovering from Gustav would require sacrifice on the part of Cubans and that the cost would be high. "A hundred million dollars means only nine dollars per resident, and we need much more. We need 30 times, 40 times that number only to cover our most elemental necessities," he said ([A Nuclear Strike](#); *Reuters*, 3/9/08).

September 3: Two prominent Cuban dissidents have asked President Bush to loosen restrictions temporarily on travel and sending money to the communist-run island to help tens of thousands left homeless by Hurricane Gustav. Marta Beatriz Roque and Vladimiro Roca signed a Spanish-language letter to Bush that they delivered to the US Interests Section in Havana. Officials at the mission said they passed it along to the White House. The letter, sent by fax the next day to foreign reporters, asks Bush to lift restrictions on travel and money transfers to Cuba by Cuban exiles in the United States "for at least two months." "You know as well as we do that any family member abroad would like to have physical contact with those who are going through a difficult situation," they wrote. "Knowing how intransigent the Cuban government is about accepting help from your country (...) we ask that you permit American non governmental organizations to help the region so as to soothe the suffering of its inhabitants," the dissidents wrote (*AP*, 4/9/08).

September 3: According to independent journalist Luis Felipe Rojas, after a summary trial, dissidents Yordis García Fournier, chief editor of the independent newsletter Futuro, and Isael Poveda Silva were sentenced to 12 and 18 months in jail, respectively. Both are activists with the Movement of Cuban Youths for Democracy (MCJD) in the Eastern provinces. They had been detained on August 31 in Guantanamo and accused of "resisting arrest" and "disobedience." Rolando Rodríguez Lobaina, leader of the MCJD, added that no relatives or activists were allowed in the courtroom during the trial. García Fournier y Poveda Silva had visited a Guantanamo police station known as "Parque 24" to inquire after fellow MCJD member Enyor Díaz Allen, who had been arrested at his home. They were both beaten up for voicing their support for Díaz Allen and shouting out slogans against the government (*Cubaencuentro*, 4/9/08).

September 3: The northeastern Cuban town of Gibara went on alert as the sea swelled due to tropical storm Hanna and Hurricane Ike. The civil defense system of Gibara, in the province of Holguin, started to function at the first signs of the swelling sea. Waves of three meters high hit the coast of Gibara and the Baracoa bay in the province of Guantanamo as Hanna advanced to the Bahamas (*Xinhua*, 4/9/08).

September 4: Dissident groups in Cuba are attempting to open up a debate on the problem of racism in the country, in order to promote "full integration" of all the island's citizens, without discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity or skin colour. To that end, a committee "without ideological affiliation or political goals" was formed at a workshop on the issue, to promote actions and initiatives to guarantee "a voice and a forum" for Afro-descendants on this Caribbean island, "with the responsible support" of all Cubans who are aware of the problem. The Citizens' Committee for Racial Integration (CIR) "will attempt to bring the issue out of the closed intellectual debates where it has been closeted for the past 15 years," said Manuel Cuesta Morúa, spokesman for the moderate dissident Arco Progresista, a coalition of small social democrat groups and one of the participants at the workshop, to which the foreign press was invited. In his view, alternative civil society organisations should seek ways to achieve the self-recognition of black people, who are not represented in proportion to their demographics and their cultural contribution to Cuba. "The CIR is pursuing recognition and racial integration, not conflict or racial pre-eminence," he said (*IPS*, 4/9/08).

September 4: In a letter to all Catholics in Havana, Cardinal Jaime Ortega Alamino, called for solidarity with the victims of Hurricane Gustav, which "caused heavy damage in the eastern region of the province of Pinar del Rio and particularly on the Isle of Youth, where the damage borders on catastrophic." Cardinal Ortega called for everyone to make an effort to contribute to the relief effort. "Last Saturday our country was hit by Hurricane Gustav, a powerful storm which media reports have shown us has caused heavy damage in the eastern region of the province of Pinar del Rio and particularly on the Isle of Youth, where the damage borders on catastrophic," he said. "I invite each one of you to extend once again, from your poverty, a charitable hand to these brothers and sisters of ours. For this purpose I ask that each one of our parishes and chapels take up a collection" and collect relief supplies to be distributed through Caritas to the affected families, the cardinal said. He said the aid collected would be sent to the parish of Our Lady of Carmel in Havana, from which it will be sent to the devastated region (*CNA*, 8/9/08).

September 5: The president of the Christian Liberation Movement, Oswaldo Paya Sardinias, said the "liberating message" of Jesus was what inspired the creation of this dissident movement that seeks peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba through the Varela Project. "Everything began very simply. We were inspired by Jesus when he said in the Gospel: 'Therefore, give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.' And we discovered that in this phrase of Jesus, as in the entire Gospel, there is a message of liberation," Paya said on the occasion of the CLM's 20th anniversary. In a message, Paya said, "We need to tell Cubans that their lives, their dignity and their freedom" belong to God, "and nobody, not even Caesar, can take that away from them if they don't give in to fear or other things." Paya recalled that throughout the years, Cubans of diverse tendencies and from all parts joined the CLM, which does not have a specific religious identity but is "inspired in the Gospel." "We are all moved by love for Cuba and for freedom," he said (*CNA*, 7/9/08).

September 5: At least seven newborns died in the maternity hospital Hijas de Galicia, in Havana, due to a bacterial infection they contracted in the operating room, medical sources said. El Nuevo Herald confirmed seven deaths and the infection of some 10 children during June and July. The infection was caused by the bacteria acinetobacter in the operating room of the facility, the sources said. The acinetobacter bacteria is very aggressive and resistant to antibiotics. A medical source, who did not want to be identified, said the children "were born completely healthy." However, a few hours after birth they developed respiratory problems, with sneezing and coughing, as well as a change in skin tone, lack of energy, fever, breathing difficulty, inflamed lungs and meningoencephalitis. For several weeks, authorities at the Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP) kept silent and continued the normal routine. But news of the initial deaths spread and forced MINSAP to close the paediatric services at the Hijas de Galicia at the end of July. To date, the authorities have not said anything about these cases (*The Miami Herald*, 5/9/08).

September 7: Hurricane Ike barreled toward Cuba as an extremely dangerous Category 4 storm and was forecast to sweep into the central Gulf of Mexico as a large and powerful storm echoing Hurricane Gustav. Ike's top sustained winds reached 135 miles per hour (215 kph), making it a savage Category 4 on the five-step Saffir Simpson scale of hurricane intensity, the US National Hurricane Center said. Forecasters said Ike could strengthen further before sweeping into Cuba, severely threatening sugar cane fields, the tourist hotels of Varadero and the crumbling colonial buildings of Havana. Over 700,000 residents of eastern provinces have been evacuated (*Reuters, EFE*, 7/9/08).

September 7: In the days since Hurricane Gustav pummeled western Cuba, angry residents in Playa de Cajío, Habana province, said not a single official had checked on this fishing town that was virtually erased by Hurricane Charlie four years ago. "No one has stopped by to see if we're eating," said 91-year-old Juana Diaz Gonzalez, whose seaside home lost part of its roof to Gustav's Category 4 winds. "We eat what we can. We live like dogs." The plight of many of Playa de Cajío's 1,500 residents offers a lesson for other hard-hit communities that hope the state will help them rebuild quickly. People in Cajío said they have struggled with official bureaucracy and ineptitude since Charlie battered the town in 2004. "It's been four years since Charlie and we're still waiting for new homes," said Rachel Gonzalez Ojeda, 44, seated outside her roofless wood and concrete home. "We never even got the materials to do the repairs. We rebuilt what we could on our own." As she spoke, more than a dozen neighbors nodded in agreement. "We can't remain silent anymore," she said. Daisy Tapanes Rodriguez, 50, a resident of Playa del Cajío, was reminded that Castro wrote in a recent essay that no storm victim would be forgotten by the state. She immediately held up four fingers. "We've been forgotten for four years now," she said (*Sun Sentinel*, 7/9/08).

September 8: President Raul Castro expressed confidence to all provincial leaders that Cubans will recover from the damages left by Hurricane Ike. In a phone call, the statesman informed top authorities from each province threatened by the storm to use all available means to protect human lives, goods and resources of the State and people. According to a note published by Granma newspaper, the president of the Council of

State and Ministers stressed the importance to be ready for the worst. Raul Castro insisted on the importance of continued preparation as a way to minimize damages. He requested top leaders from those provinces to create solidarity with the people and authorities in difficult moments like these. The Cuban president ratified his confidence in preventive, maintenance and organizational measures to reduce the impacts of the storm (*Prensa Latina*, 8/9/08).

September 8: Hurricane Ike roared across Cuba, tearing off roofs and sending waves crashing into buildings, as 900,000 Cubans fled to shelters or higher ground and Havana residents in decaying historic buildings prepared for a direct hit. Ike made landfall as a fearsome Category-3 hurricane after raking the Bahamas and worsening floods in Haiti. It is expected to tear across almost the entire length of Cuba, then enter the Gulf of Mexico with Texas and Louisiana among the likely targets. "We are preparing for a strong hit," Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage told state television. Ike's powerful winds sent huge chunks of debris flying over the streets of the central-eastern city of Camaguey, which was just 20 miles (35 kilometers) north of the eye at 8 a.m. (1200 GMT). Diagonal sheets of stinging rain flooded the narrow colonial streets, which were further clogged with tree branches, metal grates and plastic sheeting. A huge sheet of plastic roofing spun like a top in the wind above a traffic intersection. Streets were deserted, save for a lone, miserable-looking security guard taking shelter at a bus station. State television earlier broadcast images of the storm surge washing over coastal homes in the easternmost city of Baracoa. It said huge waves surged over buildings as tall as five stories and dozens of dwellings were damaged beyond repair. Winds reaching as high as 160 mph (260 kph) damaged an undetermined number of homes in Holguin province. Roofs were ripped away and trees toppled across the region. Foreign tourists were pulled out from vulnerable beach communities, including more than 9,000 from the resort of Varadero, east of Havana. Workers rushed to protect coffee plants and other crops, and plans were under way to distribute food and cooking oil to disaster areas. Forecasters said Ike would likely hit Havana, the capital of 2 million people. Morning skies were only cloudy, but schools were closed and domestic flights were suspended (*AP*, 8/9/08).

September 8: Former President Fidel Castro released a statement calling on Cubans to heed security measures to ensure no one dies. Cuba historically has successfully carried off massive evacuations before hurricanes, sparing countless lives. In a special article for the Cubadebate website under the title "Besieged by Hurricane", Fidel Castro warned that "we should be more rational than ever and fight wastage, vagrancy and complacency." "We should be absolutely honest avoiding demagoguery or compromising with weakness or opportunism. The revolutionary militants should set an example. They should give and receive confidence. They should give everything for the people, even their lives if need be," he stressed. Castro wrote that the flow of international aid to Cuba since Gustav showed that it had many friends who wanted to help. He said, without giving details, that close ally Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez had taken "measures that make up the most generous gesture of solidarity that our country has known" ([Besieged by Hurricanes](#); *AP*, *Prensa Latina*, 8/9/08).

September 8: Two children of two of Cuba's most famous revolutionaries have died in a Havana traffic accident. The Communist Party daily Granma reports that Celia and Abel Hart Santamaría were in a car that hit a tree in the Miramar neighborhood on September 7. Celia Hart was 45 and Abel 48. They were the offspring of Armando Hart and Haydee Santamaría, who were key figures in the revolution led by Fidel Castro. Hart is a former student leader who went on to head Cuba's ministries of education and culture. Santamaría accompanied Castro in his 1953 assault on the Moncada military barracks in Santiago. After 1959, she headed the cultural institution Casa de las Americas. She committed suicide in 1980 (*The Miami Herald*, 8/9/08).

September 8: Cuban President Raul Castro visited the National Civil Defense Council Headquarters to specify on the measures taken to face hurricane Ike. Raul was received by Division General Ramon Pardo Guerra, Head of the National Civil Defense Staff. He received ample information about Ike, its characteristics and probable path, from Doctor Jose Rubiera, head of the Forecast Center of the Cuban Meteorology Institute. The president also received detailed information from Pedro Saez Montejo and Ulises Guilarte de Nacimiento, heads of the Provincial Defense Councils in the two Havana provinces, about the measures taken in their respective territories (*ACN*, 9/9/08).

September 8: Although numerous churchgoers had already gathered at the local parish to take part in the traditional day of prayers, government authorities decided to disallow the celebratory mass in honor of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre in the city of Pinar del Rio. "At the request of provincial [Communist] Party authorities, the mass was cancelled and the priest broke the news to parishioners as they arrived at the church of Our Lady of Charity," said a source linked to the Pinar del Rio Diocese. The parishioners learned of the cancellation the same day the mass was to take place, when half the congregation was already there (*El Nuevo Herald*, 10/9/08).

September 9: Hurricane-force winds hit Havana as Ike pummeled Cuba with lashing rains and towering waves that have already killed four people. The hurricane killed three men and a woman in Cuba, a relatively rare event in a country which prides itself on preparedness in facing down the hurricane season's tempests. Pedro Corso Soto, 76, and Ángel Sánchez Cabello, 35, residents of Rancho Veloz, a town in the Corralillo municipality of Villa Clara province, died when they were trying to dismantle a TV antenna, which fell on the electric lines, and electrocuted them. Pascual Villafañá Rivera, 35, resident of the city of Camaguey, was hit by a wall of his house which collapsed under the impact of a fallen tree. Carmelina Diéguez Santiesteban, 74, resident of El Negro town, in Banes, Holguin, was inside her home when it collapsed under the heavy winds. "There is substantial damage in housing, and we are evaluating the farm sector," said Colonel Jose Betancourt of the civil defense department. Cuban authorities also said seven people had been injured as Ike crossed from east to west. (*AFP*, *ACN*, 9/9/08).

September 9: A Christian Liberation Movement press release called for unconditional international solidarity with hurricane Gustav victims in western Cuba. The opposition organization asked the government of the island to accept any assistance offered. "We call upon the international community to act unconditionally in solidarity with the victims

and we ask the Cuban government to accept any help offered generously and without ulterior motives. This aid is for those who need it," said the opposition organization. "As relief packages are offered, shipped and allowed in, both the State and the churches in Cuba have the capacity to distribute the aid to those who need it most," the group added (*Comunicado de Prensa del MCL*, 9/9/08).

September 10: Cuban state television said some 2.6 million people — nearly a fourth of the island's population — sought refuge from Ike, which killed four people and shredded hundreds of homes as it swept across the country. As it left Cuba, Hurricane Ike delivered a punishing blow to towns such as Los Palacios, in Pinar del Rio province, which already suffered a direct hit from a Category-4 Hurricane Gustav on August 30. In a poor neighborhood along the train tracks, the combined fury of Ike and Gustav left nearly two-thirds of the wooden homes without roofs or completely leveled. "The first one left me something, but this one left me nothing," said Olga Atiaga, a 53-year-old housewife. Gustav obliterated her roof and some walls. Then Ike blew away a mattress and smashed the kitchen sink. "I don't even have anything to sleep on," she said. Odalis Cruz, a 45-year-old housing inspector, said she evacuated to a shelter in the town's rice mill when it became clear Ike was following Gustav's path through Pinar del Rio, the westernmost province where Cuba produces tobacco used in its famous cigars. She surveyed the damage to her home. "We repaired the roof two days ago and this one took the new one," she said. "I'm ready to move to Canada! We have spent eight days drying out things, cleaning everything, sleeping on the floor, and now we are hit again" (*AP*, 10/9/08).

September 10: Cuba's official media reported 67 building collapses in densely populated Havana — 60 partially ruined, and seven destroyed — brought down by a combination of age, decay, neglect and Hurricane Ike's torrential downpours and winds. Just one day earlier, officials said 16 structures had given way to the storm, including four aged buildings in a single block that crumbled into rubble. In its 41-hour odyssey across much of Cuba, Ike left a widespread swath of destruction nearly the full length of the island and claimed the lives of four people outside the nation's capital. Nearly 16 hours after Ike's center had moved off toward the Gulf of Mexico, it took its fifth. A concrete chunk of an adjoining building crashed through the roof of a tenement fronting Havana's Malecon, triggering a chain reaction that toppled sections of floor after floor. Six hours later, emergency crews found 52-year-old Pedro Pablo Gonzalez's body, buried under three stories of rubble. Electrical power is out across much of the island, communications spotty (*Sun Sentinel*, 11/9/08).

September 10: The Cuban Housing Institute said 200,000 homes nationwide were damaged, including 30,000 total losses and the majority of the others roofless, after the passing of hurricane Ike. Adding the houses damaged by Hurricane Gustav when it walloped Cuba's western province on August 30, the tally comes to 320,000 -- a staggering figure in a nation already enduring a woeful housing shortage. So much housing is in precarious shape that 2.6 million people -- nearly a quarter of the country's population -- left their homes in advance of the storm (*The Miami Herald*, 11/9/08).

September 11: With four gold, two silver, and four bronze medals thus far, Cuba left Beijing behind at the Paralympics, when there are only six competitions ahead. The Cuban sports delegation, made up of 32 athletes, has garnered the fourth best position among the countries of the Americas participating at the games. Cuba also occupies the 15th position among all 148 countries at the event (*ACN*, 11/9/08).

September 11: "Our duty is to win," said Fidel Castro in a letter sent to the Round Table TV and radio broadcast as a message of encouragement to the Cuban people after the devastation caused by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Fidel Castro commented on the images broadcast on the program showing the destruction caused by the recent passing of Hurricane Ike, and praised the actions taken by Cuban men and women to protect the lives of the people and minimize the material loss. He particularly highlighted the work of the Civil Defense Councils of each province. Fidel Castro referred to the recovery stage in Cuba when he said all objective factors will be analyzed, including the rational use of material and human resources, and specific measures that need to be taken according to the needs of each area. Rather than tour the hardest-hit areas after each storm, President Raul Castro has dispatched vice presidents and army generals. Instead of a televised address, he has appeared only in a few shots, speaking by phone to officials in devastated areas and presiding over a closed-door meeting of civil defense leaders as they prepared for Ike in Havana. His hands-off style is a far cry from that of Fidel Castro. ([Letter from Fidel Castro](#); *AP*, *ACN*, 11/9/08).

September 11: After an intense around the clock effort, the country's Central Highway was reopened after it had been rendered impassable due to 22 fallen trees at the entrance of the city of Florida, Camaguey. The mahogany trees were felled by hurricane Ike, which struck first in eastern Cuba and left a trail of destruction throughout the island, reported Granma newspaper. A combination of people from Florida and workers and equipment from the Ministries of Construction and Agriculture from the city of Camaguey managed to saw the trees and move the pieces to the edge of the road, thus opening this important highway to vehicle traffic (*ACN*, 11/9/08).

September 12: Cuba is raising its death toll from Hurricane Ike to seven people. The Communist Party newspaper Granma reported the death of a 55-year-old man who evacuated but returned to his apartment along Havana's seaside Malecon boulevard before authorities said it was safe. Part of his aging building collapsed, trapping him among the rubble before he died. Granma said a 53-year-old man from Puerto Padre in eastern Cuba was sleeping when a wall from his neighbor's home fell and crushed him and a 55-year-old man drowned in the eastern city of Santiago (*AP*, 12/9/08).

September 14: The monument marking the spot where Christopher Columbus landed on Cuba's northeastern coast on October 28, 1492, sustained extensive damage during Hurricane Ike, state media reported. The monument, which honors the "meeting of two cultures," was heavily damaged. The Columbus monument is located in Bariay, a town in Holguin, one of the Cuban provinces most affected by the hurricane, the official AIN news agency said. Ike, one of two hurricanes that hit Cuba in a span of 10 days, damaged many monuments and historic sites in Holguin, AIN said (*EFE*, 14/9/08)

September 15: Cuban Education Minister Elsa Velázquez Cobiella praised efforts made by education workers all over the country to start the school year. In a meeting with education officials, the minister highlighted the support given by institutions and other entities to prepare the schools and to solve problems that have arisen in the wake of hurricanes Gustav and Ike in order to successfully begin the school year. Velázquez called on all education personnel to work with the same intensity and care towards students while work is done to restore facilities damaged by the storms. She also urged teachers to help rebuild the damaged workplaces and houses of their co-workers without abandoning the educational tasks (*ACN*, 15/9/08).

September 15: Dissidents in the island asked the government of Raúl Castro to accept US aid for the victims of hurricanes Gustav and Ike. They also asked Washington to ease embargo restrictions. "The politicization of the humanitarian aid to the hurricane victims is unacceptable, wherever it comes from. The wellbeing of the Cuban people must come first, for it is them who have borne the brunt of "natural disasters and the Revolution's 50 years' worth of shortages," declared Agenda for the Transition, led by Martha Beatriz Roque y Vladimiro Roca. Oppositionist economist and former-political prisoner Oscar Espinosa considered that "faced with a catastrophe of such magnitude, it is vital to accept large-scale foreign humanitarian assistance, casting aside political prejudice and unproductive traditional antagonisms" (*AFP*, 15/9/08).

