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## Research Forum on Cuba

# Chronicle on Cuba

## October 2005

### Highlights

**Domestic Affairs:** Cuban authorities increase repression and harassment against the dissident movement. Cuba's National Statistics Organization (ONE), reveals that migration is a factor in the decline of the Cuban population.

**Economy:** Hundreds of young people take control of Havana's gas stations to eliminate pilfering at the pump. Massive waves churned by Hurricane Wilma provoke flooding in Havana. Venezuela becomes Cuba's top trading partner.

**Exile Community:** Cuban dissidents asked a Spanish court to indict Fidel Castro on charges of genocide and other offenses.

**Foreign Affairs:** Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister visits Canada. Cuba sends medical aid contingents to Guatemala and Pakistan. Ibero-American leaders demand to end the US economic "blockade" against Cuba. Eleven members of a Cuban choir defect in Toronto. The European Parliament grants the Sakharov award to the Ladies in White.

**US-Cuba Relations:** The number of Cubans trying to make the voyage across the Florida Straits to the United States reaches a 10-year high. US Coordinator for Transition in Cuba defends in Madrid the importance of a "real transition" in Cuba. Fidel Castro denies that his government has accepted US aid in the wake of Hurricane Wilma.



### Domestic Affairs

**October 3:** The Cuban Council of State removed Humberto Rodríguez González as president of the National Institute of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation (INDER). Rodríguez, a member of the Central Committee of the PCC and deputy to the National Assembly, would be replaced by Julio Christian Jiménez Molina, former first vice-president of that institution. No details on the decision were provided. (*AFP*, 3/10/05)

**October 3:** Garlic tincture, copal wood resin syrup and a compound known as Imefasma are the three most highly sought after "phytopharmaceuticals" or plant-based medicines produced by the state-run pharmaceutical industry in Guantánamo, located some 1,000 km southeast of Havana. Although natural and traditional medicine has been

incorporated into the mainstream public health care system throughout Cuba as a whole, the use of herbal remedies is particularly widespread in Guantánamo. At the same time, however, some doctors warned of the potential risks posed by this practice, given the fact that some of the plants used can have toxic effects in overly large doses. The province's herbal medicine industry encompasses three laboratories and 26 dispensaries spread throughout ten municipalities, seven of them in mountainous regions. (*IPS*, 3/10/05)

**October 3:** Elsa González, wife of political prisoner Víctor Rolando Arroyo, on hunger strike since mid September due to poor conditions and harassment by Cuban authorities in jail, said that she conveyed to Arroyo statements regarding Cuban Cardinal Jaime Ortega's comments about Arroyo's hunger strike. "The first thing I did when I began the hunger strike on September 10th was to entrust myself to Jesus. Let everyone know that this was the only thing I could do. I am not playing with my life, I am defending my life and the life of everyone that is going through the same tortures as me, Arroyo said. Cardinal Ortega had asked the prisoners on hunger strike to put an end to that kind of protest. Authorities have shown no will to stop this situation where Arroyo's physical integrity is at risk. (*Puente Informativo*, 3/10/05)

**October 3:** Two Cuban political prisoners on a hunger strike were transferred from jail in the island's southeast to separate prisons in other provinces as their health worsened, an opposition activist said. Victor Rolando Arroyo and Felix Navarro were both sentenced in the Spring 2003 crackdown that saw 75 dissidents, mostly rights activists and independent journalists, given jail terms averaging 20 years in summary proceedings. Arroyo began a hunger strike to protest the conditions of his confinement. Navarro followed suit three days later. Both had been admitted to the infirmary at the prison where they were being held in Guantanamo province, but were transferred to two different institutions in other parts of the island, human right campaigner Elizardo Sanchez told the press. He said Arroyo was sent to a prison in Holguin while Navarro was taken to a penitentiary in Bayamo. Sanchez said both men are in poor health, had lost considerable weight and display "disturbing symptoms." Jose Daniel Ferrer, another member of the "Group of 75," abandoned a hunger strike after refusing food for 18 days. (*EFE*, 3/10/05)

**October 3:** Elizardo Sánchez, president of the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation, told the press about a "visible increase in political repression throughout the country" in recent months, with police calling dissidents in for questioning and paying visits to others to convey "threatening messages." According to Sanchez and other rights watchdogs both inside and outside Cuba, the Fidel Castro regime is holding around 300 political prisoners. (*EFE*, 3/10/05)