September 16: State Security agents arrested and mistreated four peaceful opposition activists who shouted in protest during the trial against another two activists in Guantanamo. The arrests took place during the appeal hearing of dissidents Yordis García Fournier and Isael Poveda Silva, both linked to the independent newsletter *Futuro*, who had been convicted early in the month on charges of allegedly "resisting arrest" and "contempt of authority." Although the prosecution failed to prove that a crime had been committed, the defendants were nonetheless handed down a 1 year jail sentence. When the verdict was read, opposition activists and others in attendance protested with shouts of "Down with the dictatorship!" and "Freedom for political prisoners!" State Security agents gathered Court staff members and armed them with clubs and lengths of rebar to confront the protesters. Opposition activists Rosaida Ramírez, Niovis García Fournier, Pastor García Fournier and Pedro Poveda were taken to a police station, where they remain under arrest (*Cubaencuentro*, 17/9/08).

September 16: Health authorities in the eastern province of Granma announced strict public health measures to avoid the outbreak of disease after the flooding caused by hurricane Ike. Preventive actions include the cleaning up of rubble and the burial and incineration of dead animals in all the areas that were flooded by the rain or rivers that burst their banks. The hardest effort is in the Rio Cauto municipality, where the Salado River overflowed and the release of water from the Cauto del Paso reservoir resulted in serious floods. Even though certain communities are still flooded, the area is being fumigated with insecticides to avoid the development of the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito which transmits dengue fever (*ACN*, 16/9/08).

September 17: Cuba finished in the 23 position in the medal standings at the XIII Paralympics Games with 5 gold, 3 silver and 6 bronze medals, in an event that gathered 4,126 athletes from 148 countries. Cuba finished in the third Latin American position, behind Brazil and Mexico (*ACN*, 18/9/08).

September 17: Cuban cinema has lost one of its most complete and dedicated artists. Humberto Solas passed away in Havana at the age of 66 from cancer. Solas was well known inside and outside of Cuba for some of the best movies produced by the Cuban Institute of Cinematic Art and Industry (ICAIC) in its half-century of existence, reported *Granma* newspaper. Solas is best known as the creator of *Lucía*, a movie that is among the best one hundred Ibero American films. As a young artist, he wrote and directed *Manuela* (1966), a precursor to the emblematic work that showcased Humberto's aesthetic sensibilities, his passion and good judgment: *Un día de noviembre* (1972), *Cantata de Chile* (1975), *Cecilia* (1981), *Un hombre de éxito* (1986), and *El siglo de las luces* (1991). After the collapse of the Eastern European socialist camp which hit the film industry, Humberto Solas promoted the Gibara International Poor Cinema Festival, a celebration of movies made with scant economic resources but rich in conceptual aspirations (*ACN*, 18/9/08).

September 18: To ease the housing problem in Havana —which was further aggravated by the passing of hurricanes Gustav and Ike— intense work is underway to identify public facilities that can be turned into shelters for affected families. Manuel Buron, director of the Micro-brigade Social Construction Movement in the capital, said that in response to calls from local area authorities, several public entities in buildings as well as warehouses that were not being used have been offered. If properly adapted, these can serve as homes for those who lost theirs to the storms. Buron underscored the importance of rehabbing and modifying such places to make them liveable as soon as possible. The official also mentioned the Communist Party and Parliament's orientations regarding the need to search for facilities that can be turned into temporary housing for families evacuated due to hurricanes and other disasters (*ACN*, 18/9/08).

September 18: An online art auction will be open by Cuban artists to raise funds for the recovery of cultural centers devastated by hurricane Ike, especially those in eastern Cuba. When announcing the project, actor Jorge Perugorria said paintings, engravings, drawings and photographs by Cuban artists will be offered on an online expo-sale as an art auction titled "Art for Art." The project is supported by Cuban cultural institutions and especially the National Visual Arts Council, reported *Granma* newspaper. In presenting the initiative, Perugorria said "Many of us want to and are willing to help our Cuban brothers and sisters in anyway possible; many other Cubans are already helping in different ways to alleviate the difficult situation of the population in the most affected areas" (*ACN*, 18/9/08).

September 18: Well-known opposition activist Jorge Luís Gracia Pérez (Antúnez) was detained as he left the United States' Interests Section in Havana. Antunez and fellow oppositionists were exiting a facility where Internet access is provided when they were intercepted by State Security agents who forced him into a waiting vehicle. He was taken

back to his temporary address in Havana where they violently picked up his wife, Iris Pérez Aguilera, and finally returned them both, against their will, to the province of Santa Clara, where they reside. Antunez declared that this suppressive act sought to prevent his participation in a press conference called by the Latin-American Federation of Rural Women (FLAMUR) to ask the Cuban government to accept US humanitarian aid for the hurricane victims (*Cubanet*, 19/9/08).

September 19: Cuban President Raul Castro said people should feel the need to work more. He was speaking in a meeting with local residents of the municipality of La Palma, Pinar del Rio, one of the areas most affected by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. He assured those in attendance that they will recover everything they had. After meeting with civil defense authorities on the Isla de la Juventud, 44 miles off Cuba's southern coast, and in the western province of Pinar del Rio, the Cuban president spoke with the residents of the two areas. In speaking with farmers in Pinar del Rio, Castro talked about the importance of gradually eliminating the double currency in Cuba and paying workers for what they do as a way to boost production. "It would be bold to say that in a period of four to five years we could eliminate the double currency and make salaries decent, but it has to be done (...) people have to be paid according to what they produce," said the Cuban president. "If you work more than me and you sacrifice more than I do, you should receive more than me," said Raul, pointing at one of the farmers (*ACN*, 19/9/08).

September 22: The Cuban government will offer training workshops on home construction to all those interested in building or repairing houses, in an effort to speed up recovery work in the wake of the destruction left by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Cuban Ministry of Construction's Deputy Minister Reisvel Rosquete Hernandez said a mass movement will be needed to recover from the devastation caused by the hurricanes, which left nearly half a million houses destroyed or damaged, reported the *Trabajadores* newspaper. The courses are also aimed at maintenance brigades and especially hurricane victims (*ACN*, 22/9/08).

September 22: Students from more than 40 nations, who study at boarding schools in the central Cuban province of Camagüey, are working in recovery effort after the passing of Hurricane Ike. The group is helping in the clean up of streets and agricultural fields and repairing community centers including the University of Camagüey, the Jose Martí Higher Pedagogical Institute and the Carlos Finlay Institute of Medical Sciences. The cooperation in polyclinics and hospitals of these doctors-to-be, now being trained in Camagüey, constituted another of the missions undertaken by the students in this period of recovery (*ACN*, 22/9/08).

September 24: Cuban Housing Institute officials are absorbed in rebuilding and won't be available for some time to talk about the "in-transit" program, a government spokeswoman said. No official figures were available on how many Cubans were already living in temporary housing before Gustav and Ike struck. Cubans in temporary housing are placed on waiting lists for new homes in their old neighborhoods. Officially, those left homeless by severe weather get priority for new places - a fact not lost on those displaced by the routine decay of buildings in Old Havana. "I think they have more hope

than we do," Damarias Gualidan said of the storm victims. "Because nothing fell down on us during a hurricane, they aren't going to give us anything," added Gualidan, who has spent the past decade in temporary housing. Xudaisy Orozco, a 28-year-old hospital employee, was even more pessimistic. "It's like the end of the world here," she said. "But there's nowhere else for us." When Hurricane Charlie tore through her apartment, Marcia Escalona considered herself lucky to land temporary housing on the Cuban capital's remote outskirts while communist authorities pledged to help her rebuild. But four years later, it no longer feels temporary. "They told me it would be six months, but that was in 2004, and I want out of here already," said the 48-year-old kindergarten supervisor who lives with her husband and 22-year-old son in two rooms with concrete walls and a leaky roof in Bahia, a community of temporary homes in Havana del Este, or East Havana. Now hundreds of thousands of Cubans blown from their homes by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike have joined Escalona in line for scarce housing (*The Miami Herald*, 24/9/08).

September 25: Cuban First Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura returned to Cuba after participating in the High Level Meeting of the 63rd Period of Sessions of the UN General Assembly in New York. During his stay in New York, Machado Ventura took part in three UN events and held 12 bilateral meetings with dignitaries from all over the world. According to Granma news daily, the head of the Foreign Relations Department at the Central Committee of Cuba's Communist Party, Fernando Remirez de Estenoz, also returned accompanying Machado Ventura (*ACN*, 26/9/08).

September 25: The Cuban Government has sounded the alarm on a troublesome increase in the theft of state resources, the mysterious disappearance of supplies from hard-currency stores and price speculations on food items in the aftermath of hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Already grappling with recovering the agricultural sector and alleviating the housing crisis, the Government is now trying to curb corruption and rampant theft of state-owned resources that has flourished amidst the shortages. Following several statements published by former leader Fidel Castro, Cuban authorities have mobilized forces to end the debacle on all fronts. "For those people that divert resources or try to speculate with the price of food items, that steal electrical or telephone cables, or try to appropriate resources from the state reserves, our penal code foresees circumstances of aggravated crimes," noted Deputy Attorney General Rafael Pino Becquer during the Mesa Redonda program, adding that "prosecutors will rigorously solicit sanctions from the courts." Pino Becquer also stated that people that have accumulated goods through lucrative activity will have their possessions confiscated. The Attorney General, General Juan Escalona Reguera, appeared on Mesa Redonda to warn that the nation will preserve "the socialist legality" and "will consequently apply the law for this scenario," further stating that his office will "act with a lot of force" (*The Miami Herald*, 26/9/08).

September 29: Over 700,000 Cuban workers have thus far discussed a Social Security draft bill that proposes, among other aspects, the extension of the active labor time and the retirement age. The most recent session of the Cuban parliament agreed to submit the draft bill to workers before its analysis for approval at the legislative body. Since last September 1, Cuban workers have gathered in 21,576 assemblies throughout the country, which have been marked by great interest and awareness said Alfredo Machado, member

of the National Secretariat of the Cuban Workers Federation (CTC) in statements to Granma newspaper. Some of the largely discussed issues proposed by the draft bill include the extension of the retirement age and the active labor time; the calculation of pensions according to age and the re-incorporation of retired people to work centers (ACN, 1/10/08).

Economy

September 1: Cuba said more than 90,000 houses were damaged or destroyed when Hurricane Gustav tore through the western province of Pinar del Rio with 150 mile per hour (240 km per hour) winds. Officials and state media said 80 percent of the province, which has about 750,000 residents, was without power after Gustav knocked down 80 high-tension towers with cables that distribute electricity throughout the region. State-run news agency AIN, in a story quoting Cuban vice president Carlos Lage, said 53 percent of the homes in the hardest hit areas were affected, most of them suffering roof damage. Power lines were knocked down throughout the stricken area in Cuba, many of them draping across roads and highways. Lage said during a trip to the worst-hit Pinar del Rio towns that power supply was a "very grave and urgent problem." "It doesn't have to do with repairing a few towers, it has to do with constructing a new electricity network, because much of the network is on the ground," he said. State television said tobacco warehouses in Pinar del Rio, the main growing region for Cuba's famed tobacco, had been damaged. AIN also reported heavy damages to hotels and thousands of buildings in Pinar del Rio's Vinales valley, a popular international tourist destination known for its dramatic rocky outcrops and traditional architecture (*Reuters*, 1/9/08).

September 2: The rains of hurricane Hanna have directly affected the eastern Cuban provinces of Guantanamo and Holguin, as then storm moves towards the Central Bahamas. A report from Guantanamo's Venceremos newspaper said that rains coming from the storm could be locally intense in some northern areas of the two eastern provinces, while winds are expected to blow at 60 to 70 kilometers per hour (ACN, 2/9/08).

September 2: The German cities of Frankfurt and Berlin got a sneak peak at the 29th International Tourism Fair (FITCUBA 2009), the biggest tourism trade expo and planned to take place in Cuba in October. Germany will be the guest of honor due to fact that it is the fifth main country from which tourists come to the Caribbean island. Cuba's delegation to the pre-trade fair activities was headed by Deputy Tourism Minister Maria Elena Lopez; also present were several Cuban executives of hotel chains and tour operators (ACN, 2/9/08).

September 2: The Saturno motor vessel of the Cuban Revolutionary Navy is expected to arrive in Isla de la Juventud on September 4 loaded with materials for the reestablishment of the communications and energy systems in this area, devastated by hurricane Gustav. The ship set sailed from the Haiphong terminal of Havana's port carrying four containers with power generators, communications equipment and liquid containers and 50 poles for the erection of electricity wires, according to statements by the ship's commander Jorge

Luis Mora Sotomayor to the Juventud Rebelde newspaper. The vessel is the first of several shipments to be sent by the navy to the island, located 44 miles off Cuba's mainland south-western coast and considered a special municipality of the country. Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces Ministry (MINFAR) has been closely involved with the recovery efforts of Pinar del Rio and Isla de la Juventud. Colonel Raul Perez Ramos, Head of MINFAR's Transportation Department said raw materials for basic industry and engineering equipment and bulldozers have been sent to those territories (ACN, 3/9/08).

September 3: Electrical line crews from several unaffected areas of Cuba are helping in the recovery of the power system in Pinar del Rio and Isla de la Juventud, the two areas most damaged by Hurricane Gustav. More than 100 workers from Guantanamo, Santiago de Cuba and Villa Clara are supporting Pinar del Rio's efforts to reestablish the electricity services, while a crew from central Camaguey has been working on Isla de la Juventud since September 1st. Akdelay Ledouen, head of the workers brigade from Sagua la Grande, in Las Villas province, said his crew expressed their commitment to stay in the affected areas as long as needed. Meanwhile, the fifth plane loaded with food and water for the hurricane victims landed on Isla de la Juventud on September 2. The director of the Rafael Cabrera Montelier airport, Juan Corrales, told the press that airplanes with food have been arriving to the island since September 1st. Corrales said the airport suffered serious damage, especially the control tower, which left the terminal cut off (ACN, 3/9/08).

September 3: Guatemala's President Alvaro Colom announced that Mexico and other Central American countries are considering the purchase of Cuban pharmaceuticals, due to their low cost. During a press conference in Guatemala City, Colom said that at the initiative of his Panamanian counterpart Martin Torrijos the countries making up the Central American Integration System (SICA) plus Mexico are considering the purchase of as many pharmaceuticals as possible from the Cuban market. Cuba is producing lots of pharmaceuticals, which are cheap enough, said the Guatemalan President, as cited by different international news agencies. Colom pointed out that he is looking for more Cuban assistance in the health care field in order to increase the number of Cuban doctors in his country, particularly in rural areas (ACN, 3/9/08).

September 3: Cuba and Mexico will analyze ways to strengthen bilateral cooperation, during the 4th Session of the Joint Commission for Development inaugurated in Havana with representatives from the two nations. The encounter will promote conditions to reinitiating mutual collaboration, said the vice-minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, Orlando Requeijo. He also pointed out that Latin American and Caribbean countries are, like other geographic areas, facing the negative impact of climate change and the increase of food and oil prices, a situation that affects the economies and creates imbalances in trade in the region (ACN, 3/9/08).

September 4: Cuba and Mexico entered a new stage of mutual collaboration with the signing of the final statement of the 4th Joint Commission Meeting between the two countries that concluded in Havana. The document, endorsed by representatives of the two nations, includes proposals for collaboration in aquaculture, plague control,

epidemiological vigilance, general treatment of senior citizens, airport systems and the national environmental atlas. The statement also includes projects for the development of the biomedical applications-oriented nanotechnology, housing and public administration. The document was signed by Cuba's Deputy Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration (MINVEC), Orlando Requeijo, and the head of the economic relations and international collaboration office of the Mexican Foreign Ministry, Luz Maria de La Mora (*ACN*, 4/9/08).

September 5: Cuba's central bank has told creditors the country's foreign debt increased by \$1.1 billion in 2007 to \$16.5 billion, sources close to Cuban efforts to reschedule some official debt said. The increase came in Cuba's so-called "active" debt, on which it pays interest and principal, which rose from \$7.8 billion in 2006 to \$8.9 billion. Additional official and bank debt accounted for the increase. Cuba's active debt includes around \$4.5 billion in official debt owed to other governments, \$2.5 billion in supplier debt owed to traders, and bank debt of \$1.86 billion owed to foreign financial institutions. Cuba's active debt is comprised of money borrowed since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. Its "inactive" debt is the debt it is not paying interest on and which was built up after Cuba defaulted on its obligations in the 1980s. Cuba reported a \$488 million balance of payments surplus in 2007, but higher costs for food and fuel imports this year, and lower prices for its main export, nickel, have led it to seek some restructuring with Japan and other creditors. Cuba is not a member of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank or other multilateral lending institution. Cuba last reported its inactive debt as \$7.6 billion in 2006. The central bank said there was little change in that part of the debt, the sources said (*Reuters*, 5/9/08).

September 8: The Cuban Ministry of Finances and Prices announced new gasoline and diesel prices, which will be updated every three months in accordance with price fluctuations on the international market. A note published by Granma news daily recalls that gasoline prices have tripled in the past three years and that Cuba cannot keep on charging the same prices that it did three years ago to the public. "In spite of this situation, the prices of domestic sales remained unchanged although this increase gradually reduced profits until it caused economic losses in the last months," the note points out. The text adds that if prices remained unaltered, there would be economic losses to the tune of 388 million CUCs (1 CUC approximately equal to 1 Euro), which would be unsustainable for the country's economy (*ACN*, 8/9/08).

September 8: Hurricane Ike has caused major damage to homes and agriculture in the eastern provinces of Santiago de Cuba, Holguin and Las Tunas, according to local preliminary reports. Col. Jose E. Betancourt, head of the Risk Reduction Department of the National Civil Defense Council, noted that in spite of the loss, measures taken to preserve human life and to minimize the negative effects on the economy have been effective. Santiago de Cuba's municipalities of Guama and Segundo Frente are cut off by rivers that have flooded several localities in the area. Of the nine reservoirs in the area, seven are releasing waters, as an average of 96 percent of the total capacity has been already collected. Northern coastal towns in Las Tunas, Jesus Menendez, Puerto Padre and Manati were also severely hit by the hurricane. Ike's winds caused serious damage to

houses, banana plantations, schools and health centers and buildings related to the local economy (ACN, 8/9/08).

September 8: Eastern Cuban province Holguin is one of the most severely affected by the passing of Hurricane Ike, which greatly damaged communications, power supplies and tourist facilities in its territory. Miguel Díaz- Canel Bermúdez, First secretary of Holguin Communist Party reported over the phone to the National television program Round Table, the amount and severity of damages in the eastern province. Díaz- Canel highlighted that the territories affected the most by the winds and rains are Gibara, Moa, Rafael Freyre, Banes and the capital city municipalities. Among the main damages caused by the meteor are fallen trees blocking roads, and power interruptions. Also the communication systems suffered damages, especially the transmitting towers, which wreaked havoc in the mobile phones. Hotel facilities were affected in the tourist pole of Guardalavaca and Pesquero Beach (ACN, 8/9/08).

September 8: Hurricane Ike seriously affected the province of Camaguey during the seven hours it took to cross the province- it finally moved west by way of a point on the southern coast close to neighboring Ciego de Avila. The hurricane severely damaged homes, schools, warehouses, and service and productive facilities, said local civil defense authorities. Electric poles and transmission towers were also heavily affected as well as communication lines and antennas. In the city of Nuevitas, to the north coast of Camaguey, both homes and the port's warehouses suffered great damage, while hotels and tourism-related facilities were also severely affected at Santa Lucia Beach (ACN, 8/9/08).

September 9: Easternmost Guantanamo province's reservoirs are almost at the top of their capacity (348 million cubic meters) and the two most important of them are downloading at the moment, reported the Province Hydraulic Resources Institute. The contribution to the filling up of the Guantanamo province reservoirs is the only good thing done by the passing of Hurricane Ike close to this Cuban territory, which caused considerable damage to housing and social and economic facilities in the Baracoa municipality and other mountain areas. Due to the heavy rains associated with the storm, that is still battering Cuba's territory, the La Yaya and Jaibo reservoirs in the Niceto Perez and El Salvador municipalities respectively with 280 million metric cubic combined capacities are shedding surplus water. Also shedding excess waters is Los Asientos reservoir, located in the Cuajeri Valley, an agriculture center in the San Antonio del Sur municipality, whose meteorological station reported high levels of precipitation related to Ike. This valley is the only place in Cuba where vegetables can be cultivated in spring and summer and besides it has the Pozo Azul reservoir, at 60 percent of its capacity at this moment (ACN, 9/9/08).

September 9: Cuba said that Hurricane Ike did no serious damage to its nickel mines and processing plants and it expected to restart production of its top export in a few days. The damage "won't prevent renewal of production in the next few days," the Ministry of Basic Industries said in a communique read on state television. Cuba is one of the world's top nickel producers and operates three mines, one in association with Canadian firm Sherritt

International. It shut production at the nickel facilities before Hurricane Ike made landfall with 120-mile-per-hour (195-kph) winds in the eastern province of Holguin, where the mines and plant are located. The government did not say what the damages were, but the Communist Party chief in the province of Holguin, where the mines are located, said on radio the Ernesto "Che" Guevara plant had suffered roof damage (*Reuters*, 9/9/08).

September 10: Hurricane Ike limped out of Cuba, leaving behind \$3 to \$4 billion in damage to homes, agriculture, public buildings and the electrical grid, the United Nations said. More than 140,000 structures were damaged, Elisabeth Byrs of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said at a news briefing in Geneva. Ike ripped across the Caribbean island, damaging an economy already strained by Hurricane Gustav and the soaring cost of imports. The central bank had already asked various creditors to restructure debt due to this year's spike in fuel and food prices and a fall in the price of nickel, Cuba's main export. "If we were cash short before, you can imagine now. There is little liquidity for recovery, let alone anything else," said a Cuban economist who asked not to be named. Communist-ruled Cuba, under an economic embargo imposed by Washington more than 40 years ago, is not a member of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank or other multilateral lending institution with a US presence that could help bail it out. Ike struck near Cuba's nickel-producing region in eastern Holguin province and roared nearly the entire 700-mile (1,125-km) length of the island, flattening sugar cane fields and toppling decrepit buildings in the capital. There is also likely to be an impact on the tourist industry. Damage from Ike could hit \$3 billion to \$4 billion (1.7 billion to 2.3 billion pounds), according to "some official sources" in Cuba, Elisabeth Byrs, a spokeswoman for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said at a briefing in Geneva (*The Miami Herald*, *Reuters*, *BBC*, 10/9/08).

September 10: The picture was dire across the island after the passing of hurricane Ike. In Villa Clara, 70 percent of crops were destroyed, including 80 percent of banana trees, news anchor Randy Alonso said. In Camagüey, the Cuban state newspaper *Adelante* said damage was "principally to the electrical and telephone system, industrial and tourist facilities, schools, homes, warehouses of different uses and forestry." The city was completely without power after the north and south coasts were flooded by sea surge and three rivers overflowed inland. A second evacuation operation was under way in Camagüey, where up to 4,000 people were being moved due to rising waters. "After bidding farewell to this unwelcome visitor, another equally damaging one arrived: the flooding due to the overflowing rivers," the newspaper said. Authorities also reported heavy damages in Nuevitás, on the northern coast. "Everyone is volunteering how they can -- some are cutting up the wood, some are taking out the trash, everyone is pitching in," Zuliemy Garcia said by phone from Nuevitás. "When we looked outside and saw what happened to our city, a lot of people were crying." Cubaencuentro website reported heavy damage to the town of Chaparra in Las Tunas, saying 80 percent of homes were damaged. In Ciego de Avila, the state government news agency said the largest fruit company in the country, La Cuba, was severely damaged. Television footage showed widespread destruction to nearly all the buildings and gas stations. "The sea wall is completely destroyed," said Dennys Rodríguez Guilarte, 44, who runs a guest house in Baracoa, Guantánamo. "The winds pushed the sea onto the people who live there. Now

there's a hurricane of people trying to recover everything from the debris." Mudslides and flooding blocked La Farola, the main road between Baracoa and Guantánamo. In Granma province, 150,000 banana plants fell in Laguna Blanca, and Guama, Segundo and Tercer Frentes are unreachable by land because of flooding on the main roads, the state media reported. Television reports showed helicopters attempting to rescue people trapped there by landslides. At least nine reservoirs in the southeast filled, creating what the state press called "a tense panorama" in Yerba de Guinea, where the reservoir rose 11 inches in just four hours. In Guantánamo, two reservoirs were being vented (*The Miami Herald*, 10/9/08).

September 11: Cuba's already hurricane and plague-damaged citrus industry took a hard hit from Hurricane Ike just one week after Hurricane Gustav felled fruit and damaged groves and processing plants, state-run media reported. Workers rushed to salvage for processing and animal feed at least 50,000 tonnes of downed grapefruit ready or near ready for harvest, while tonnes of immature oranges were declared a total loss. "Once again citrus has been battered by a hurricane," the official daily Granma reported from the 23,000-hectare state-run Jaguey Grande orchard in western Matanzas province. "This time the storm felled 35,000 tonnes of grapefruit and around 3,500 tonnes of oranges," it said. Category-four Gustav destroyed processing facilities and groves and wiped out the entire crop on the Isle of Youth less than two weeks ago, while felling tonnes of fruit in western Pinar del Rio and Havana provinces, the state-run media reported at the time. Ike entered eastern Cuba, felling fruit, damaging trees and a processing facility in the entire eastern part of the country, according to local sources. In central Cuba, tonnes of fruit were downed in Ciego de Avila, where a processing plant reported only light damage. The government reported a 2007 citrus crop of 469,000 tonnes, compared with more than 800,000 tonnes in 2004. Output from January through April of this year declined around 35 percent from with the same period in 2007, the National Statistics office recently reported. In the 1980s Cuba was the world's biggest citrus fruit exporter, producing more than a million tonnes of mainly oranges and grapefruit on 120,000 hectares, most destined for the former Soviet Union (*Reuters*, 11/9/08).

September 11: Cuba began moving students and workers into eastern Cuba's mountains to clear roads and coffee plantations of trees and save what it could of the crop hit hard by Hurricane Ike this week, state-run media said. "Brigades of forestry and agricultural workers, supported by mountain road repair crews, are working to clear access to plantations and trees that have fallen on the coffee plants," the official daily Granma said. Ike slammed into Eastern Holguin Province as a powerful Category 3 Hurricane, its winds covering eastern Guantanamo, Granma and Santiago de Cuba provinces as well, home to 85 percent of the crop. Torrential rains followed for four days, washing away fallen beans and causing serious flooding that cut mountain roads. Local media reported at least a tenth of the crop on the ground, and a similar amount in need of immediate picking, but camps for the thousands of students who harvest the crop and the rest of the infrastructure were seriously damaged. "Many local producers are trying to save what they can of the fallen beans, while working to repair damage to 44 student camps, 32 coffee processing plants, dryers and lunch rooms," Granma said of Guantanamo province. Cuba produced a record low 4,200 tonnes of semi-processed coffee the

previous harvest and said output would increase by 30 percent this year (*Reuters*, 11/9/08).

September 12: Hurricane Ike flattened 156,000 hectares of Cuban sugar cane and flooded more when it churned along the island for two days this week, state-run radio reported. Cuba harvested 330,000 hectares of cane during the 2008 harvest, producing almost 1.5 million tonnes of raw sugar. There are 700,000 hectares devoted to sugar cane in the country. The president of the Cuban sugar technicians said the preliminary figures would no doubt increase as workers gained access to plantations where roads were washed out. "The data is still preliminary and is going to increase (...) I saw today a figure of 15,000 hectares flooded," Tirso Saenz told Radio Progreso. Saenz said he was more worried about the flooded cane than that which was flattened, but that both situations were serious. Top sugar reporter Juan Varela in his weekly radio program said there was extensive damage to infrastructure. Varela said at least 700 kilometers of plantation roads were washed out and 14 rail and highway bridges linking plantations to mills. Earlier reports had 100,000 pieces of roofing blown off sugar industry mills and other installations (*Reuters*, 12/9/08).

September 12: The Cuban government began distributing state emergency reserves across the country in the areas hit hard by Hurricane Gustav and Ike. In statements published in the *Granma* newspaper, Major General Carlos M. Lezcano Perez, president of the National Institute of State Reserves, said the areas with the heaviest damage will receive priority. "Every year, the government outlines a plan to increase its reserves of food, fuel, building materials, medicines, etc.," explained the official, "but it would be naïve to believe that the reserves created by a small country like Cuba, with limited financial capacity and more than a half-century of economic war [with the US], would be enough to meet the demands after a disaster of the magnitude caused by Ike and Gustav," reads the statement (*ACN*, 12/9/08).

September 12: Oil Refinery is warming up its equipment to refine 65 thousand barrels a day, after stopping work because of Hurricane Ike's passing through Cuba. Hector Rodriguez Cabrera, operations chief of this facility explained to the press that the mandatory stoppage due to the closeness of the hurricane started with a gradual cooling down of the engines, and later with the shutting down of the furnaces and processing plants and finally they had applied the contingency plan. The refinery suffered just mild affectations to five meters of the thermal insulation in the atmospheric distillation tower, which is about to finish its repairs. During the passing of Ike the refinery workers just kept the small power plants that supply energy to the residual treatment lagoon activated, so it would not burst its banks and pollute the bay (*ACN*, 12/9/08).

September 12: The Cuban government was scrambling to salvage battered crops, and many towns across the island remain inaccessible due to flooding brought on by swollen rivers and overflowing reservoirs in the wake of hurricanes Ike and Gustav. Authorities also continued their frantic efforts to assess total damage and direct aid to the neediest areas after admitting that the country's reserves will not be enough to deal with the devastation. The death toll is now at least seven. Víctor Ramírez, President of Cuba's

National Housing Institute, warned in the TV program Mesa Redonda that ``we must be prudent in the distribution of materials. The hurricane season is not over yet. We can't let our guard down." There will be massive mobilizations to pick the coffee crop "before it rots," Cuban TV said. In Holguín Province in eastern Cuba, about 50,000 acres of crops, mostly plantains, were first battered by hurricane winds and then washed over by continuing torrential rains. Hurricane Ike also flattened 385,000 acres of sugar cane, out of a total of 1.7 million planted across the island. All grove crops in the Isle of Youth, off Cuba's southwest coast, were decimated when Gustav rumbled through August 30 as a Category 4 hurricane. A German nongovernmental organization, Agro Acción Alemana, which has worked in Cuba for 15 years, estimated that at least 75 percent of the island's agriculture suffered some damage, according to news reports. Agro Acción Alemana also warned that the food situation is "truly difficult" and that the damages ``leave the country vulnerable to nationwide food uncertainty in the next six months" (*The Miami Herald*, 13/9/08).

September 14: Cuba's nickel industry, damaged by Hurricane Ike, has resumed some production, state-run media said, quoting basic industry Minister Yadira Garcia on a tour of the plants and mines. Garcia said the state-owned Pedro Sotto Alba plant in Moa Holguin was operating and another state-owned plant in Nicaro Holguin was preparing to open. Garcia said the joint venture Ernesto Che Guevara plant with Canadian company Sherritt International in Moa Holguin had suffered the greatest damage and gave no date for a restart there. Cuba is one of the world's top nickel producers at 75,000 tonnes of unrefined nickel and cobalt per year. Nickel is the country's top export. About half the output comes from the joint venture plant with Sherritt, which was also undergoing an expansion. The Category 2 storm entered Cuba at Holguin's northern coast last Sunday, where the nickel industry is located, seriously damaging housing and buildings and swamping the area with torrential rains and a storm surge. Cuba said at the time that damage was not serious and production would be renewed "in the next few days." The government has not specified damage to the plants and other facilities, all located on the northern coast of Holguin (*Reuters*, 14/9/08).

September 15: Cuban Minister of Domestic Trade Marino Murillo said that preliminary figures show that more than 4,000 tons of foodstuffs were damaged by Hurricane Ike as it ripped off roofs of warehouses during its trajectory over almost the entire country. Speaking from the province of Santa Clara the minister said that just 10 days before Ike 1,300 tons of food was lost in the province of Pinar del Rio and the Isla de la Juventud with the passing of Hurricane Gustav, reported Granma newspaper. Murillo reported that the entire country suffered damage to the warehouses that supply all Cubans with basic foodstuffs such as rice, beans, sugar and salt, but noted that the provinces of Holguin, Las Tunas and Camaguey were the most seriously affected (*ACN*, 15/9/08).

September 15: Starting September 17, Cuban farmers, agricultural associations, enterprises and cooperatives farms interested in cultivating fallow public land can submit their requests to the government. "This is a strategic effort to face the food crises (...) and is also motivated by the urgent and additional need to recover from the devastating effects of hurricanes Gustav and Ike," reads a communiqué from the Cuban Agricultural

Ministry published Monday in the Granma newspaper. According to a decree issued in July 2008 by the Cuban government, farmers who do not own land will have the opportunity to receive use rights on up to 13.4 hectares, and those who already have a producing lot can be leased up to 40.3 additional hectares (ACN, 15/9/08).

September 15: Cuba's entire sugar crop was flattened and flooded by Hurricanes Ike and Gustav this month, according to a preliminary government report on the two storms damage to the country, broadcast by state-run television. "There were 156,600 hectares of cane flattened and 518,879 flooded," the report said. Cuba harvested 330,000 hectares of cane during the 2008 harvest, producing almost 1.5 million tonnes of raw sugar. There are 700,000 hectares devoted to sugar cane in the country. The harvest is still three months away and flattened cane often recovers with some loss in yield, while flooded cane needs to be drained within two weeks to avoid significant losses. The report, read on the evening news, did not indicate how much of the flooded area had been drained (*Reuters*, 15/9/08).

September 16: Losses from two back-to-back hurricanes in Cuba that wiped out housing, crops, electrical lines, schools and hospitals from coast to coast will cost about \$5 billion, the Cuban government announced. An approximately 3,000-word statement published in the Cuban newspaper Granma marks the first time the Cuban government has quantified the nationwide damage of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. The figures published paint a daunting figure for a nation that was already facing a housing crisis, low agricultural production and shortages of key materials ([Información oficial](#); *The Miami Herald*, 16/9/08) .

September 16: The poultry industry in the westernmost Cuban province of Pinar del Rio was devastated after the passing of two major hurricanes within two weeks that damaged 39 large facilities to some extent, reported Granma newspaper. Up until the end of August, the average monthly egg production in Pinar del Rio was between 20 and 22 million eggs, half of which was sent to Havana city to supply domestic needs. Calculations made after the passing of Gustav and Ike shows that in September, production will not surpass 10 million, and that is only if the chicken feed is steady, something that has not been the case in the first half of the month. "We hope to cover the quota for the province, but we are no longer sending to the capital," said Victor Fidel Hernandez, director of the Pinar del Rio Poultry Company. Damage occurred in 298 of the 390 laying facilities (93 totally destroyed). More than 290,000 birds died and many others had to be killed ahead of schedule. The feed processing industry was also seriously affected. "We had not suffered something similar since the founding of the National Poultry Center (CAN) in 1964. These two hurricanes destroyed the efforts of many people during all this time," he added (ACN, 16/9/08).

September 17: Eighty-eight percent of the Cuban population has electricity service said Electric Company executive Ricardo Gonzalez on the TV show The Round Table. The electric company official said that all consumers in the provinces of Havana, City of Havana, Ciego de Avila and Granma have service and that by September 19, work should be completed to provide renewed service in Matanzas, Villa Clara, Cienfuegos, Sancti

Spiritus, Santiago de Cuba and Guantanamo. Gonzalez said the places with the greatest difficulties to restore the service are in Las Tunas, Holguin and Camaguey and to a lesser extent in Pinar del Rio and Isla de la Juventud (*ACN*, 17/9/08).

September 18: Cuban media said more than 5,000 people have applied to farm idle plots of government land as the island struggles to recover from hurricanes Gustav and Ike. The Communist Party newspaper *Granma* says 5,515 Cubans requested farm plots, part of a program to boost food production that is being sped up after the twin hurricanes devastated Cuban farms this month. The communist government also is under pressure to reduce food imports expected to cost US\$2 billion this year. It hopes that letting thousands of private farmers operate on state land will be the answer. Landless Cubans can apply for about 33 acres (13 hectares), while existing farmers can increase their holdings to 100 acres (40 hectares) each (*AP*, 18/9/08).

September 18: Cuban agriculture officials said they expect a six-month food crisis after hurricanes Ike and Gustav ravaged 30 percent of the island's crops, and they are moving to increase domestic production and control prices to ensure no one goes hungry. Cuba, which spends up to US\$2 billion annually on food imports, already was struggling to increase its historically paltry domestic production when the twin storms destroyed large amounts of staples such as rice and beans, plantains and Cuban sweet potatoes. "We need to see what food is available and where it needs to go," Agriculture Vice Minister Alcides Lopez told international journalists. "We have six hard months to go," he said. But he added that "no Cuban will die of hunger." Thousands of acres of crops were destroyed earlier this month when the twin storms struck the island with heavy rains and high winds. Agriculture officials said the egg and dairy industries also were hit hard, with a production loss of 70 million eggs and 790,000 gallons (3 million liters) of milk in recent weeks. Lopez said authorities are rushing to recover as much of the damaged crops as possible, and to repair salvageable farm equipment. Priority is being placed on short-term crops such as salad greens and on restoring electrical power to food processing plants, Lopez said. The vice minister said he could not rule out the possibility of price limits at the country's supply-and-demand farmers markets, where small producers have long sold their products at market prices (*AP*, 18/9/08).

September 21: Cuba and Venezuela are studying the "possible reactivation" of a 189-kilometer (117-mile) pipeline linking the north and south coasts of the island that would make it easier to distribute oil from a jointly operated refinery in the city of Cienfuegos, the official *Prensa Latina* news agency reported, citing officials. The pipeline "would free up space on two piers" at the Camilo Cienfuegos refinery, located about 250 kilometers (155 miles) from Havana, Jose Suarez, a manager with the joint venture, told the news agency. The refinery joint venture was formed in April 2006 by Cuba Petroleo, or Cupet, which has a 51 percent stake, and Petroleos de Venezuela, or PDVSA, which holds a 49 percent stake in the project. The pipeline would run from the city of Matanzas, on Cuba's northern coast, to the refinery in Cienfuegos, which is located on the island's south coast, Suarez said. The official said the pipeline, which has been inactive for more than 15 years, was being inspected for "possible damage." Energy officials are also looking at dredging new areas, building another pier in Cienfuegos Bay and constructing a floating

dock on the high seas, Suarez said. The Camilo Cienfuegos Refinery was constructed in the 1980s and closed in 1995 due to the economic problems experienced by the island in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The refinery was inaugurated in December 2007 following a \$166 million renovation project (*EFE*, 21/9/08).

September 22: Vietnamese Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUD) has signed a memorandum of understanding with Cuba's Palmares Group on HUD's investment to build a 36-hole golf course and tourism-service-apartment complex in Bauta, Havana province. The project is expected to cover an area of 300-400 ha, including a 180 ha lake. A joint venture will be established to run the project, in which the Vietnamese and Cuban sides each hold 50% of chartered capital for 50 years. Cuba's Palmares will hire consultants to assess the value of the land plot, which will be considered its capital contribution. Palmares is a big group comprising 18 companies running restaurants, entertainment venues and golf courses with 1,000 business points. The Vietnamese side has also negotiated with Palmares about a second golf course in Varadero, Matanzas province. Besides the cooperation with Palmares, HUD has also talked with Cubanacan, the leading tourism group in Cuba, about investment in a five-star hotel with 800 rooms which is expected to be located on a 9.22 ha land plot in Santa Lucia, Camaguey province (*VietNamNet Bridge*, 22/9/08).

September 22: The second of three Cuban nickel plants was scheduled to open this week, according to local radio reports, as the industry struggles to resume full production after taking a direct hit from Hurricane Ike. "Repairs are moving forward at the Rene Ramos Latourt plant of Mayari ... it's hoped the plant can resume nickel production on the 25th," state-run Radio Angulo reported. The state-owned Rene Ramos Latourt is Cuba's oldest and produces around 10,000 tonnes of nickel plus cobalt per year. The Pedro Sotto Alba plant in Moa Holguin, a joint venture between state-run Cubaniquel and Canadian Sherritt International, resumed operations a week ago. The Pedro Sotto Alba plant is Cuba's largest and most efficient, producing 33,000 tonnes of unrefined nickel plus cobalt per year. The state-owned Ernesto Che Guevara plant in Moa Holguin, with a similar capacity, suffered the greatest damage from the storm and it was not clear when it would open. The Caribbean island is one of the world's largest nickel producers, at 75,000 tonnes per year, and supplies 10 percent of the world's cobalt, according to the Basic Industry Ministry (*Reuters*, 22/9/08).

September 22: Cuba and Vietnam will analyze the state of economic relations at the 26th Session of the Intergovernmental Commission underway in Hanoi, presided over by Cuban Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas. The meeting focuses on the economic and commercial ties established at the previous meeting held in Cuba in 2007. Among the topics under discussion are the definition of deadlines for the completion of pending projects, and the outlining of new goals. During his visit to Vietnam, Ricardo Cabrisas will meet with several top-government and Communist Party officials, including First Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Sinh Hung (*ACN*, 22/9/08).

September 23: Cuba will exhibit its tourism products in a stand that will be open to the public until September 26th as part of the International Leisure Fair that began in Russia.

According to Prensa Latina news agency, the fair, which has the Krocus Expo in Moscow as the main venue, is the second most important tourism event held in Russia and Cuba is participating with a large delegation headed by representatives from the Cuban Tourism Ministry (MINTUR). The Director of the MINTUR office in Moscow, Carlos Oscar Hernandez, said that this fair is very important for Cuba because one of the main goals of the event is to negotiate the winter market, as it is the season when Russian tourists travel to the tropical regions (ACN, 23/9/08).