**October 3:** A study on Intra-family Child Abuse, conducted in a "health area" (área de salud) of Santiago de Cuba addresses the high levels of violence against children in Cuba. According to the investigation, carried out six years ago by a group of scientists from the Higher Institute of Medical Sciences, half of the children polled between 8 and 10 years of age reported fights and beatings from their parents in inebriation. Of all children interviewed, 56.3 per cent had been physically abused and 55.7 per cent emotionally abused, being the mother the person who ill-treats more, followed by the father, the stepfather, the uncles, the brothers and the grandparents. Beating is the most common educational method employed in the "Health Area 30 de Noviembre", where the investigation was carried out. Only 13 per cent of the children polled said their parents use persuasion as an educational tool. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 3/10/05)

**October 3:** Darsi Ferrer, a Cuban dissident doctor, sent a letter to Cardinal Jaime Ortega, president of the Bishops' Council of Cuba, asking the bishops to intercede with the Cuban authorities in favour of political prisoners Víctor Rolando Arroyo and Félix Navarro, on a hunger strike in the Guantánamo prison. "The Church condemns suicide; these innocent brothers in prison are not committing suicide, they are being murdered, since only desperation led them to go on a hunger strike" due to the subhuman conditions in prison, says the letter. "(...) Why does the Church keep quiet and does not to stand up publicly for these brothers in danger of physical and spiritual death?" (*Cubanet*, 4/10/05)

**October 4:** Cuban political prisoner Víctor Rolando Arroyo ended the hunger strike he began on September 10. According to Oswaldo Payá, leader of the illegal Christian Liberation Movement, Victor is being fed little bits of yogurt, and the doctor has treated his relatives in a nice way. Also, according to information provided by Payá during the radio program "La Noche Se Mueve", a Cuban official apparently spoke to Arroyo and told him that conditions in prison will change, and that an investigation is underway regarding what transpired at the Combinado de Guantánamo. (*Puente Informativo*, 5/10/05)

**October 5:** Political prisoner and president of the Pedro Luis Boitel Party for Democracy, Félix Navarro Rodríguez, ended the hunger strike he began on September 15, in solidarity with political prisoner Victor Rolando Arroyo. Navarro was transferred from Guantanamo to Bayamo. (*Lux Info Press*, 6/10/05)

**October 8:** Meetings and cultural activities were held in Cuba to commemorate the 38th anniversary of the death of Argentine-born Cuban revolutionary Ernesto Che Guevara, who was executed in Bolivia on October 9, 1967. Thousands of people attended a grand meeting in the central island city of Santa Clara where Che's remains are buried. (*VNA*, 8/10/05)

**October 10:** Dozens of pro-government sympathizers prevented the leader of a center-left Cuban dissident group from attending a meeting in Havana, resorting at one point to shoving him as he tried to join his colleagues in their home. The pro-regime mob gathered in front of the home of Progressive Arc members Marta Cortizas and Eugenio Leal in Havana's Nuevo Vedado neighborhood and shouted revolutionary slogans and insults at the dissidents. The tension grew when the leader of the opposition group, Manuel Cuesta Morua, appeared on the scene accompanied by another colleague. The angry crowd surrounded Cuesta Morua, pushed and insulted him and prevented him from going into the house, eventually forcing him to leave the area. Holding his hands high and refusing to respond to the insults or the pushing, Cuesta Morua was swept along for several blocks surrounded by dozens of people who removed him from the area while they shouted "Fidel, Fidel" and "gusano" (worm), the latter a typical epithet for opponents of Fidel Castro's 46-year-old communist regime. The Progressive Arc leader said that the scheduled meeting was one of the regular get-togethers held each Monday by members of the organization. (*AP, The New York times, EFE*, 10/10/05)

**October 11:** Former political prisoner Roberto de Miranda Hernández said that a political demonstration organized by agents of Cuba's State Security against his wife was frustrated. De Miranda Hernandez, a leader of the School of Independent Educators of Cuba (SIEC) revealed that one of his neighbors alerted him that an agent of the State Security was visiting several houses on the block where De Miranda lives asking about his wife, Soledad Rivas Verdecia. The agent was pointing out to De Miranda's neighbors Rivas Verdecia attendance to the Catholic church of Santa Rita, where the Ladies in White pray for the liberation of their relatives every Sunday. The neighbor said that the political police has not been able to organize the demonstration against the dissidents due to lack of support from the residents in the area. (*Lux Info Press*, 11/10/05)

**October 11:** In an eight-point document titled "Juntarse, palabra de orden", three dissident groups called for unity among internal oppositionists and exiles to achieve the democratization of the country. The document is signed by the Assembly to Promote Civil Society (APSC), the "All United" platform, and the Lawton Foundation for Human Rights on behalf of opponent Oscar Elías Biscet, serving 25 years in prison, a sentence imposed in April 2003. (*AFP*, 11/10/05)

**October 11:** Auxiliary Bishop of Havana, Monsignor Alfredo Víctor Petit Vergel, lamented the impossibility of building new churches in the country. He also referred to the role of the "Houses of Prayer" where the faithful meet under the guidance of committed laymen, nuns or deacons. During the XII Congregation of the Synod of bishops held in Cuba, the bishop mentioned that "in light of the difficulty and virtual impossibility of building new temples", the Catholics in the country have been forced "to create the so-called 'houses of prayer'". (*EFE*, 11/10/05)

**October 13:** The aging and decline of the Cuban population due to increased life expectancy, low infant mortality, low fecundity and migration will force the authorities to take measures to avert a crisis, admitted researchers and officials on the island. Sponsored by the National Statistics Department (ONE), the report points out that of 11,241,291 inhabitants—end of 2004 figures—15.4 per cent are aged over 60. “By 2025, or even earlier, the Cuban population will start decreasing”, forecasts the report. Migration, especially towards the United States, is an element in the decreasing of the population, added the document, highlighting exoduses like “Mariel” (1980), the “*Balseros*” (Raft People, 1994), the approximately 20,000 annual visas Washington grants to Cubans, as well as illegal migration. (*AP*, 13/10/05)

**October 14:** Mobs organized by Cuban authorities attacked a group of peaceful dissidents in Villa Clara. As a consequence, Juleski García López and Bárbara Jiménez were taken to a police station. A few moments later, a group of dissidents went to the police station to inquire about García and Jiménez, but a few dozen Castro followers surrounded them and brutally beat them. Jesús Alberto Gutiérrez, a member the Democracy Movement, suffered detachment of his left kidney due to the kicks he received. Joel Fonseca a member of the Christian Democratic Movement, was hospitalized with a broken ankle, a broken wrist, and other contusions. (*Puente Informativo*, 16/10/05)

**October 17:** Fidel Castro, 79, is in excellent health, the head of Cuba's legislature said, denying that illness explained his absence from an Ibero American summit. "He enjoys excellent health, which is enviable," said Ricardo Alarcon, president of Cuba's National Assembly, after a reporter asked about Castro's decision not to attend the summit of leaders from Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries with leaders of Spain and Portugal in Salamanca, Spain. (*AFP*, 17/10/05)

**October 16:** Herminia Ramírez Jiménez, a resident of Guantánamo, reported to the independent press about harassment outside her house from groups organized by Cuban authorities against dissidents. Herminia was with her 13-year-old daughter while the group yelled insults at them and hit on the windows and door. Both Herminia and her husband are linked to the illegal Assembly to Promote the Civil Society. (*Netfor Cuba*, 17/10/05)

**October 16:** For the first time in Camagüey, a group of Ladies in White went on a silent walk demanding their imprisoned relatives be released, under the attentive watch of state security officials and astounded passers-by. The Ladies in White started their walk after attending mass at Santa Ana Church. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 19/10/05)

**October 18:** Cuban dissident Ernesto Martínez Fonseca and his family were evicted from their house in Havana by police and government officials, who said that they were living there illegally. "It's very arbitrary of the government, which is solely responsible for this," said Martínez Fonseca, a member of the Liberation Christian Movement, or MCL, since 1989, adding that the act was a "reprisal for my militancy in the (MCL) and my defense of the rights of all Cubans for the past 17 years." He, his wife Judith Arbesu and two daughters aged 8 and 10 were evicted from the small house in the residential neighborhood where they had lived since 2000. The couple said that the eviction came "without any advance warning" and that about 100 police and other officials were on hand to carry out the deed. Martínez is the personal secretary of Oswaldo Paya, Cuba's best-known pro-democracy advocate and winner of the European Union's top human rights award -- the Sakharov Prize-- in 2002. (*EFE, Reuters*, 18/10/05)