September 24: Cuban and Vietnamese officials are working in Hanoi to draw up a strategy for mid and long term cooperation in various key economic sectors. During the 26th Session of the Cuba-Vietnam Intergovernmental Commission for Collaboration, the deputy prime minister of the Asian country, Nguyen Sinh Hung, said the most important sectors for cooperation are the gas and oil industries, tourism and production for national consumption. Cuban Minister of Government Ricardo Cabrisas, who is heading the island's delegation to the meeting, said the working sessions are very important for increasing collaboration, especially in the rice and cereal production, which are vital for the Cuban food security (ACN, 24/9/08).

September 24: The Cuban ambassador in Angola, Pedro Ross Leal, announced that cooperation between the Caribbean and the African nation will significantly increase in different areas in the last quarter of 2008. Speaking to reporters in a press conference, the diplomat said that the presence of Cuban doctors, teachers and technicians in Angola will increase as a result of an agreement signed recently between the two countries. According to Prensa Latina news agency, Ross announced that a Cuban-made antidote to cholera will soon be used in Angola. He added that a campaign against malaria will also be carried out in this African country with the assistance of Cuban health personnel (ACN, 24/9/08).

September 25: All three Cuban nickel plants were back in operation, state-run radio reported, just short of three weeks after taking a direct hit from Hurricane Ike. "The three Cuban nickel plants in Holguin are now in action," state-run Radio Rebelde said. "In the next few hours, nickel production will be stabilized at what it was before the hurricane." The Caribbean island is one of the world's largest nickel producers, at 75,000 tonnes of unrefined nickel per year, and supplies 10 percent of the world's cobalt, according to the Basic Industry Ministry (Reuters, 25/9/08).

September 25: Zarubezhneft is ready to consider launching oil exploration projects in Cuba and will propose setting up a joint venture, the Russian company's general director said. "We have a proposal to make and we hope to start prospecting works inland and later on the shelf," Nikolai Brunich said during a meeting with Cuban Basic Industry Minister Yadira Garcia Vera in Havana. Zarubezhneft is Russia's leading foreign trade company in the oil and gas sector (RIA Novosty, 25/9/08).

September 25: Cuban tourism products were promoted in Japan during the annual International Fair, JATA 2008, in an effort to boost the Japanese market. Representatives of Cuban tour operators Cubanacan Viajes, Cubatur and Havanatur participated in the

fair, in a delegation headed by Miguel Figueras, Tourism Ministry Advisor, reported the Cuban Foreign Relations Ministry on its website (ACN, 26/9/08).

September 26: A protocol on the exchange of goods for 2009 was signed between Cuba and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The protocol was signed by the DPRK foreign trade ministry and a Cuban government economic delegation, according to a KCNA official report. The news release did not include the details of the deal. The Cuban delegation is led by ambassador to the DPRK Jose Manuel Galego Montano (ACN, 26/9/08).

September 26: Cuba and Brazil signed three cooperation agreements on mining geology, water resources and commercial bank. During the meeting held in Havana, the representative of the Brazilian Agency of Cooperation, Andreia Rigueira, said the agreements will be carried out soon. "The new agreements will give more possibilities for the application of the geo-statistics in the mining exploration in Cuba," Rigueira said during the Seventh Meeting of the Technical Cooperation Work Group. "The agreements will also enhance the technical exchange on the management of water resources," Rigueira said. Rigueira said the agreements will help "train directors and experts from the banks and other financial institutions" (Xinhua, 27/9/08).

September 26: Russia and Venezuela agreed to create a joint oil company that will invest "tens of billions of dollars" to develop fields in Latin America and beyond, Russian Energy Minister Sergei Shmatko said. Petroleos de Venezuela SA, or PDVSA, will be joined in the venture by Russian oil companies OAO Gazprom, OAO Rosneft, TNK-BP, OAO Lukoil and OAO Surgutneftegaz, Shmatko said, speaking after a meeting between Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and his Venezuelan counterpart Hugo Chavez in the southern Russian city of Orenburg. Venezuela will control the new oil company, Shmatko said, adding that a draft agreement will be ready for submission to both countries' governments by the end of October. The Russian producers will likely participate on an equal basis, according to Shmatko. "We're going to work in Cuba, Bolivia and other countries," he said. "I think the geography could later be expanded" (Bloomberg, 26/9/08).

September 27: Cuba expects tourism to increase 13 percent this year despite destruction from hurricanes Gustav and Ike, which damaged colonial and coastal towns, and hit picturesque hideaways in the tobacco-growing west even harder. Tourism Minister Manuel Marrero said that officials believe foreign visitors will top 2.3 million in 2008, up nearly 200,000 from last year. The sector is "bursting with vitality despite the passage of these hurricanes," he said during an event at the University of Havana. Cuba had previously announced that tourism rose 15 percent in the first quarter. Marrero said that dipped only slightly after Gustav smacked western Cuba in late August. Ike hit eight days later, slamming into the island's eastern tip and moving west over much of Cuba. Marrero said hotels and other tourism infrastructure were damaged in the provinces of Camaguey and Holguin and in tobacco-growing Pinar del Rio, home to the limestone mountain-flanked town of Vinales. But the beaches most popular with international visitors were largely spared. Foreign visitors to Cuba peaked at about 2.3 million in 2005 but slipped to

2.1 million last year — dealing a financial blow to a nation that relies on tourism for much of its hard-currency revenue. Tourism brought in some US\$2.2 billion last year (*AP*, 27/9/08).

September 29: The Cuban nickel industry is still operating at below capacity more than three weeks after taking a direct hit from Hurricane Ike, according to local media from the nickel region of eastern Holguin province. Luis Garcia, director of the Ernesto Che Guevara plant in Moa Holguin, told the local Communist party newspaper *Ahora* that capacity was gradually being restored since opening last week, but was yet to be fully reached. "We never thought an event of Ike's magnitude would strike. First we were without water, then the winds took off the roof and rain fell on the controls," the paper quoted him as saying. *Ahora* reported the plant lost 12,000 square meters of roofing and walls. Alberto Pantón, director of state-run Cubaniquel, told *Ahora*, "We emphasized checking the automatic controls, the electrical systems, and communications, because the worst damage was to the roofs of the plants and workshops and that humidity got into the technology. Days before, the government said all three plants were operating (*Reuters* 29/9/08).

September 29: Cuba announced price freezes at all farmers markets, promising to punish any vendors charging more for hard-to-find fruits and vegetables as food reserves dwindle due to the destruction caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. A decree occupying the entire front pages of state-run newspapers said prices at agricultural markets will remain fixed at levels set by regional communist committees, and that supply-and-demand farmers markets will have prices revert to pre-hurricane levels "for a group of basic products." The government also warned of a crackdown on those who steal food and construction materials from work and sell them on the black market, a common practice in Cuba, which is plagued by shortages from cement to breakfast cereal. "Any attempt to violate the law or social norms will be met with a quick and energetic answer," it said. The move seemed aimed at reassuring Cubans that basic food prices will not rise even though the storms ravaged 30 percent of the island's crops and officials have warned of food shortages that could last six months. The announcement was met with some skepticism by Cubans, already outraged that private transportation costs have soared since the government raised gasoline prices September 8 - the same day Ike tore across the island (*AP*, 29/9/08).

September 29: Workers from different sectors responded to a call by the Cuban Central Workers Confederation to volunteer in the harvest of coffee beans in the areas hit by Hurricane Ike. According to the *Juventud Rebelde* daily, the goal is to collect more than 60,000 bushels of coffee in the eastern Cuban province of Guantanamo, which is the largest producer of the bean for exports in the country. Preliminary assessments report that Guantanamo lost over 170,000 bushels of coffee, and the roofs of coffee farms were damaged. Emilio Rivera, with the Province's Coffee Production Office, assured that much of the fallen beans could be recovered if they are picked and processed before they rot. The enterprise thus works to clean access roads to the coffee plantations in order to take out the collected beans as quickly as possible (*ACN*, 29/9/08).

September 29: Cuba can't pay its foreign debt because of the damage done by the 46-year-old US economic embargo, the island's communist government said on an official Web site. The embargo keeps Cuba from "receiving sizeable revenues from exports of goods and services," said the article published on the Web site Cubadebate. According to the National Statistics Office, Cuba had in 2006, the last year for which official data are available, a foreign debt of \$7.79 billion. "Up to December 2007, according to conservative estimates, the criminal siege led by Washington has caused economic damage to the Cuban state worth more than \$93 billion, some 12 times the amount of the foreign debt," the article said. The article, signed by journalist Patricio Montesinos, was sent by e-mail to foreign correspondents accredited in Havana. "The economic, trade and financial war pursued by the United States is aimed at despoiling Cuba of its income from exports of goods and services, blocking access to sources of financing, as well as causing an increase in its expenditures," Montesinos said (*EFE*, 29/9/08).

September 30: Over 270 metric tons of lobster were captured in September by crews belonging to the Gerardo Medina Cardentey Fishing Compound in westernmost Pinar del Rio province, according to an official report issued by this company. Luis Leonel Lima, deputy director of this compound located in La Coloma town, reported that the planning up to September was to capture 58.8 tons of lobsters, but even after the devastation caused by hurricanes Ike and Gustav to the infrastructure, especially in the roofing of the storage facilities, they were able to increase the level of capture four times. This compound completed the year's plan with 1,045 tons. Lobster's capture must stop now due to the beginning of the close season in October and November. Japan and the European Union are the main destination for this product (*ACN*, 30/9/08).

September 30: Havana's farmers markets reacted with empty shelves, stalls without any supplies, and predictions that the situation "is going to get a lot worse," after the decision by Cuba's communist government to crack down on price increases. The day after international finance markets fell drastically due to the U.S. Congress' rejection of the bailout plan presented by President George W. Bush, Cuba's farmers markets, which up to the day before were allowed to set their prices, were having their own "Black Tuesday." The government announced the day before that food markets will "provisionally" have to sell some basic products at the prices they were before Hurricanes Gustav and Ike devastated Cuba. According to an official communique, "any attempt to break the law (...) will receive a quick, energetic reply." The response was not long in coming and some of Havana's most important markets on Tuesday had about 80 percent of their stalls empty, while products like peppers, onions, garlic and cucumbers were nowhere to be found. "Peppers? Forget it, you're not going to find any, don't waste your time. There aren't any," a produce vendor at the main farmers market in the Havana neighborhood of El Vedado told the press. The government chose to tighten regulations when price increases in the markets and for some products soared by as much as 300 percent. At the same time, it launched a campaign in the official media harshly attacking "hoarders" and "speculators who traffic in stolen goods" (*EFE*, 1/10/08)

September 30: Cypriot Foreign Minister Markos Kipryanou said in Havana that he supported strengthening economic ties between his country and Cuba to raise them to the

same level of political ties. After meeting with the Cuban minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, Marta Lomas, Kipryanou told ACN that the two parties identified areas to increase cooperation, including public services, healthcare, tourism, energy and agriculture. The Cypriot minister said that a basic bilateral cooperation accord will be signed from which economic ties can be increased. "There's great potential to improve current ties; I will ask the ministers of Finances and Trade in my country to examine the material and put into practice the results of our meetings [in Havana]" (ACN, 1/10/08).

September 30: The Cuban Domestic Trade Sector was also hard hit by the passage of hurricanes Gustav and Ike. The TV show "The Round Table" focused on the pace of recovery in that and other sectors in different Cuban provinces. Deputy Domestic Trade Minister Francisco Silva Herrera said that the storms inflicted huge damage on facilities particularly located in the provinces of Pinar del Rio, Las Tunas, Holguin, Guantanamo and in the municipality of the Isle of Youth. Some 167,000 tons of foods were protected from the effects of the storm; however, some 4,727 food storages were damaged, as well as 2,640 grocery stores, plus over 500 gastronomic facilities. Major efforts have included the repair of grocery stores and the regular distribution of school snacks for 352,000 high school students and teachers. In Cuba, high schools work during the whole day, while students and teachers are guaranteed their noon snack. The deputy minister said that recovery actions also focus on other domestic commercial facilities offering different services to the population (ACN, 30/9/08).

Exile Community

September 2: As a matter of urgency, a Miami-based exiles' group asked President George W. Bush for a temporary lift of sanctions against Cuba to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to the victims of hurricane Gustav. The proposal coincided with an initiative by the Cuban Feminist Network in Miami to collect civil society donations, as well as with a series of international community appeals from the island's domestic dissident movement to help the hurricane victims. The Democracy Movement asked for an emergency exception or a 30-60 day moratorium on the restrictions that regulate cash remittances and care package shipments to the island, as well as travel and luggage weight limitations. "This hurricane has been devastating and the government of Cuba is today less capable of meeting the needs of the population. Therefore it becomes imperative that the Cuban exile community reacts in a humanitarian way and, above all, within the law," stressed Ramón Saúl Sánchez, president of the Democracy Movement (*El Nuevo Herald*, 2/9/08).

September 3: A group of Cuban-Americans are trying to get aid to the island after Cuba suffered catastrophic damage when Gustav hit as a Category 4. "This will give them at least a little bit of start at life to have a towel, to have a toothbrush, to have soap," Food for the Poor's Angel Aloma said. Some families in Cuba are still waiting for help, recovering from the aftermath of devastating hurricane Gustav (*NBC6.Net*, 3/9/08).

September 5: Efforts to aid the Cuban victims of hurricane Gustav were engulfed in controversy as Cuban exile community leaders split on how to help. Two Cuban-American Democrats running for Congress, Raul Martinez and Joe Garcia, as well as Democracy Movement head Ramón Saúl Sánchez, urged President Bush to temporarily lift restrictions that limit exiles to visiting Cuba once a year and sending up to \$300 every three months to close relatives. Senator Barack Obama, the Democratic presidential candidate, endorsed the appeals for lifting restrictions but reaffirmed his support for the US embargo on Cuba. The four Florida Republican Cuban-Americans in Congress – Representatives Lincoln and Mario Diaz-Balart, Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Senator Mel Martinez -- opposed lifting the restrictions and said in a joint statement that the US government should instead directly help hurricane victims. The Republican Cuban-Americans were joined in the statement by several Democrats, including Senator Bill Nelson of Florida (*The Miami Herald*, 5/9/08).

September 5: The group Consenso Cubano, which brings together more than twenty exile organizations in the United States, offered its "generous and unconditional solidarity" to the Cuban people, "in the face of the devastation caused by hurricane Gustav and the possibility that the situation may grow even worse during the present hurricane season." In declarations made in Miami, the group, who believe that "no one should attempt to politicize the relief effort," proclaimed its "unconditional support for the initiatives to request" that the US government "suspend, at least temporarily, all current (...) restrictions that could hinder these humanitarian efforts or make it difficult for the affected families to communicate with and support one other." The same was requested of Havana ([Declaration of Consenso Cubano](#); *Cubaencuentro*, 7/9/08).

September 7: Our Lady of Charity, patron saint of Cuba, has a new stylized statue in Miami -- outdoors and by the bay. The 4 ½-foot-tall bronze sculpture, standing on a polished black granite pedestal, was unveiled in the gardens surrounding the Ermita de la Caridad Church in Coconut Grove. The faithful will be able to reach the new icon via a small path built with slabs of coral. The unveiling of the work of art came on the eve of the annual day -- September 8 -- of Our Lady of Charity, known in Spanish as La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre. Created by Cuban sculptor Antuán Rodríguez, the figure of the virgin faces Biscayne Bay, just over a wall where people pray or throw the ashes of a cremated loved one who died in exile while yearning to return home. "I wanted to place it as close as possible to the sea, because that is its natural habitat," the 36-year-old artist said. "I realized that many people of faith who come to pray to the virgin do so in front of the bay" (*The Miami Herald*, 8/9/08).

September 11: Cuban-Americans in Miami, Florida are collecting donations and aid supplies for people in Cuba who have been affected by Hurricane Ike and other recent storms. Community leaders are asking US and Cuban officials to relax restrictions between the countries to facilitate the relief efforts. Cuban-Americans are boxing up canned food and other supplies, and some Miami churches are setting aside space for donations to be sent to hurricane survivors in Cuba in coming days. The relief effort by Miami's Cuban community is a common response to hurricane damage on the Communist-ruled island. This time, however, Cuban exiles are against US restrictions

that limit Cuban-Americans to sending only \$300 to family members in Cuba every three months. In response to the hurricane, the Cuban American National Foundation has reached an agreement with US officials to temporarily relax the limits, enabling families to send up to one thousand dollars. Foundation Chairman Jorge Mas Santos says the group is helping to process wire transfers of up to \$250,000 during the next three months. "We have an agreement with Western Union who has assured us the money will be delivered directly to family members in Cuba within the next 24 hours. It is our hope that in the next 48-to-72 hours, we can provide \$100 to 1,000 families," he said. CANF already holds a license to spend up to \$100,000 to help civil society groups and dissidents in Cuba. The new license allows up to \$250,000 in aid to hurricane victims (VOA, *The Miami Herald*, 11/9/08).

September 11: The US government offered \$100,000 and an inspection team after Hurricane Gustav hit western Cuba on August 30. Jorge Mas Santos, president of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), called the US offer "insulting." "Although the Cuban government has declined the offer of a humanitarian assessment team, we remain willing to send one," State Department spokeswoman Heide Bronke said. "We are evaluating how best to provide additional humanitarian relief for Cuban victims of this disaster." She added that the US government increased existing authorizations for US-based aid groups to provide more cash to help storm victims. CANF got such authorization, and the line grew quickly. "We had over 400 people come fill out 600 applications," said CANF spokeswoman Sandy Acosta Cox. "We were holding people in the parking area. It was like that all day." Miami-based business consultant Teo Babún, of Babún Group Consulting, said information coming from the island shows widespread devastation. According to his organization's report, more than half a million homes were damaged and almost 350 bridges wiped out. He said 600 municipal water wells were damaged and some 500 miles of telephone and power poles are down. At least 150,000 people remain in shelters. "I would say the situation in Cuba is similar to what we saw during Andrew in South Florida," Babún said. "It's very, very bad." "I think the Cuban government first of all hasn't done a full assessment and is trying to double-check with their assessment teams," he said. "Cuba is a military regime, so they are very concerned about providing information they consider secret or detrimental to the state. That is information they are not accustomed to giving out." "The Cuban government isn't accepting the US donations; they only accept those from Russia and other friendly countries," said Diego Suarez of the Cuban Liberty Council. "For them it is more important to not accept the US donations than to help the people" (*The Miami Herald*, 11/9/08)

September 15: A US Treasury-issued license authorizing the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) to arrange cash remittances to hurricane victims in the island has been used up and the organization has applied for a new one. "Due to the extraordinary response to our call to assist the victims of hurricanes Gustav and Ike, we have exhausted (...) in just two days (September 11 and 12) the \$ 250,000 license the US Treasury granted us", indicated the organization. Omar López Montenegro, CANF director for Human Rights, described the humanitarian response of the community as "extraordinary" (*Cubaencuentro*, 15/9/08).

September 17: A Spanish-language television station has raised about \$200,000 in a telethon for hurricane victims in Cuba. América TeVé (WJAN-Channel 41), located in Hialeah Gardens, organized the drive after hurricanes Gustav and Ike dealt consecutive blows to the island nation, causing deaths and widespread flooding and destruction. Religious leaders and business owners encouraged South Florida residents to give, and Cuban music stars Isaac Delgado and Roberto Torres delivered on-air performances. In addition to cash donations, residents brought canned food and other supplies to the station (*The Miami Herald*, 17/9/08).

September 18: Huber Matos, a former Commander of the Cuban Revolution, called upon the Cuban military to set up a Government Board responsible for launching a political transition and adopting measures to overcome the emergency situation created by two hurricanes in the span of ten days. "Cubans in the Armed Forces and the Department of the Interior, there is only one sensible and dignified way to answer the enormous challenge before our community: an alliance with the people," said Matos in an open letter. With such a compact, he said, we could avoid even more tragic consequences "like the epidemics, famine and widespread chaos that will follow in the wake of the present hardships." According to Matos, the Board, made up of representatives from the military and civil society, with the support of the Cuban exiles, "would be responsible for implementing the political transition and emergency measures required to tackle the severe situation currently affecting the Cuban family" (*EFE*, 18/9/08).

September 18: The powerful Cuban American National Foundation began a political campaign to get the US Congress to approve a temporary suspension on travel restrictions and sending remittances to Cuba. The several-month moratorium that CANF and other Cuban exile groups are asking for is aimed at facilitating funneling aid directly to relatives and other people who sustained property damage on the island during the passage of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Francisco "Pepe" Hernandez met in Washington with several members of the House Foreign Relations Committee to explain the need to modify the current restrictions. As a CANF spokesman said in Miami, Hernandez explained the current difficulties in sending direct aid to relatives and others since the two hurricanes hit Cuba within the space of 10 days. The CANF said earlier that it had obtained a license from the US Treasury Department, which enforces the 46-year-old embargo against Cuba, allowing the Miami-based group to send up to \$250,000 in aid to hurricane victims. But the CANF initiative reached that limit within two days, and the foundation is now seeking an expansion of the license. Groups like the Democracy Movement and Agenda Cuba also supported the proposal for a temporary lifting of the restrictions (*EFE*, 18/9/08).

September 18: Humanitarian groups and scores of Cuban-Americans are pressuring President Bush and Congress to suspend the US embargo of Cuba to aid hurricane victims. A group of more than 800, including many Cuban-Americans in Florida, have signed a letter to the president and congressional leaders urging a 90-day suspension of licensing requirements for sending money and traveling to the island. Some signers added individual notes citing hardships faced by their families in the aftermath of Hurricane Ike

and other storms. ``As a Cuban-American, I urge you to please let us help those in need,`` wrote Agustin Fernandez of Florida. ``The embargo can wait 90 days. Who knows, this could be the opportunity to really get the people to disconnect with their government and see the good of these United States`` (*Sun Sentinel*, 18/9/08).

September 22: Brothers to the Rescue founder and president Jose Basulto wants to sell its only remaining plane -- the last symbol of its organization -- to raise money for hurricane relief efforts in Cuba. "It's all we have left, our only asset," Basulto said, a day before he planned to announce the sale publicly. "What we are doing is responding to a need for which Brothers to the Rescue was created, which was to serve brothers in need," Basulto said. Brothers to the Rescue stopped flying over the Straits in 2003 as a result of the wet foot/dry foot policy, which requires U.S. authorities to return Cubans caught at sea, but to allow those who make it to land to stay. The plane, now parked at the Opa-locka airport, was flown only once a year -- February 24 -- to "marker's point" where floral wreaths are thrown into the sea in memory of four fallen Brothers. But back-to-back hurricanes Gustav and Ike gave the plane -- appraised at between \$95,000 and \$100,000 -- a new mission, Basulto said. "The one in danger now is the biggest raft of all, the island," he said (*The Miami Herald*, 23/9/08).

September 23: Women For Human Rights International (Mujeres Pro Derechos Humanos) is urging South Florida women to join in the relief drive and humanitarian activities to benefit the victims of Hurricanes Gustav, Hanna and Ike in Cuba and Haiti. The non-profit is fully backing Catholic Charities and directing monetary donations to the Catholic NGO, which will ensure the right aid reaches both islands. In addition, Women for Human Rights International is now conducting a canned food drive to help the Daughters of Charity in its relief work for Cuba and Haiti. The nuns' organization - in the island - provides full care to elderly shelters, a hospital outside Havana (Hospital de San Lazaro) and a center for children with physical and mental disabilities. WHRI is a participating member of Consenso Cubano, which unites over 28 Cuban-American organizations in South Florida and has drafted a humanitarian agenda that calls for suspending US travel restrictions to Cuba so that families can more effectively help their own in the island (*WHRI Press Release*, 23/9/08).

September 26: The Cuban American National Foundation, which sent \$250,000 in aid to people in Cuba after hurricanes hit the island, said the US federal government has imposed strict restrictions on further aid. A license granted September 10 allowed up to \$250,000 to individuals or hard-hit areas without restriction to family connections. The group reached the license's maximum within two days and reapplied for another license. But the license granted most recently does not allow Cuban Americans to send aid to specific persons such as relatives. The new license stipulates that "the person giving a donation cannot determine who it goes to specifically on the island because that would be a remittance and the license is not for remittances, it's for humanitarian assistance," said Sandy Acosta Cox, a foundation spokeswoman. ``It's very difficult to understand why, in a moment of crisis, you can't help your cousin or your aunt.`` "We're in the process of appealing it and seeing if we can get the restrictions removed," Acosta Cox said (*The Miami Herald*, 27/9/08).

September 29: In the aftermath of two destructive hurricanes and two tropical storms that recently struck Cuba, Bacardi Limited has donated \$100,000 to the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF) to provide assistance to the people on the island. "Through this donation to the Cuban people, Bacardi Limited has continued to demonstrate its leadership in the area of humanitarian assistance," said John Sanbrailo, Executive Director of PADF. "The Bacardi family and Company are deeply saddened by the devastation caused by the recent hurricanes in Cuba. We hope that this donation will help alleviate some of the pain that the Cuban people are experiencing and remind all Cubans that they continue to remain in the hearts and minds of all Cuban exiles," said Facundo L. Bacardi, Chairman of Bacardi Limited (*PRNewswire*, 29/9/08).

Foreign Affairs

September 2: The Russian emergencies ministry said it would send four planes with humanitarian aid to Cuba, hit by a devastating hurricane. "At the Russian president's request, the emergencies ministry will send four cargo planes with tents for 5,000 people, construction materials, food and essentials supplies," a source in the ministry said. The first two planes are scheduled to take off for Cuba on September 3 (*RIA-Novosti*, 2/9/08).

September 2: East Timor's President boarded a plane to Cuba for a medical check up. Jose Ramos Horta has gunshot wounds from an attack on him in February by rebels. The nobel laureate was given a military guard as he boarded a commercial flight to Singapore from Dili's airport. East Timor's Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao said the President is still feeling unwell. But he said Dr Ramos Horta also wants to convey the solidarity of the Timorese people to Cuba, where Hurricane Gustav swept through on August 30 (*Radio Australia*, 2/9/08).

September 2: The European Union said it is giving 2 million euros (US\$2.9 million) to people made homeless by Hurricane Gustav when it hit several Caribbean nations. The EU said the money will pay for clean water, food, medical care, shelter and basic household items in Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic (*AP*, 2/9/08).

September 3: Chinese President Hu Jintao sent a message to Cuban leader Raul Castro, offering sympathy and solicitude to the Cuban people over their suffering and damages caused by Hurricane Gustav. In his message, Hu said he believes the Cuban people, under the leadership of the Cuban government and Communist Party, will recover soon from the natural disaster and rebuild their homelands (*Xinhua*, 3/9/08).

September 3: The Panamanian government sent a solidarity message to the authorities and people of Cuba, for the heavy toll taken by hurricane "Gustav". The Foreign Ministry, voicing the feelings of the National Government and the Panamanian people, "wishes to express its solidarity on the calamitous impact of hurricane "Gustav" along the western end of Cuba," said an official press release. The Government vowed to contribute to the relief effort and encouraged the Panamanian people to make donations through the Embassy of Cuba in this country (*EFE*, 3/9/08).

September 3: The Canadian Network for Cuba (CNC) has expressed its deepest support and solidarity towards the Cuban people in their recovery from the serious material damages caused by Hurricane Gustav. Today, like in the past, the Cuban people and their leaders can count on the support of the Cuba-Canada Solidarity Movement, affirmed the CNC in a communiqué (*ACN*, 3/9/08).

September 3: The Table de Concertation de Solidarité Québec-Cuba and its Fabio Di Celmo Committee for the Release of the five Cuban antiterrorists held in US jails will stage a picket line in front of the US consulate, in Montreal next September 12 and 13, in the context of the Five's 10th year of unfair imprisonment. The announcement was made by Fabio Di Celmo Committee member Arnold August as he read a message of greetings from the Table de Concertation de Solidarité Québec-Cuba to the 4th Biennial Convention of the Canadian Network on Cuba (CNC), recently held in Toronto, Canada (*ACN*, 3/9/08).

September 3: Russian President Dmitry Medvedev had a telephone conversation with Cuban leader Raul Castro, in the course of which he expressed sympathy for the people of Cuba in the wake of the damage that has been inflicted on the country by hurricane Gustav, the Kremlin press service said. Medvedev also told Castro about Russia's efforts in rendering humanitarian aid to Cuba. The two leaders also discussed the current status of and prospects for bilateral relations in various spheres. President Medvedev issued an instruction to Emergencies Minister Sergei Shoigu September 1 to allocate emergency aid to Cuba in the wake of the devastating hurricane (*Itar-Tass*, 3/9/08).

September 3: A United Nations Population Fund official visited several facilities related with the people's quality of life in Cienfuegos province, located in the central part of Cuba. Arie Hockman, UNPF representative for Mexico, the Dominican Republic and Cuba was interested in programs for human development implemented in the province. He talked with health experts from Cienfuegos and offered, on behalf of the international organization, to cooperate with actions to improve the quality of life of senior citizens in particular. The province has one of the highest average ages of the country, with 17 percent of the population over 65. The municipality of Cruces is among the top three in the country for life expectancy (*ACN*, 3/9/08).

September 4: Mexican police detained a Cuban man and woman for their alleged involvement in the beheadings of a dozen men in the Yucatan Peninsula last August, authorities said. "Ricardo Coto Vazquez, 39, and Yemiset Santana Lam, 30, both of Cuban nationality, were caught in Cancun," the public safety department said in a statement. Police acted after questioning three Mexicans, suspected members of the Gulf drug cartel, already detained in the case, the statement said. The 12 headless bodies were discovered near Merida, the capital of the southeast Yucatan state, on August 28, two days before several hundred thousand Mexicans protested across the country against rising insecurity (*AFP*, 4/9/08).

September 4: Cuba's state-run media highlighted the arrival of Russian aid in the wake of devastating Hurricane Gustav, the latest sign the former Cold War allies are out to strengthen their relations. State-run television showed two huge cargo planes arriving at Havana's Jose Marti airport at the top of its morning news broadcast. Cuban soldiers were seen unloading supplies such as tents, electrical cables and construction materials. Such scenes have not been seen in Cuba since the Soviet Union collapsed. The Russian aid was the first to arrive in Cuba after Gustav, packing record high winds, devastated parts of westernmost Pinar del Rio province and the Isle of Youth. Russia's ambassador to Cuba was scheduled to tour the area (*Reuters*, 5/9/08).

September 4: The President of East Timor, Jose Ramos Horta, expressed his solidarity with the Cuban people after the devastation caused by hurricane Gustav over the weekend in the Isle of Youth Special Municipality and Pinar del Rio province. Ramos Horta, who arrived in Cuba for an official visit at the invitation of President Raul Castro, told reporters that, although East Timor is a poor country, they are studying ways to help the Caribbean nation recover from this tragedy. He also sent greetings to the Cuban people from the Prime Minister of East Timor, Xanana Gusmao, and from the President of Parliament, Fernando Lasama Araujo. He recalled that Cuba and East Timor have very close relations and thanked Cuba for its support of the independence and self-determination of the so-called Country of the Sandalwood. Currently, 231 Cuban doctors and other health professionals are working in East Timor, 36 professors serve as advisors to that country's literacy campaign, and nearly 700 youths from this Asian nation are studying medicine in Cuba (*ACN*, 4/9/08).

September 4: The Prime Minister of East Timor, Xanana Gusmao, announced that his country will donate 500,000 US dollars to Cuba as cash assistance to help in the recovery from the damages caused by hurricane Gustav, which devastated the Isle of Youth Special Municipality and areas of the province of Pinar del Rio. Speaking on television, Gusmao recalled that solidarity with other peoples is a principle that appears in the Constitution of his country and, thus, the Council of Ministers of East Timor decided to send this donation to the Cuban people and government (*ACN*, 5/9/08).

September 5: The Chinese government announced that it will provide 300,000 US dollars to Cuba as a donation to the Caribbean nation's recovery efforts after Hurricane Gustav hit the western region of the country leaving thousands of houses destroyed and significant economic losses. According to Prensa Latina news agency, the Red Cross Society of China also announced cash aid of 50,000 US dollars to its Cuban counterpart (*ACN*, 4/9/08).

September 5: Spain has delivered humanitarian aid to Haiti, Cuba and Jamaica, the three countries ravaged by the hurricanes Gustav and Hanna, authorities said. The Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI) said Spain sent to Cuba 15 tons of commodities: 99 tents, two generators, 1,008 sanitary kits, 1,020 water deposits, 1,200 mosquito nets and 1,000 sailclothes. Cuba's Deputy Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration Ricardo Guerrero Blanco expressed gratitude to Spain for the

aid. Guerrero said the aid will be distributed to the affected people in the western province of Pinar del Rio and Isle of Youth (*Xinhua*, 5/9/08).

September 5: Cuban President Raul Castro presided over the official welcoming ceremony for his counterpart from East Timor, Jose Ramos Horta, at Havana's Revolution Palace. The Cuban Armed forces paid military honors to the Timorese Head of State. Both leaders greeted attending delegations, which included East Timor's ambassadors to Cuba Egidio de Jesus and to the United Nations Nelson Santos, among other officials. Attending the ceremony on the Cuban side were First Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura; Health Minister Jose Ramon Balaguer and Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. Following the ceremony, both Raul Castro and Jose Ramos Horta held official talks (*ACN*, 5/9/08).

September 6: The Honourable Beverley J. Oda, Minister of International Cooperation announced that Canada is providing \$600,000 to assist people affected by recent hurricanes and tropical storms in Haiti and the Caribbean. Canada's support includes a \$43,000 contribution to Médecins du Monde to provide water, hygiene kits and primary health care, and \$100,000 to the IFRC's Preliminary Emergency Appeal to assist 7,000 families affected by the devastation in Haiti, Cuba and Jamaica. The Government of Canada stands prepared to respond further to the humanitarian situation in the Caribbean, as the need arises (*DFAIT Press Release*, 6/9/08).

September 7: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez reiterated his solidarity with the Cuban people, which have suffered the devastation of two Category 4 hurricanes in little more than a week. During his weekly radio and television program "Alo, Presidente", the Venezuelan leader praised the organization and readiness of the Caribbean nation to face this kind of natural disasters. According to Granma news daily, Chavez ratified the decision and willingness of his government to help the Cuban people. "Fidel, we are praying here so that God helps not only Cuba but also the peoples of the Caribbean and the people of the United States," the Venezuelan president said. Chavez added that he spoke over the phone with his Cuban counterpart Raul Castro, who gave him details of the situation in the Caribbean country after the devastation caused by Hurricane Gustav and also of the measures taken to face Hurricane Ike (*ACN*, 8/9/08).

September 10: In a rare move Cuba said it would accept aid from the United Nations, said John Holmes, the UN's humanitarian affairs chief. He said the aid would total up to \$3.5 million. "It's the first time certainly that anybody can remember (that Cuba has accepted UN aid)," Holmes told reporters during a visit to Mexico City. "I think that's an indication of how serious the situation is in Cuba," he added (*Reuters*, 10/9/08).

September 11: President Hugo Chavez urged the Venezuelan people to show their solidarity with Cuba and Haiti, "two nations - he said - that have been severely affected by two powerful hurricanes." "I urge all Venezuelans to further cooperation with Cuba and Haiti because these hurricanes have hit them far beyond our imagination," Chavez said. According to Juventud Rebelde news daily, the Venezuelan leader noted that there was no electricity supply all across Cuba and that only a group of small power generators

guaranteed basic services in hospitals, bakeries, radio stations, etc. He added that more than 2.5 million people were evacuated in Cuba before Hurricane Ike hit the country causing severe damages to houses, crops, roads and the nationwide system of electricity supply. "The damage is incalculable," he stressed (*ACN*, 11/9/08).

September 11: South Africa said it has given its 2008 humanitarian award to former Cuban president Fidel Castro for his contributions to "humankind beyond boundaries." Castro, who turned 82, becomes the first non-African and the third ex-head of state to win the "Ubuntu" award, the National Heritage Council of South Africa said in a statement. "The Ubuntu award is honouring persons who have consistently lived the humanitarian values of the African philosophy of Ubuntu," which defines the individual in terms of their relationships with others. Castro won the award "for the role he played in the Cuban revolution and worldwide contribution to the struggle for an alternative, just and humane society," the statement said (*AFP*, 11/9/08).

September 11: The Education Minister of the People's Republic of China, Zhou Ji, met in Beijing with Cuban Council of State official Lissette Díaz, and her accompanying delegation. The two parties examined bilateral exchange in the field of education and paid special attention to the Spanish language program for Chinese students in Cuba and its excellent results so far. Díaz reaffirmed Cuba's commitment with the learning of the Spanish language of the young Chinese students, and spoke about how they adapt themselves to their new life and assimilate knowledge. For his part, the Chinese minister highlighted the international prestige of Cuba's education system and expressed his confidence in the success of joint projects (*ACN*, 11/9/08).

September 11: Cuba and Mexico are discussing how to clamp down on the flow of illegal Cuban immigrants through Mexico to the United States, Cuba's Ambassador Manuel Aguilera said. Aguilera said the two countries could reach an initial agreement on undocumented migration when Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque visits Mexico in the next few weeks. "What we are discussing is how to get both countries to increase our cooperation so that the migratory flow between Mexico and Cuba is safe, legal and orderly," Aguilera told a news conference. Thousands of Cubans slip into Mexico by boat each year, mostly to the Yucatan Peninsula, without exit permits from the Cuban government. The Cuban ambassador said talks were centered around cracking down on migrant-smuggling gangs while also making it easier for academics and business executives to get visas to travel between the two countries (*Reuters*, 11/9/08).

September 11: The Mexican Senate agreed to offer immediate aid to Cuba after the passing of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. The Mexican deputies passed a resolution seeking to contribute to the recovery in Cuba that was presented by the body's vice president, Yeidckol Polevnsky, on behalf of the parliamentary groups of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), *Granma* newspaper reported. In his presentation, Polevnsky detailed the damage caused by the two storms and recognized Cuba's continuous showing of solidarity towards Mexico and other countries, adding that "today it is in need of the solidarity of its brothers and sisters." The resolution was supported by the other parliamentary groups (*ACN*, 11/9/08).

September 11: In a telephone conversation with his Cuban counterpart Raul Castro, Namibia's President, Hifikepunye Lucas Pohamba, expressed his country's solidarity with the people of Cuba after the devastation left by the passing of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. During their conversation, Raul thanked the Namibian president for his concern and offered detailed information on the damage inflicted by the two storms that hit the country, Granma newspaper reported. At the end of their conversation, the Namibian leader requested that his greetings be given to Fidel Castro (*ACN*, 12/9/08).

September 11: The Canadian Committee for the Release of the Cuban Five and Vancouver Cuba Solidarity Communities (VCSC) have called a rally for September 12 in that Canadian city, in support of the release of these prisoners. The meeting will be held in front of the US Consulate in Vancouver, reports Juventud Rebelde newspaper. Demonstrators will also demand the end of Washington's embargo against the island and will condemn the support given by the US government to Miami-based anti-Cuba terrorist groups (*ACN*, 12/9/08).

September 12: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) staff in Cuba are rushing to provide clean water and sanitation to the areas hardest hit by Hurricane Ike, the fourth deadly tropical storm to batter the Caribbean region with torrential rains and heavy winds within the past month. Preventing outbreaks of infectious disease is now the top priority in the wake of Ike, UNICEF's deputy representative in Cuba, Viviana Limpias, said from Havana. "We are also concerned with the status of schools and recreational facilities for children on the island, given that the return to school has been pushed back until further notice and many classrooms are currently being used as shelters," Ms. Limpias said. Ms. Limpias added that natural disasters on the scale of the hurricanes are especially frightening for children. "More funding will be needed to ensure children's well-being since we are expecting several other hurricanes in the next few months" (*UN News*, 13/9/08).

September 13: Cuban President Raul Castro issued a statement expressing concern about current developments in Bolivia and reiterating Cuba's firm support of the legitimate government of Evo Morales. In his statement, which was published by Cuban television, Raul Castro said that political, economic and media pressures on the government of Evo Morales threaten the South American country's integrity. The statement denounces Washington's interference with Bolivia's domestic affairs and reiterates that the situation taking place in that country must be solved by the Bolivian people, according to the principles of sovereignty, independence and self-determination. Bolivia's constitutional order and territorial integrity must be respected, said Raul Castro in his statement. Cuba also calls for continental solidarity with Bolivia, since the developments in that country could lead to a dangerous escalation of violence threatening peace and security in the continent ([Declaración del Presidente de los Consejos de Estado y de Ministros](#); *ACN*, 14/9/08).

September 13: Cuba received a first shipment of nearly 15 tons' worth of Brazilian humanitarian aid for the victims of hurricanes Gustav and Ike. "The first Brazilian plane

loaded with humanitarian aid landed yesterday evening in Havana, carrying 14.7 tons of foodstuffs for the victims of the hurricanes Gustav and Ike (...)," said Granma, the newspaper of the ruling Communist Party. Ramón Rippoll, Deputy Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration, claimed that the Brazilian aid package would be distributed as a basic basket that should feed a family of five for two weeks (*Reuters*, 14/9/08).

September 13: The Norwegian government has allocated 11 million Norwegian kroner to be spent on emergency aid to hurricane victims in Haiti and Cuba, in the wake of tropical storms Gustav and Hanna. The hurricanes have created an acute humanitarian situation on Haiti and Cuba. The many who are hard hit need our and other nations' help, says State Secretary Haakon A.Gulbrandsen. The Norwegian aid will be distributed through the UN, the International Red Cross and NGOs (*The Norwegian Post*, 13/9/08).

September 14: Cayman Islands, the wealthy British Caribbean dependency, says it is distributing 24,500 pounds (11,100 kilograms) of relief supplies to Hurricane Ike's victims in the Turks and Caicos Islands. The government of the Cayman Islands says donations for its fellow British overseas territory include generators, tarpaulins, canned foods and toiletries. Kurt Tibbett, the top elected official in the Cayman Islands, said in a statement that the territory is also trying to organize relief for Cubans rebuilding after Ike's destructive path (*AP*, 14/9/08).

September 14: The murder of President Hugo Chávez would be a catastrophe for the homeland of Simón Bolívar, Fidel Castro warned in a letter read on television by the Venezuelan head of State. The missive alluded to recently uncovered plans for a military coup and presidential assassination in Venezuela involving Army officers, both retired and in active duty. "What they should do is take care of you if they really believe that socialism is a failed doctrine that divorces the leaders from their own people, when in fact it is the only path, the only path to life, to the Homeland," expressed Fidel Castro in the letter read by Chávez in his regular TV appearance *Aló Presidente*. After commenting that he had received a message from Castro, Chavez remarked, "Fidel Castro is fighting our battle" (*AIN*, 14/9/08).

September 15: A group of 25 students from Solomon Islands planning to study medicine in Cuba will take up their scholarship at the end of this month. The Solomon Times reported that, under the agreement, Cuba is offering 50 scholarship this year for Solomon Island students. Solomon Islands ministry of health regards the agreement as a big bonus to the Solomon Islands. It says the Solomon Islands is short of up to 60 doctors (*Radio Australia*, 15/9/08).

September 15: More foreign help continues arriving into Havana in the form of important donations of building materials and food as part of the recovery efforts after the passing of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, reported Granma newspaper. Two Hercules C-130 planes of the Colombian and Honduran Air Forces arrived at the Jose Marti International Airport in Havana. The assistance from Colombia includes 3,000 sheets of zinc roofing material with the 18,000 ties necessary for installation (11 tons in all). Honduras sent ten

tons of foodstuffs including rice, beans, noodles and instant soups. Luz Amanda Pulido, head of Colombia's Disaster Prevention and Attention Office of the Ministry of the Interior and Justice, led the Colombian mission and offered a special greeting from President Alvaro Uribe. She was welcomed by Orlando Requeijo, vice minister of Economic Investment and Foreign Collaboration. Pulido said her government will attend the requests from the Cuban government, especially regarding building materials. Meanwhile, Juan Ramon Elvir, the Honduran ambassador in Havana, called the humanitarian flight historic, since it is the first time in 50 years that a plane of the Honduran Air Force lands in Cuba on this type of mission (*ACN*, 16/9/08).

September 15: Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin made his second visit to Cuba in two months in what Cuban state-run press said was a one-day trip to evaluate hurricane damage and strengthen commercial ties. Sechin arrived with representatives from several Russian ministries and large Russian companies who would look at ways they could help Cuba recover from hurricanes Gustav and Ike, said news agency Prensa Latina. Sechin visited Cuba in August on a trip that the two old Cold War allies billed as the reactivation of "traditional relations" between the Caribbean island and Russia, which as the then-Soviet Union was Cuba's biggest benefactor before it collapsed in 1991. That visit followed a report out of Russia, later denied by the Russian Defense Ministry, that Cuba might be used as a refueling base for Russia's nuclear-capable bombers (*Reuters*, 16/9/08).

September 15: Cuban President Raul Castro met with the Vice President of the Russian Federation, Igor Ivanovich Sechin, who was in Cuba for a working visit heading a delegation of Russian ministers and businesspeople. The meeting took place in a friendly and congenial atmosphere and both leaders expressed their political willingness to continue increasing bilateral cooperation. Raul Castro thanked the visitor on behalf of the Cuban people for the humanitarian aid sent by Russia to help the Caribbean nation in the aftermath of the devastation caused nationwide by hurricanes Gustav and Ike (*ACN*, 17/9/08).

September 16: The first Cuba-Pacific Islands Ministerial Meeting is on its way in Havana. Already in the Cuban capital for this meeting are the President of Kiribati, Anote Tong, and the Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Apisai Lelemia, as well as the foreign ministers of Nauru, Salomon Islands and Fiji Islands: Kieren Keke, William Haomae and Ratu Epei Nailatikau, respectively. Also present in the meeting are the representatives before the United Nations from Tonga, Vanuatu, Samoa, Micronesia and Papua-New Guinea. According to Granma news daily, this meeting will contribute to the strengthening of cooperation ties between Cuba and this group of small island-states, mainly in the fields of health, sports and training of human resources. In addition, participants will also analyze common challenges such as climate change, natural disasters and the current world food and energy crisis (*ACN*, 16/9/08).

September 16: The Cuban government under new leader Raul Castro has reportedly accepted the resumption of formal political dialogue with the EU after it lifted diplomatic sanctions against the island two months ago. The EU representative in Havana, Javier

Nino signaled interest in taking up formal talks with Europe in what could be a first step towards normalization of strained relations between the 27-member bloc and Cuba. In a letter handed over earlier this month at the embassy of France, current holder of the EU's rotating presidency, Nino said the communist regime was interested in restarting dialogue with the EU. "The Cuban government agrees to begin dialogue. (...) The EU proposal is an unconditional dialogue, mutual benefit, mutual respect on a number of issues such as rights and environmental issues," Nino told the press. "At this moment the two sides are negotiating over when (plans for) the dialogue can be firmed up, but ideally it will be relatively soon," he said, adding that no date or venue had been set (*Deutsche Welle*, 17/9/08).

September 16: Cuba and 10 island-states of the Pacific region strengthened their cooperation and friendship ties after the conclusion in Havana of the First Bilateral Ministerial Meeting that took place at the Palco hotel. Speaking on behalf of the visiting delegations, the Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Apisai Lelemia, noted that climate change and the world food crisis are the real threats today for the host country and these small island-states. He also expressed his satisfaction at the general consensus of participating delegations on the need to reform the United Nations (*ACN*, 17/9/08).

September 16: Cuban Vice President Esteban Lazo met with the president of Kiribati, Anote Tong and the Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Apisai Lelemia, to whom he offered greetings from President Raul Castro. The meeting took place after the opening session of the First Ministerial Meeting of Cuba and the Pacific Islands in Havana. Lazo called the encounter "historic" and said it "will lay the foundations for our relations." He noted that both Fidel and Raul Castro put much importance on this First Ministerial Meeting, reported *Granma* newspaper (*ACN*, 17/9/08).

September 16: A cargo plane carrying 20.7 tons of humanitarian aid sent by Spain and the UN World Food Program arrived in Havana from Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. The Spanish Ambassador in Cuba, Carlos Alonso Zaldivar, told the press that this second shipment shows the willingness of his country to continue cooperating with Cuba in its efforts to recover from the severe damages caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. He explained that this time the donation includes 16 tons of foodstuffs, and construction tools and materials, among other goods (*ACN*, 17/9/08).

September 17: Cuba and Kiribati signed a cooperation agreement that will increase bilateral cooperation in the health sector. The document was signed in Havana by Cuban Health Minister Jose Ramon Balaguer and by his Kiribati counterpart, Riteti Maninraka, in a ceremony that was presided over by Anote Tong, President of this small island-state of the Pacific. The Cuban official said that the agreement reaffirms the close bilateral ties of friendship and the commitment of both governments to continue strengthening cooperation. "We are sister nations, two small islands facing big challenges," Balaguer stressed (*ACN*, 18/9/08).

September 17: Fidel Castro was granted the Ubuntu 2008 Solidarity Award by the South Africa National Heritage Council (NHC). During a press conference in Pretoria,

Sonwabile Mancotvwa, executive director of NHC said that the award is granted to personalities whose life has been consistent with the humanitarian values of the Ubuntu African philosophy, which is based on unity and solidarity (ACN, 17/9/08).

September 17: A delegation from Portugal, led by State Secretary for Health Manuel Pizarro, held talks with the rector of Havana Medical Sciences Superior Institute (ISCMH), Jorge Gonzalez Perez. Also present at the meeting were Rosa Matos Zorrillo, Alentejo Health director, Luis Manuel Conhia Ribeiro, High Health Commissioner, and André Aragao Azevedo, head of staff of the delegation chief (ACN, 17/9/08).

September 18: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque said that his government has agreed to a political dialogue with the European Union (EU) but that a "formal agreement" on the talks' framework, format and governing principles is still pending. "We accepted this dialogue proposal, but first the EU and Cuba have to discuss and come to a formal agreement on what the framework will be, what forms of dialogue will be used and on what principles this discussion will be based," indicated Pérez Roque in a press conference. He added that this dialogue will "in no case be allowed to become an attempt by one of the parties to tutor the other." It will be an "exchange between equals that Cuba is willing to undertake and considers useful." Pérez Roque said that, from the island's perspective, the parties must engage in dialogue "as equals," with respect for national "sovereignty" and "the principle of non-interference in each other's domestic affairs" ([Conferencia de prensa de Pérez Roque](#); *EFE*, 18/9/08).

September 19: In a gesture of solidarity with Cuba after it was struck by two devastating hurricanes, the government of Trinidad and Tobago contributed \$1 million to the recovery efforts led in Cuba. During the symbolic delivery of the aid at the Cuban Foreign Ministry, Trinitarian Ambassador to Havana Lester Efebo Wilkinson said his country has closely followed the situation in Cuba. He praised the organization and discipline maintained by the Cuban people and said the response from his government could only be one of solidarity, reported Granma newspaper (ACN, 19/9/08).

September 19: The Government of Canada announced a \$400,000 contribution to assist the people of Cuba affected by Hurricanes Gustav, Hanna and Ike. Of that amount, \$200,000 will be transferred to the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), allowing the IFRC and the Cuban Red Cross to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to 40,000 Cubans whose lives have been devastated by the impact of the hurricanes. Provisions will include water filters, temporary shelter materials, and other much-needed emergency supplies such as kitchen sets, jerry cans, mosquito nets, towels, mattresses and sheet sets. This is in addition to the \$100,000 provided on September 6 for initial emergency responses in Cuba, Haiti and the Caribbean. In addition, \$200,000 has been set aside for the Cuba Community Development Fund to support relief and reconstruction proposals submitted by local Cuban organizations. Canadian officials are monitoring all regions of the Americas that have been hit by the recent storms and will continue to work with trusted humanitarian partners to ensure that this assistance is making a difference (*CIDA Press Release*, 19/9/08).

September 20: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said he will visit hurricane-ravaged Cuba before leaving on a trip to China and Russia. Chavez said he was invited by close friend Fidel Castro and his brother Raul, Cuba's current president. He said in a speech that Cuba can "count on" Venezuela for help after Hurricanes Gustav and Ike recently did an estimated US\$5 billion in damage. He did not give details (*AP*, 20/9/08).

September 21: Cuban President Raul Castro received a message of solidarity from his Angolan counterpart, Jose Eduardo Dos Santos, on the occasion of the devastation caused recently in the Caribbean nation by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. According to Granma news daily, the letter was delivered by the Angolan Minister of Public Works and City Planning, Francisco Higinio Lopes Carneiro. Raul Castro thanked Lopes Carneiro for the important contribution made by the Angolan Government. Also present in the meeting was the Angolan ambassador in Cuba, Antonio Condesse de Carvalho, as well as Cuban Army Corps generals Julio Casas Regueiro and Leopoldo Cintra Frias (*ACN*, 22/9/08).

September 21: Pope Benedict XVI says he is offering special prayers for people suffering in the wake of hurricanes that hit Haiti, Cuba and other Caribbean countries. The pope also recalled the populations of Texas and other southern US states that were battered by hurricanes earlier this month. Benedict told pilgrims at his Castel Gandolfo summer retreat that he hopes that help quickly reaches damaged areas, and that solidarity and brotherhood prevail (*AP*, 21/9/08).

September 21: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez arrived in Cuba to meet with former Cuban leader Fidel Castro, as Caracas's firebrand leader sets out on a tour that includes China, Russia, Portugal and France. The Venezuelan leader was greeted at Jose Marti International Airport by Cuban President Raul Castro, who wore his customary military uniform. In an article published in Cuba's state-run press, Castro, 82, said the one-hour meeting with his close friend Chavez will be "a great honor for me" ([What is True and What is False](#); *Reuters*, 22/9/08).

September 22: The government of Suriname will contribute \$125,000 to Cuban efforts for recovery after the passing of the devastating hurricanes Gustav and Ike. The announcement was made by Suriname's Foreign Relations Minister Lygia Kraag-Keteldijk at the request of the president of her country, Ronald R. Venetiaan, in a meeting with the Cuban ambassador to that country Andres Gonzalez Garrido. On behalf of Suriname's government, the minister expressed her deep sorrow for the damage caused by the two hurricanes and the death of seven people (*ACN*, 22/9/08).

September 22: Cuba demanded at the UN specific aid for the African peoples, such as the condoning of the foreign debt and the fulfilment of Official Development Assistance (ODA). Cuba also called for the mobilization of new and additional resources, as well as financial, technical and human support and a larger worldwide effort in terms of health and education in the continent, reported Prensa Latina news agency from New York. These were the positions expressed by Cuba's first vice-president, Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, in his speech to the special high level session Africa's development needs: state

of implementation of various commitments, challenges and the way forward. In his speech to the forum, Machado Ventura affirmed that if an answer is not given to the imperative need of establishing a new North-South relation system, "whatever we do, will be a futile exercise" (*ACN*, 22/9/08).

September 22: Cuban First Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura held bilateral meetings with the presidents of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe; Equatorial Guinea, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo; and Cape Verde, Pedro Pires. Machado Ventura heads the Cuban delegation to the High Level Meeting of the 63rd Period of Sessions of the UN General Assembly in New York. Also, the Cuban high-ranking official met with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and with Miguel D'Escoto, current President of the Assembly. In addition, Machado held bilateral meetings with the foreign ministers of Angola, Algeria and Indonesia. According to Granma news daily, in the night, the Cuban First VP participated in a rally in solidarity with Cuba at the Intercession Church in Harlem organized by groups working in the campaign for the release of five Cubans who remain in US jails (*ACN*, 23/9/08).

September 22: A donation of food, drinking water, mattresses and other articles sent by the Jamaican government arrived to the port of eastern Santiago de Cuba to help the victims of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. The coastguard vessel Middlesex of the Jamaican Armada carried the load along with four specialists from the Jamaican Office for Disasters Preparation and Emergencies. Local authorities received the donation on behalf of the Cuban people. The two sides exchanged information and experiences on the handling regional disasters (*ACN*, 22/9/08).

September 23: Former Cuban leader Fidel Castro is "strong," Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said, adding that he had enjoyed a walk and chat about the world financial crisis with the octogenarian revolutionary. "We stopped in Havana first and I talked with Fidel for a while, a good while. Fidel is strong, you know," Chavez told journalists at the start of a visit to China, his second stop on a world tour that began in the island nation. "We walked...we analyzed the situation in the world, in Latin America. And the situation in the United States, which is so terrible not only for their people but for the whole world -- the collapse of the international financial system" (*Reuters*, 23/9/08).

September 24: "Cuba is a school of social development," said Jose Juan Ortiz, representative of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the Caribbean nation. In statements published by the digital edition of the Bohemia magazine, the UNICEF executive said that Cuba has proven wrong the thesis that says that guaranteeing children's rights depends on economic resources. "The truth is that, if there is political willingness, many things can be done. Cuba is working very seriously to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. In fact, several of these goals have already been fully attained and there is significant improvement in others," the UN official noted (*ACN*, 24/9/08).

September 24: Cuban Vice Minister for Economic Investment and Economic Cooperation Ricardo Guerrero referred to donations to Cuba after the devastation caused

by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike as "expressions of friendship". At the Round Table television program, Guerrero said that, Cuba doesn't measure the financial impact of donations coming from abroad. "Above all, we appreciate the gesture of extending friendly and humanitarian hands to us to complement our efforts (...) in our resolve to recover from the damage caused by the recent storms. Guerrero reported that so far Cuba has received 230 offers of aid from 63 nations and institutions amounting to US\$ 30.5 million, of which 1 million in resources and 2 million in funds has already arrived. The vice minister denied the rumor that international donations were being sold in government stores (ACN, 24/9/08).

September 24: Cuban First Vice-President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura demanded a new and fairer world order as he addressed the 63 Period of Sessions of the UN General Assembly, in New York. After congratulating Nicaraguan Miguel D'Escoto for having been elected to chair the Assembly, Machado Ventura said that today's world circumstances are crucial for the history of humankind, since the threats currently pending on the planet endanger the existence of the human race. The Cuban First Vice-President said that the only way to secure the future is by promoting peace, solidarity, social justice and sustainable development. The current unfair and unsustainable world order must be replaced with a really democratic and equitable system, he said. Machado Ventura pointed out that a new world order must be based on respect for international law and the principles of justice and solidarity to put an end to inequalities and the exclusion to which large majorities of the world population have been submitted ([Address by Machado Ventura at the UN General Assembly](#); ACN, 24/9/08).

September 25: The prospects of cooperation between Azerbaijan and Cuba will be discussed in Baku during high-level talks in the near future. Cuban President Raul Castro will pay an official visit to Azerbaijan, Cuban Ambassador to Azerbaijan Marcelo Caballero Torres said. "The visit of the Cuban President will have a positive effect on expansion of bilateral cooperation, which is being resumed at the moment. Since opening the embassies the two countries have been reanimating former relations. Mutual visits intensify the efforts," he said. "That will be the second visit of Raul Castro to Azerbaijan. The first time he visited Baku was in 1970, when he was Cuba's Defence Minister," the Ambassador said. Economic relations between Azerbaijan and Cuba have shifted to a new development stage since last year. At the end of 2007 the first session of Azerbaijani-Cuban Inter-Governmental Commission for Economic Co-operation took place in Havana, which focused on the current situation of the economic ties and the prospects for their development between Azerbaijan and Cuba (*Trend News*, 26/9/08).

September 25: Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero said in New York he would continue to support dialogue with the Cuban government as a means of promoting freedom and human rights on the communist-ruled island. During a press conference at the United Nations, Zapatero made the remarks in response to a question about how he plans to work for the release of Cuban political prisoners. The Spanish premier, who is attending the UN General Assembly, said that "extending freedom in all corners, defending basic rights in all places and working from the standpoint of dialogue" are constant goals of his government. "I think that's the most constructive way," Zapatero

said, referring to engaging in dialogue with Cuba, either bilaterally or as a member nation of the European Union. Spain was instrumental in the EU's decision this summer to officially end sanctions that had been imposed on Cuba following a crackdown on dissidents in 2003 (*EFE*, 26/9/08).

September 26: Brigades of construction workers from Venezuela joined local crews in the recovery works of the western province of Pinar del Rio, which was seriously battered by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. The Venezuelans are working in the rebuilding of nearly one hundred schools damaged by the hurricanes, which were the biggest natural disasters that have ever hit Cuba. The works include plumbing, carpentry, building and roofing in schools in different areas of the province including the mountains. Among the most devastated sites are Candelaria, San Cristobal, Bahia Honda, Los Palacios, La Palma, Consolacion del Sur and the well-known town of Viñales (*ACN*, 26/9/08).

September 26: The government of Algeria donated two million dollars in aid to Cuba, to help Cubans overcome the devastation left after the passage of hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika decided to send this donation aid, which will be added to the special bank account opened by the Cuban government for this assistance. Algerian ambassador Ahcene Kerma explained Bouteflika helps Cuba in the name of his compatriots, moved by the disastrous damages left by Gustav and Ike. Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration Minister Marta Lomas received the check for two million dollars and thanked for this action of solidarity in the name of Cuban government and people (*ACN*, 26/9/08).

September 26: German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier's meeting with his Cuban counterpart Felipe Perez Roque was not approved by the Chancellor's Office. German officials said that Chancellor Angela Merkel's government headquarters disapproved of the meeting on the sidelines of the UN General assembly in New York. Even after the resignation of President Fidel Castro "nothing has moved" in Cuba, the Chancellor's Office pointed out. In addition, the European Union is the more suitable actor regarding the Cuban issue. Germany should "not push ahead at the national level." Steinmeier expressed surprise by the reprimand from the Chancellor's Office and met with Perez Roque nevertheless. In his 15-minute meeting he advocated a very different position from that of the Chancellor's Office. Steinmeier saw a "policy of opening up" in the Caribbean country, even though "many things are still unsatisfactory" (*Der Spiegel*, 27/9/08).

September 27: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez made a surprise visit to Cuba and wasted little time heading into a closed-door meeting with President Raul Castro and his ailing brother Fidel. A report on the Web site of the Communist Youth newspaper Juventud Rebelde said Chavez arrived at around 8:30 p.m. and was greeted at the airport by the 77-year-old Raul Castro. Chavez then met with both Castro brothers, according to the Internet item, which was posted about a half-hour after his arrival. The meeting was still under way at the time of the posting. The story provided no further details and there was no additional comment from Cuba's government. It was the second Cuba visit in less than a week for Chavez, who visited Havana for a few hours as part of a previously

announced stopover at the start of his tour to China, Russia and Europe. Earlier in the day Cuban state television showed images of Chavez being interviewed in Portugal, where he could be heard saying he didn't have much time to talk because "Fidel was waiting" for him in Havana. The 82-year-old Fidel Castro had previously published an article titled "The Democratic Socialism" in which he praised Chavez, calling him "a Venezuelan soldier" who is designing "an unprecedented national and internationalist program" ([The Democratic Socialism](#); AP, 27/9/08).

September 29: A Cuban medical brigade is getting ready to set up a new ophthalmological center in the Peruvian city of Cusco, where they will perform free-of-charge eye surgeries. According to Granma news daily, the announcement was made by Olga Lopez, head of the Cuba-Peru cooperation in the field of public health during the 9th National Encounter of Cuba-Peru Friendship Centers. The Cuban specialist said that the new ophthalmological center will open as part of the Operation Miracle free eye-surgery program for low-income people carried out by Cuba and Venezuela, mainly in Latin America and the Caribbean (ACN, 29/9/08).

September 29: Cyprus' Foreign Relations Minister Markos Kipryanou paid tribute to Cuban National Hero Jose Marti in a ceremony that marked the beginning of an official visit to Cuba. Kipryanou is in Havana at the official invitation of his counterpart Felipe Pérez Roque. In statements to the press, he said the trip to Cuba is to explore exchange potentials and develop commercial relations (ACN, 29/9/08).

September 30: Cuban Vice President Esteban Lazo and Cyprus Foreign Minister Markos Kyprianou, highlighted the friendship bonds that join their two countries together in a meeting held in Havana. During the meeting, Foreign Minister Kyprianou, who is on an official visit to Cuba, announced the decision of his government to donate US\$100,000 to Cuba as a gesture of support from the people of Cyprus with the victims of hurricanes Gustav and Ike (ACN, 1/10/08).

September 30: Some 130 celebrities from the arts, media and politics have signed an open letter calling for justice for five Cubans jailed in the US for spying. The letter appeared in two national UK newspapers to mark the 10th anniversary of the men's arrest. Campaigners are urging US authorities to give visas to the wives of two of the men. They have not been allowed to visit the US for several years. The men were convicted in a Miami court in 2001 on a range of charges. These included lying about their identities, trying to obtain US military secrets and spying on Cuban exile groups. Three were given life terms, the other two 19 and 15 years in jail. A full-page advertisement in The Guardian and The Independent newspapers carries a large photograph of Adriana Perez, who has not been granted a visa to visit her husband, Gerardo Hernandez, for 10 years. The signatories include 10 Nobel laureates, among them Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, German and Portuguese novelists Gunter Grass and Jose Saramago, and Guatemalan indigenous rights campaigner Rigoberta Menchu. The men, Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labanino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando Gonzalez and Rene Gonzalez, have appealed against their sentences, three

times. They say that by being tried in Miami, the centre of anti-Castro Cuban exiles, they were victims of bias (*BBC*, 30/9/08).

September 30: A shipment of medicines valued at US \$53,000 in addition to foodstuffs and building materials was donated by Guatemala to Cuba as a contribution to the recovery efforts on the island from the devastation caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. The Guatemalan medicine distribution company, Pharma Group, donated to Cuba 115 boxes of medicine that include vitamins, pain relievers among other pharmaceutical products. Rodolfo Luna, Pharma's president said the company hopes the donation can relieve at least to a minimal extent the situation of the Cuban people after the passage of the two hurricanes, reported *Prensa Latina* (*ACN*, 30/9/08).

September 30: Dozens of people needing cataract surgery were flying to Cuba for free treatment, Guyana's health minister said, marking a resumption of a program that has helped more than 5,000 Guyanese. Health Minister Leslie Ramsammy said Cuba had suspended the Guyana program because there were not enough patients to fill an airplane after the first year. The first flight in more than six months was due to leave Guyana with about 60 people requiring cataract surgery (*The Miami Herald*, 30/9/08).

September 30: The United Nations allocated a second donation to Cuba, this time over \$4.8 million to help address the tremendous damage done by hurricanes Gustav and Ike recently. This contribution from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), with the support of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN/OCHA), will be assigned to support short-term problems of housing, health, food, education, water, sanitation and agriculture in eastern Cuba. Susan McDade, the UN resident coordinator, reported that with this new donation, as confirmed by United Nation Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John C. Holmes, the total award amount goes up to \$8.6 million in terms of what the international organization has donated. As a part of the collaboration, UN officials have committed to work jointly with local and national authorities in the recovery efforts over the coming months (*Xinhua*, 30/9/08).

September 30: The Chinese government donated US\$ 1 million to Cuba to help in the recovery effort from the damage caused by the two major hurricanes that recently struck the island. The formal donation was signed by Chinese Ambassador to Cuba Zhao Rongxian and Cuban Minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration Marta Lomas in Havana, reported *Granma* newspaper. China had previously contributed US\$ 300,000 to Cuba. (*ACN* , 1/10/08).

Security

September 9: Russia is not planning to reopen a radar base at the Lourdes facility in Cuba, according to the news agency Novosti which quoted the Russian foreign minister. "This matter is not under consideration," Sergei Lavrov told reporters at a joint news conference with Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik. The electronic monitoring and surveillance facility near Havana at Torrens, also known as the Lourdes facility, the

largest Russian electronic eavesdropping site abroad, was shut down in October 2001 by then-president Vladimir Putin. The facility, which covered a 28-square-mile area, was manned by about 1,000 to 1,500 Russian engineers, technicians and military personnel. The complex was capable of monitoring a wide array of commercial and government communications throughout the southeastern United States, and between the United States and Europe (*Novosti*, 10/9/08).

September 12: "The Russian strategic bombers Tu-160 will not be flying to Cuba just yet, but if required they could go there and land in the airfields of that country," claimed Russian Strategic Aviation commander, General Pavel Androsov. "We have no plans to fly to Cuba yet, but we would have no problems landing in Cuban airfields," said Androsov, commenting on remarks by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, who expressed his wish to fly in a Tu-160 over Cuba to greet Fidel Castro. "It is a very interesting area because a new US operational fleet is being deployed in the Gulf of Mexico," pointed out Androsov (*Adnmundo.com*, 12/9/08).

September 13: Cuba announced that it is postponing a military exercise so soldiers can focus on helping the country recover and rebuild from the devastation of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. An "informative note" in the Communist Party newspaper Granma said President Raul Castro had decided to put off "Bastion 2008," an exercise scheduled to begin in November. It provided no further details about the exercise. Cuba's armed forces had begun to tap into reserve stocks of food and other supplies to provide aid to tens of thousands left homeless (*AP*, 13/9/08).

September 17: Moscow is ready to help Cuba develop its own space center, Russia's space agency chief said after talks in Caracas with Venezuelan and Cuban officials, Itar-Tass news agency reported. Russia has stepped up efforts to develop closer links with both countries, which are ideological enemies of Washington, including sending Russian strategic bombers on a mission to Venezuela this month. "We have held preliminary discussions about the possibility of creating a space center in Cuba with our help," the chief of Russia's Federal Space Agency Anatoly Perminov was quoted as saying by Itar-Tass in Caracas. "With our Cuban colleagues, we discussed the possibilities of joint use of space equipment (...) and the joint use of space communications systems," Perminov was quoted as saying. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin visited Cuba and together with representatives from several Russian ministries and large Russian companies looked at ways to help Cuba recover from hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Russian officials have said they want to renew Cuban ties that were neglected after the Soviet Union's collapse (*Reuters*, 17/9/08).

September 18: Russia is in talks to build a space center in Cuba as it forges closer ties with Latin American countries opposed to the US in the wake of Cold War-era tensions sparked by the Georgia conflict. The head of the Russian Federal Space Agency, or Roscosmos, Anatoly Perminov, who visited Havana with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin, made the announcement in a statement posted on the agency's Web Site. After Cuba, Sechin traveled to Venezuela, whose President Hugo Chavez heads to Moscow next week, and Nicaragua. Russia is playing its most active role in the region

since the Soviet era, in a challenge to the U.S. in its traditional backyard. "We're increasing our presence in Latin America -- the countries in the region themselves want this," said Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Igor Lyakin-Frolov. "There's a big power in the north. They need a counterweight," he said by telephone from Moscow today, referring to the US (*Bloomberg*, 18/9/08).

September 24: General Godfrey Nhlanhla Ngwenya, chief of South Africa's National Defense Force, led a military delegation from his country on official visit in Cuba. General Nhlanhla Ngwenya, accompanied by Major General Antonio Enrique Lussón, commander of the Cuban national army's Special Forces, laid a wreath at the monument to the soldiers fallen in the defense of the Homeland, in Colon cemetery. The South African general said that his presence in the island sought to strengthen relations between both peoples. The South African military delegation toured a large army base, accompanied by member of the Communist Party's Political Bureau, Deputy Minister of the Army and Army Chief of Staff, Army Corps General Álvaro López Miera, and Brigadier General Francisco Hernández López, commander of the large base (*Granma*, 24/9/08).

US-Cuba Relations

September 1: Members of the United States men's team will come home from the World Cup qualifying match with an uncommon souvenir: a stamp in their passports from La República de Cuba. The United States national team has not played in Cuba since 1947, when it lost, 5-2, in Havana. (In 1991, a United States under-21 team participated in the Pan American Games in Cuba.) An economic, commercial, travel and financial embargo imposed on Fidel Castro's Cuba in February 1962 remains in effect, to varying degrees, and American citizens still face travel restrictions. "Obviously, it's a unique situation for all of the history," Sunil Gulati, the president of the United States Soccer Federation, said in a telephone interview. The 20-player United States team is gathering in Miami, where it will train at Barry University before boarding a charter flight to Havana on September 4. The team will train in Cuba the next day, play the game on September 6, and return home immediately after the match (*The New York Times*, 1/9/08).

September 3: Senator Barack Obama called on President Bush to lift US travel for and other restrictions on family remittances, visits and humanitarian care packages to Cuba because of damage to the island country for 90 days because of Hurricane Gustav. "I wish to express my deepest sympathies for those affected by Hurricane Gustav, particularly the untold number affected in Cuba, who face the daunting task of reconstructing their lives with the weight of the failed Castro regime on their shoulders," said Obama in a statement. "This is a time when the Cuban people -- not (Fidel) Castro -- need and deserve American compassion and assistance. Make no mistake -- the embargo must remain, and I strongly oppose any aid to the Castro regime," said Obama. "The Cuban American community stands ready to directly assist their family members in this time of need. A failed Bush administration policy, however, stands in the way of moral and necessary aid," he added. Raul Martinez, the former Hialeah mayor now running for Congress as a Democrat against Miami-area incumbent Republican Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart,

also called for a temporary suspension of the restrictions in a separate statement, because of the damage in Cuba from Hurricane Gustav is heavy and Cubans need help (*Washington Bureau*, 3/9/08).

September 4: Cuba said it will appeal to the US Supreme Court part of a lower court decision against five Cuban agents who have been imprisoned nearly 10 years on espionage charges. Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon said lawyers would ask the nation's highest court to reverse a decision upholding sentences against two of the men, one sent to prison for 15 years and the other for life. "We're going to appeal to the Supreme Court of the United States, to the World Court, to the interplanetary court (...) to fight against this infamy," he said in a news conference. Alarcon, point man for Cuba's US policy, said the US 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta, Georgia, had denied Cuba's most recent attempt to have the convictions overturned. The sentences for the other three agents were earlier found to be excessive and sent back to a lower court for review, which the Cubans will not appeal. The men, known in the island as the "Five Heroes," were sent to the United States to infiltrate exile groups opposed to the Cuban government, the Cuban Government says. In 1998, they were arrested and accused of being unregistered agents of the Cuban government, and in one case of conspiring to murder members of the exile group, Brothers to the Rescue (*Reuters*, 5/9/08).

September 4: The United States State Department said that it had offered humanitarian aid to Cuban victims of Hurricane Gustav, provided that it went through relief organizations and not the government of President Raúl Castro. "The US government informed the Cuban government that we're prepared to offer hurricane assistance to the Cuban citizens," said Heide Bronke, a State Department spokeswoman. "We've made the offer, but we haven't heard from them yet." All six Cuban-American members of Congress have called for the Bush administration to aid victims of the storm, which tore through the western province of Pinar del Río and the Isle of Youth over the weekend, causing what the Cuban government estimates to be billions of dollars in damage. The offer from the United States, which was made through the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, calls for an initial \$100,000 in emergency aid. The State Department also offered to send disaster experts from the United States Agency for International Development to Cuba to assess damage. Initial estimates by the United States put the number of Cubans affected by the storm at 500,000. Whether Cuba would accept such assistance from Washington remains to be seen. The countries have a long history of animosity when it comes to disaster aid (*The New York Times*, 5/9/08).

September 4: Several South Florida organizations mobilized to ship money and supplies to the victims of Hurricane Gustav in Cuba, Haiti, and other Caribbean points. Deepening local concern about the death and destruction wreaked by storms in both countries underscored once again the profound links that exist in South Florida between expatriates and their homelands -- and the complicated politics that even humanitarian aid can ignite. Jewish Solidarity and Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul urged people to make contributions and said they have plans to ship supplies to Cuba as soon as feasible. Catholic Charities announced plans to provide financial aid to hurricane victims on several Caribbean islands (*The Miami Herald*, 5/9/08).

September 6: Clint Dempsey scored late in the first half and the United States held on to beat Cuba 1-0 in a sloppy and low-energy World Cup qualifier, the Americans' first match on the island since 1947. Half of the lights at rain-soaked Pedro Marrero Stadium went out in the 86th minute, causing a brief delay. Afterward, Cuba nearly tied it after a free kick, but US goalkeeper Tim Howard came up big. The US, trying to qualify for South Africa 2010 for its sixth straight World Cup, took the lead in Group One of the semifinals in the North and Central American and Caribbean region. Cuba's last World Cup was in 1938 (*AP*, 7/9/08).

September 6: Cuba politely declined a US offer to send a disaster assessment team to the island after Hurricane Gustav, saying it would rather Washington suspend restrictions on travel and the sale of food and other materials it needs to recover. Cuba's Foreign Ministry did not mention some US\$100,000 in humanitarian aid that Washington offered to send through nonprofit groups, along with the assessment team. It said in a statement that it appreciated the US government gesture recognizing the destruction that Gustav caused. The Cuban statement was released as forecasters predicted another powerful hurricane, Ike, will likely sweep across the length of the island. "Today when the country's east already is under storm alert with the threat of Hurricane Ike, just as powerful as Gustav, Cuba affirms that in reality the only correct, ethical (action) ... would be the total and definitive elimination of the harsh and cruel economic, commercial and financial blockade applied over nearly a half century against our nation," the statement said ([Declaración del MINREX](#); *AP*, 6/9/08).

September 7: US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that it would be unwise for Washington to lift an embargo against Cuba, despite its pleas following Hurricane Gustav. Cuba spurned an offer from the US to send hurricane victims \$100,000 in aid through relief organizations and said on Saturday that the United States should instead sell it relief supplies and allow food sales on credit. Rice said US President George W. Bush had made clear that Washington would be "responsive" to the Cuban regime if it was prepared to free political prisoners and had a process for free and fair elections, among other reforms. "We see nothing that suggests that has come about. What we can't do is to have the transfer of power from one dictatorial regime to another. That is not acceptable," she said during a visit to Morocco. "I don't think that in the context of what we see now that the lifting of the embargo would be wise," she said (*Reuters*, 7/9/08).

September 9: The United States is reaching out to help Cuba in the wake of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike despite Havana's rejection of an earlier offer to send assistance, the US State Department said. The State Department said Washington had reiterated its offer to send a humanitarian assessment team to Cuba in response to Hurricane Ike. "Our offer to send a team in the wake of Hurricane Ike remains on the table," the State Department said. The State Department said the United States was providing \$100,000 in immediate emergency assistance to nongovernmental organizations responding to Hurricane Gustav. Washington has increased authorizations for US-based aid groups to provide larger amounts of humanitarian assistance, including cash donations, to help the Cuban people,

the State Department added. The department said Washington also would expedite applications of up to \$10 million per donor for up to 90 days (*Reuters*, 9/9/08).

September 10: US Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez said the United States is being frustrated in attempts to provide aid for victims of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike by a Cuban government intent on playing politics. Instead of accepting the offer, Cuba has said it would be more helpful if the United States dropped its 46-year-long trade embargo against the island. Cuba's talk of the embargo "obviously seems to have the ring of politics overriding the needs of the people" and "has nothing to do with humanitarian aid," Gutierrez told the press in a telephone interview from Washington. "We believe we could be of great help to the Cuban people, but the offer was rejected, and it's very frustrating because we want to help," he said. The United States has said it is providing \$100,000 in emergency assistance and requested that the Cubans let it send in a team to assess what further help is needed. There have been calls in the US Congress for the Bush administration to temporarily lift its limits on remittances and travel to Cuba so that people in the United States can help storm-stricken family members in Cuba. But Gutierrez said, "That's not something we believe is relevant to this." "It seems like we're being put in a position whereby we can be accused of not helping because the regime in Cuba doesn't allow us to help," Gutierrez said ([Statement by Carlos Gutierrez](#); *Reuters*, 10/9/08).

September 10: Cardinal Francis George, speaking as President of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), has asked the US government to lift its ban on remittances and travel to Cuba in a letter to President George W. Bush. "In light of the devastation and humanitarian disaster caused by recent hurricanes in Cuba and the efforts of extended families, friends and organizations to reach those in need, I urge you to suspend – even temporarily - Treasury and Commerce Department restrictions and licensing requirements for humanitarian travel and remittances by American citizens and assistance by not-for-profit organizations," Cardinal George wrote. "At times of crisis, there are simple and basic acts of charity on which people rely," he continued. Saying the United States can be "rightly proud" of its tradition of humanitarian assistance, the cardinal urged that everything be done to facilitate relief efforts, whether through private donations or organizations like Catholic Relief Services. "Removing restrictions on remittances and travel to Cuba are a necessary step which I urge you to take without delay," Cardinal George wrote (*CNA*, 10/9/08).

September 11: Cuba has turned down US storm relief handouts, but is asking for trade restrictions to be lifted so it can buy American materials to assist in its recovery from Hurricane Ike, officials said. "Cuba hasn't asked the United States government to give it anything," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement published in the Communist Party newspaper *Granma*. "Simply that it lets us buy." The Foreign Ministry said it has for the second time turned down a US government offer to send a disaster assessment team to the island, insisting that Cuban experts are capable of assessing damage wrought by Ike when it ravaged the island this week. Cuba says it wants some US trade restrictions lifted instead, so it can buy American roofing and other construction materials to repair homes and the island's damaged electrical grid. It also wants the US to allow lenders to give

credits to help Cuba buy US foods, which law already permits Americans to sell to the island ([Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#); AP, 11/9/08).

September 12: The American Red Cross is committing \$1 million from its International Response Fund to support the disaster relief efforts of the Red Cross in Cuba in response to the devastation caused by two consecutive hurricanes. Nearly 400,000 people remain in shelters and the agricultural sector is severely damaged. "The situation in the Caribbean, particularly in Cuba and Haiti, is desperate and our hearts go out to the people impacted by the recent calamities," said David Meltzer, senior vice president of international services at the American Red Cross. "The infrastructure has been hit hard," says Jose Reyes, disaster management delegate in Cuba for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. "In addition, about one-third of the population was evacuated during the storms and 30,000 houses were destroyed and 320,000 houses were affected." A cargo plane carrying emergency kits for 3,300 families already arrived in Cuba from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' regional disaster unit in Panama. More supplies will be transported as needed (*PRNewswire*, 12/9/08).

September 13: As damage estimates continue to mount in Cuba, the US government has responded with expedited licenses for agencies that provide humanitarian aid. Several local groups reported getting new licenses in recent days at a faster pace than usual. The US government also increased the amount of cash that groups with existing authorizations could send to Cuban storm victims. Despite those changes, the embargo can spook individuals who are otherwise inclined to help. Tom Cooper, of South Florida's Gulfstream Air, has agreed to help Jewish Solidarity and another local charity take food and powdered milk to Cuba. His company operates daily charter flights to the island, but is uncertain about taking relief shipments. His lawyers are checking on whether the company is allowed to deliver aid supplies. Several aid groups say that once goods reach Cuba, they move through a relatively swift distribution system. Catholic Charities, for example, is using local donations to purchase 40,000 pounds of beans, rice and canned goods for the island. The goods are turned over to Catholic Relief Services, the US church's international relief and development arm. That agency has a license to ship humanitarian items, and is currently preparing at least five containers for Cuba. In Havana, workers from Caritas Cuba, a charity church branch, will meet the shipment when it arrives. Government trucks distribute the aid. "Things have gone relatively smoothly as long as we inform the government we are coming," said Lynn Renner, Catholic Relief Services' Caribbean representative. "The government has assured Caritas that everything that comes into the country will be distributed immediately on a fast track (..) because the needs are tremendous right now" (*The Miami Herald*, 13/9/08).

September 14: The Cuban government asked Washington for a six-month reprieve on embargo rules that prohibit the communist country from making purchases from American companies, saying devastation from Hurricanes Gustav and Ike make it critical. Washington and Havana have been embroiled in a diplomatic dispute over hurricane aid since Hurricane Gustav smashed into western Cuba on August 30. Washington offered \$100,000 and a humanitarian assessment team, and the Cuban

Foreign Ministry answered by saying what it needed was purchasing credits. Havana sent a second, more harshly worded note when Washington made the same offer after Hurricane Ike devastated eastern Cuba. The statement released on September 11 called US Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutiérrez a hypocrite, and said US diplomats were cynical liars. But this new diplomatic note takes a much softer tone. "The Cuban Interests Section in Washington wishes to communicate to the government of the United States that our country cannot accept a donation from the country that blockades us, although it is willing to purchase the indispensable materials that the North American companies export to the markets, and requests authorization for the provision of same, as well as the credits that are normal in all commercial operations," the statement said. "If the government of the United States does not wish to do so permanently, the government of Cuba requests that at least it do so during the next six months, especially if the damage caused by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike is taken into account, as well as the fact that the most dangerous months of the hurricane season are still ahead." There was no immediate response from Washington ([Nota del MINREX](#); *The Miami Herald*, 14/9/08).

September 15: The US State Department said it regretted that Cuba has rejected its offer of up to 5,000,000 dollars in aid for the victims of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Washington "informed the Cuban government (on September 13) that the US is committed to providing up to five million dollars in relief assistance for Cuban hurricane victims," Department spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters. The US government "could fly emergency relief supplies to Cuba as soon as they, the Cuban government, authorize such assistance," he added. On September 14 "the Cuban government informed us that they would not accept a donation from the United States," McCormack said. "And our reply was that we regret that Cuban authorities have not accepted this offer of humanitarian assistance for the Cuban people," he said (*AFP*, 15/9/08).

September 16: A civilian aircraft was ready to be loaded with supplies to help residents of this hard-hit province and fly out of Miami, but Havana rejected the US humanitarian assistance offer -- repeating that what it really needs is a temporary suspension of the trade embargo. Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Shannon called the offer made to Cuban diplomats "unique and unprecedented," because in the interest of speeding up delivery, the US government was prepared to turn over up to \$2 million in plastic sheeting, hygiene kits, blankets and other items directly to the Castro government -- an exception Washington was willing to make because of the extreme humanitarian need. The initial flight loaded with \$348,000 in goods was part of a \$5 million aid package the Cuban government shunned, saying in a statement that it cannot accept help from a "government that blockades them." Henrietta Fore, director of the US Agency for International Development, told reporters that about \$3 million in cash will make its way to the storm-wracked island anyway through various nongovernmental organizations, earmarked for some 35,000 hurricane victims. "This was a genuine offer," Fore said in a conference call with reporters. "We knew of the dire need. This was an important, serious offer of humanitarian assistance. We are hoping the Cuban government will reconsider" ([Press Statement by the State Department](#); *The Miami Herald*, 16/9/08).

September 16: The American Red Cross is committing \$1 million from its International Response Fund to support the disaster relief efforts of the Red Cross in Cuba in response to the devastation caused by two consecutive hurricanes. Nearly 400,000 people remain in shelters and the agricultural sector is severely damaged. "The situation in the Caribbean, particularly in Cuba and Haiti, is desperate and our hearts go out to the people impacted by the recent calamities," said David Meltzer, senior vice president of international services at the American Red Cross (*Medical News Today*, 16/9/08).

September 17: Hundreds of Cuban writers, musicians and artists are asking the US to ease trade restrictions and speed the import of food and building supplies to help the island rebuild after Hurricanes Ike and Gustav. The two storms caused US\$5 billion in damage as they ripped across Cuba this month. A letter addressed to the world's artists and intellectuals was signed by musicians Silvio Rodriguez, Pablo Milanés and Chucho Valdés, writers Miguel Barnet and Roberto Fernández Retamar, dancer Alicia Alonso and painter Roberto Fabelo, among others (*AP*, 17/9/08).

September 17: Bypassing its trade embargo on communist Cuba, the United States announced approving 250 million dollars in "farm sales" to Havana after Hurricanes Gustav and Ike devastated Cuba's crops. The licenses for agricultural sales, which include food and construction materials, were approved after Ike lashed Cuba a week ago and "wood, a material essential to rebuilding, is included," read a State Department communique delivered to reporters at the US Interests Section in Havana. State Department officials in Washington regretted that Cuba rejected up to five million dollars in aid for the victims of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. After being hit hard by two hurricanes in less than two weeks, desperate Cuba last week urged Washington to ease its trade embargo to allow US firms to open private lines of credit for food imports to the cash-strapped island of more than 11 million people. The bilateral breakthrough "is more or less what they (the Cubans) are asking for, not credit because our law does not permit it. That will have to be through third parties. The license includes food and wood," a US diplomat in Havana told the press (*AFP, The Globe and Mail*, 17/9/08).

September 17: The US Secretary of Commerce visited South Florida to speak about the US government's offers to help people in Cuba who are victims of hurricanes Ike and Gustav. During his visit to the National Hurricane Center, Carlos Gutierrez focused on what the US is doing to help hurricane victims in Cuba. "We are ready with a planeload of materials that would have been in Havana or wherever they would tell us to send it within 36 hours," Gutierrez said. "They rejected that offer." Hurricanes Gustav and Ike have brought some of the biggest blows to Cuba, which is only 90 miles from the US, so far during this hurricane season. After touring the National Hurricane Center, Gutierrez said aid has been offered repeatedly to Cuba, but it was turned down. First, the Cuban government did not like the idea of a US assessment team coming in to survey the damage, so another deal was put on the table. "Five million dollars without the condition of having to send an assessment team. We did something that's frankly unprecedented," Gutierrez said (*Local 10*, 18/9/08).

September 17: Cuba, devastated in recent weeks by two powerful hurricanes, has too much dignity to accept aid from the United States, former leader Fidel Castro said in a column published in the official media. He said the United States had done billions of dollars in damage to Cuba with its 46-year-old trade embargo against the island and does not understand "that the dignity of a people has no price." Cuba suffered \$5 billion in damages from hurricanes Ike and Gustav, but the government has rejected offers of up to \$5 million in US aid. "If instead of five million they were one billion, the answer would be the same," wrote Castro. "The wave of solidarity with Cuba, that encompasses countries big and small, with resources and without, would disappear the day that Cuba quit being dignified," Castro said ([Playing the Good Guy Role At Our Expense?](#); *Reuters*, 17/9/08).

September 18: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque presented a draft resolution in Havana that will be subjected to approval by the UN's General Assembly on October 29. The motion is entitled "The need to put an end to the economic, commercial and financial blockade of the United States against Cuba." Perez Roque said Washington's more than 50-year-old blockade is the main obstacle hindering development in the country and is making it more difficult for the Cuban people to recover from the devastation that resulted from the hurricanes Gustav and Ike ([Report on UN Resolution 62/3](#); *ACN*, 18/9/08).

September 18: Cuba accused the US government of lying about its aid to the island following hurricanes Ike and Gustav and said the 46-year-old US trade embargo against Cuba is hurting recovery from the storms. Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said the Bush administration was conducting "a propaganda operation" to make it look like it was helping the island after the storms caused \$5 billion in damage. The United States has said it gave \$100,000 in aid for Cuba and accelerated the approval of \$250 million in agricultural sales from US companies. It also offered \$5 million in aid that Cuba rejected, saying it would not accept US help due to the embargo imposed a few years after the now ailing Fidel Castro took over the island in a 1959 revolution. Perez Roque, in a news conference, said the licensing of agricultural sales, permitted under the embargo, was routine procedure and did not represent aid because Cuba pays in cash for what it buys from US farmers. "To try to present this process and the licenses they say they've granted in recent days as proof of their willingness to cooperate is really a coarse manipulation," he said. As for the \$100,000, "we don't have the slightest idea where they've distributed this money nor have we asked for it." He also said the United States had exaggerated when it said in a recent statement that private US groups gave \$61 million in humanitarian aid to Cuba last year. The actual amount, Perez Roque said, was \$6.1 million. He said the number of US nongovernmental organizations operating in Cuba had dropped from 160 before the Bush administration took office seven-and-a-half years ago to 21 ([Conferencia de prensa de Pérez Roque](#); *Reuters*, 18/9/08).

September 18: According to an article carried by the official press, Cuban leader Fidel Castro accused the US government of cynicism and spreading lies for claiming that it had granted 250 million dollars' worth of agricultural licenses as humanitarian aid to Cuba following the havoc wreaked by two hurricanes. "The government of that country

presented to the world an authorization for the sale of food and lumber, as if it was a new decision linked to the disaster caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. A total joke," sneered Castro in comments made on the government-sponsored Web forum Cubadebate. Castro claimed that the US State Department used "the same lie twice" when it declared that it had green-lighted 250 million dollars in agricultural sales to the island, including lumber ([Twice the Same Lie](#); *AFP*, 18/9/08).

September 20: Solidarity actions in favor of the five Cubans held in US jails, like the recent concert in New York and other demonstrations, help raise awareness about the case, though millions of Americans still need to know about it, said Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon. In statements to the Cuban News Agency, Ricardo Alarcon said "we are quite far from talking about what can be described as a massive solidarity movement in the United States. Unfortunately millions of Americans do not have the slightest idea of what happened in Miami, while the demonstrations that took place around September 12 were not practically covered by the mass media" (*ACN*, 20/9/08).

September 21: US Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez released a statement regarding the United States' fourth offer to send humanitarian aid to Cuba. "Our most recent offer was in direct response to the Cuban government's plea for construction materials. In addition to our previous offers, USAID is prepared to deliver, via air and sea, building supplies and shelter kits that could provide temporary and permanent housing that will help 48,000 Cubans", the statement says. " We understand the difficulties caused by such devastating storms and we want to give the people of Cuba the materials needed to begin to recover. We hope the Cuban government will consider our genuine offers of assistance and that the best interests of the Cuban people will come before political differences. The United States stands ready to provide relief to the Cuban people." The latest aid package includes aircraft filled with 8,000 Family Emergency Shelter and Emergency Household Kits, followed by a shipment of supplementary material to include: zinc roofing and lumber for residential repair to complement the 8,000 Family Emergency Shelter Kits ([Statement by Secretary Gutierrez](#); *US Department of Commerce Press Release*, 21/9/08).

September 22: The democratic candidate for the presidency of the USA, Barack Obama, expressed his interest in "easing" the restrictions on remittances sent by Cuban-Americans to relatives on the island. The democratic candidate said that the freedom of the Cuban people is a matter of national interest and that is why pressure must be put on the president of that country, Raúl Castro, and his Government to obtain the release of all political prisoners and promote political freedom, of expression, of the press and worship. To achieve that, it is necessary that the USA moves toward a new age of different politics that allows to advance into the 21st century and not to remain in the 20th. We can start by easing the restrictions on the remittances sent by relatives of the Cubans and also lifting travel restrictions so that the Cuban-Americans can visit their families in the island with more frequency," he elaborated. However, he made it clear that he will maintain the embargo on the Caribbean island -- for leverage in case a direct negotiation takes place -- until there is a clear sign that there is political freedom in Cuba (*EFE*, 22/9/08).

September 22: Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón praised the increasing worldwide solidarity with five Cubans imprisoned in the United States. Alarcon started a visit to Venezuela as part of a campaign to free the Cuban Five, as these men are internationally known. "The struggle in favor of the Cuban Five has not stopped. Now, we are going to have two legal battles that will take place almost simultaneously: one in Miami and the other before the US Supreme Court," he noted. The Cuban official said that, after a decision made by the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta earlier this year ratifying the sentences against Gerardo Hernandez and Rene Gonzalez, the only solution is to appeal to the Supreme Court. "Otherwise, there would be no solution, in particular for the situation of Gerardo, whose sentence of two life terms was ratified," Alarcon said. As to Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero and Fernando Gonzalez, the President of the Cuban Parliament recalled that their cases have been sent back to Miami where they will receive new sentences (*ACN*, 23/9/08).

September 23: The Cuban government has not officially responded to Washington's latest no-strings offer to provide \$6.3 million in light construction materials to benefit hurricane victims. Havana has rejected three previous offers. The US State Department told Cuban diplomats in Washington on September 19 that the US Agency for International Development (USAID) was ready to send \$6.3 million in corrugated zinc roofs, nails, tools, lumber, sheeting and light shelter kits by ship to benefit some 48,000 people hit by back-to-back devastating hurricanes. But speaking at a New York church on September 22, Cuba's vice president said Washington can keep making its proposals, but what it should really do is lift the trade embargo. "They will continue making proposals," First Vice President José Ramón Machado Ventura said at a speech in Manhattan. "If they really want to help the Cuban people, why don't they lift the embargo? They try to say that Cuba is trying to sacrifice its own people for politics when the most politicized thing is the blockade." Havana has already turned down flights full of disaster relief supplies and has not responded officially to the latest offer from Washington (*The Miami Herald*, 23/9/08).

September 24: Federal authorities are investigating how a Cuban migrant headed for the US died from a head injury. Customs and Border Protection officials intercepted three boats carrying 33 Cuban migrants and 7 alleged smugglers in the waters south of Key Largo late on the night of September 23. Coast Guard authorities boarded the boat shortly after and discovered that one of the migrants - an adult man - had a severe head injury. A helicopter airlifted the man to the Opa Locka airport, where waiting paramedics pronounced him dead. The other 39 people, including the alleged smugglers, are on board Coast Guard cutters while federal authorities investigate (*AP*, 24/9/08).

September 24: Without ever pronouncing the two words "United States," Cuba's First Vice President José Ramón Machado Ventura condemned Washington, telling the leaders gathered at the United Nations that the country's quest for fast money at the expense of the poor was to blame for the world crises currently threatening the "existence of mankind." Speaking at the UN's 63rd General Assembly, Machado Ventura said Washington's manipulative trade policy stifled growth around the world. "Fabulous fortunes cannot be wasted while millions are starving and dying of curable diseases,"

Machado Ventura said. ``For a large part of the nonaligned nations, the situation is becoming unsustainable. Our nations have paid and will continue to pay the cost and consequences of the irrationality, wastefulness and speculation of a few countries in the (...) north." "The rise in oil prices is the result of irrational consumption, strong speculation and imperial war adventures," he said in his remarks. Machado Ventura also repeated his country's demand that the US end its decades-long trade embargo. He only obliquely referred to the latest US offer of about \$6 million in humanitarian assistance to help those suffering after Hurricanes Gustav and Ike tore through the country. "Cuba has asked for no gifts from the United States government. It has simply asked and asked again that it be allowed to purchase in the United States the materials that are indispensable for the reconstruction of homes and power grid and that US companies be authorized to grant Cuba private commercial credits to buy food," he said ([Address by Machado Ventura at the UN General Assembly](#); *The Miami Herald*, 25/9/08).

September 24: US Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez released the following statement regarding the Cuban government's five-day silence following our fourth offer of humanitarian aid in the wake of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike: "Our offer is unprecedented and unconditional. We regret that the Cuban government has failed to move quickly to accept our latest offer of humanitarian assistance. On Friday [September 19], the United States extended its fourth offer, which was in direct response to the Cuban government's plea for construction materials. In addition to the aid contained in previous offers, the US Government was prepared to deliver, via air and sea, building supplies and shelter kits that could provide temporary and permanent housing that could bring relief to more than 135,000 Cubans. By all accounts the situation in Cuba demands immediate attention, so it is regrettable that the Cuban government has allowed the situation to persist so long. Getting aid to the Cuban people has been a top priority. Reports from news agencies and relief organizations that have visited the island indicate that as many as 2.5 million Cubans were relocated during the storms, and 200,000 remain without homes. We understand the tremendous struggles left in the wake of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, and we want to offer the Cuban people the supplies they need to begin recovery. The United States will continue to stand ready to provide relief to the Cuban people" (*US Department of Commerce Press Release*, 24/9/08).

September 25: Fidel Castro mocked US President George W. Bush for the speech he gave on the spiraling US financial crisis. In an article published in Cuba's leading newspapers, the convalescing 82-year old Castro derided Bush's failure to assign blame for the collapse of US financial institutions. "Looks like 'democratic capitalism' doesn't include self-criticism," Castro wrote. "In any case, we must not be ungrateful or impolite: we have to thank Bush for his brilliant insight on political theory," Castro added, tongue-in-cheek. Bush delivered a 13-minute televised speech urging the US Congress to pass his government's 700 billion dollar bailout plan for Wall Street ([Bush's Self-Criticism](#); *AFP*, 25/9/08).

September 26: Southern Baptists will send two containers of relief supplies to Cuba to help victims of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike rebuild their homes and lives. An agreement negotiated with the US and Cuban governments will allow a container of building

supplies and food to be sent to both of the Baptist conventions -- eastern and western -- on the island nation 90 miles off the Florida Keys, according to Jim Brown, US director for Baptist Global Response, a Southern Baptist international relief and development organization. Assessment teams of representatives of the International Mission Board, Florida Baptist Convention and BGR toured opposite ends of Cuba, evaluating needs and discussing possible responses with Cuban government officials. "The entire island of Cuba has been damaged in one degree or another by both Gustav and Ike," Brown said. "Most of the damage was related to housing -- houses destroyed or damaged, roofs gone or partially destroyed, crops damaged or destroyed, areas of sporadic flooding, electric infrastructure damaged, and destroyed personal items. There also is a tremendous need for food and water." The government dispatched soldiers to clean up roads and fallen trees and Cuban Baptist churches leaped into action after the storm, meeting needs out of the limited resources immediately available to them, Brown said (*Baptist News*, 26/9/08).

September 26: The third annual Baseball Film Festival at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum concluded in New York with the presentation of three awards for films determined by a panel of four judges. The festival kicked off with a salute to the 20th anniversary of Bull Durham. Nine films were screened at the Museum on topics that included themes of American and international culture. "We really learned something from every film," said judge and Albany Times Union sportswriter Mark McGuire. The Award for Best Film went to Cuban Ian Padron's *Fuera de Liga* (Dreaming in Blue), which chronicles the history of the most popular team in Cuban baseball and the obsession Cuban fans have with the sport. The film was the first screening of the weekend and took home the award for best overall entry (*Baseball Hall of Fame Press Release*, 26/9/08).

September 29: The United States government denied re-entry visas to two Prensa Latina correspondents working at the United Nations after they spent their holidays in Cuba. A statement issued in Havana by the news agency General Management says that Ilsa Rodríguez Santana and her husband Tomás Anael Granados Jiménez had been assigned to the United Nations for the last three years. Rodríguez Santana and Granados Jiménez have been working with Prensa Latina for four decades. The two of them are senior journalists with previous expertise as news correspondents in India, Zimbabwe, China and New York, the text added. The journalists denounced before the United Nations Correspondents Association (UNCA) that they have been denied their re-entry visas into the US (*Prensa Latina*, 29/9/08).

September 29: Fewer Cubans have been apprehended this year trying to enter the United States, according to the US Coast Guard. The agency said it had seen 25% fewer Cubans trying to illegally enter the country this fiscal year, which ends on September 30. That amounts to 2,140 people, compared with 2,868 migrants last year. The decline has come after an ailing Fidel Castro resigned as Cuba's president in February, ceding control of the communist nation to his brother after nearly a half-century in power. Still, plenty of Cubans are trying to make the 90-mile trip to the United States. Officials sent 29 Cubans back in four different incidents over the past week. The Coast Guard said almost 100

Cubans in the most recent two-year period died or are missing and presumed dead attempting the trip to the US (*The Miami Herald*, 29/9/08).

September 29: Cuban authorities are detaining three Miami-Dade brothers who fled to Cuba earlier this year when they were charged with defrauding \$119 million from Medicare, US officials familiar with the case confirmed. News of the Benitez brothers' current status surfaced in recent days in the Dominican Republic, where the son of one of the siblings arrived from Cuba. After being briefly detained, the son told Dominican authorities that his father and two uncles were being held in prison in Cuba, according to published reports. It was unclear whether US authorities were trying to negotiate with the Cuban government on the release of Carlos, Luis and Jose Benitez, who were arrested in mid-September in Cuba on immigration violations, according to two US law enforcement officials. The State Department did not immediately respond for comment. This summer, the FBI teamed up with authorities in the Dominican Republic to seize the brothers' property, bank accounts and other assets purchased in that country, allegedly with their Medicare millions. The Benitez brothers are among 56 defendants charged with Medicare fraud since 2004 who have fled South Florida to avoid prosecution, according to federal records (*The Miami Herald*, 30/9/08).

September 30: Leading international press advocacy groups protested the US government's refusal to grant visas to two Cuban journalists trying to return to their jobs at the United Nations after a brief vacation back home. Paris-based Reporters Without Borders called on the U.N. secretary-general's office to intercede on behalf of Tomas Granados Jiménez and Ilsa Rodríguez Santana, a married couple who have covered the United Nations in New York for Cuba's official Prensa Latina news agency since 2005. Their UN accreditation is valid until early next year. The United Nations "must demand an explanation from the US State Department and ensure that Granados and Rodríguez are able to return to their posts," Reporters Without Borders said. The Committee to Protect Journalists issued a similar statement from New York. "We are concerned by the decision of the U.S. authorities to deny the renewal of visas to Prensa Latina reporters accredited to cover the United Nations," Carlos Lauria, the committee's senior program coordinator for the Americas, said in the statement. "We urge US authorities to explain the reasons for their action" (*The Miami Herald*, 30/9/08).