**October 18:** Dissident Vladimiro Roca of the All United Movement (Todos Unidos), said that Cuban authorities arrested opposition figure Niurka Brito Rivas thus preventing her from holding a scheduled press conference. Brito Rivas had called the press conference where she planned to reveal new elements in an alleged case of administrative corruption at a Havana milk company. Roca said that the arrest came a few hours before Brito Rivas was to meet with the press. Brito, a former director of the Havana province milk company, accused other executives at an August 9 news conference of skimming off funds with the illegal sale of 34 tons of powdered milk. Since then, police have harassed Brito by investigating her relatives and friends in their homes and workplaces, she said in a statement issued by Roca. (*EFE, Reuters*, 18/10/05)

**October 17:** Juan Carlos González Leiva, president of the illegal Cuban Foundation for Human Rights, denounced to the independent press the beatings received by political prisoner Virgilio Mantilla in the Kilo 9 prison, Camaguey. Mantilla was tied to a gate while several prison guards beat him with clubs. As a result of the blows, he was taken to Camaguey's Provincial Hospital. (*InfoNet*, 17/10/05)

**October 17:** A bishop in eastern Cuba issued a complaint to the island's communist government about a recent assault on a deacon who is also a political dissident. The deacon, Andres Rodriguez Tejada, confirmed that two men hit him in the face and chest and shouted out insults last week as he left his house on his way to church with his wife and 14-year-old son. Hector Luis Pena Gomez, a bishop of the Roman Catholic Church in the province of Holguin, denounced the attack as well as other recent protests against Rodriguez by government supporters in a statement calling on authorities to prevent and punish such acts, which are on the rise across the island. Rodriguez said the bishop delivered an official complaint to the Communist Party's office of religious affairs. The dissident is a member of the Christian Liberation Movement and worked as a coordinator with the Varela Project, a democracy drive led by internationally known activist Oswaldo Paya. (*AP*, 18/10/05)

**October 19:** The health of political prisoner Omar Pernet Hernández who has been on a hunger strike since October 10 in Santa Clara's Old Hospital took a turn for the worse. According to some relatives, the prisoner is suffering from diarrhea and refuses intravenous feeding. On October 10 of 2004, Pernet Hernández was involved in an automobile accident, while he was being transferred from the prison Las Mangas, in the eastern province of Bayamo, to another prison in Las Villas province, in the center of the island. In the accident, the prisoner suffered fractures to his clavicle and his right leg. Pernet Hernández, 60, is serving a 25-year sentence since April 2003. (*Puente Informativo*, 19/10/05)

**October 20:** Delegations from seven countries are participating in the First International Health Congress underway in the Eastern Cuban province of Holguín. At the conference there will be discussions and exchanges of experience between professionals interested in improving healthcare for the current and future generations. The event, taking place in educational centers across the province, is sponsored by the Center for Comprehensive Care for People with HIV/AIDS and the Foundation for the Prevention and Fight against AIDS. (*Ahora*, 20/10/05)

**October 23:** Fidel Castro appeared on a television program to calm Cubans anticipating increased winds and flooding as hurricane Wilma passed overhead en route to southwestern Florida. Castro praised the island's efficiency in hurricane preparation, saying that despite scarce resources, Cuba has become internationally recognized as "a model country that protects the lives of its citizens." He also offered Cuban doctors to Mexico to help the neighboring nation recover from the natural disaster. (*The New York Times*, 24/10/05)

**October 25:** Over 170 delegates from 32 countries are attending the International Jose Marti Conference "With and for the Good of All" at Havana's Conference Center. The aim of the meeting is to tackle Cuba's National Hero's legacy and thoughts on global problems, analyze humanity's current challenges and discover possible actions for a possible better world, among other issues. Armando Hart, director of Marti Program Office, opened the forum, while Francisco Piñon, general secretary of the Organization of Ibero-American States (OIS), analyzed the struggle against poverty as a result of neoliberalism and the US blockade of Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/10/05)

**October 27:** Lamasiel Gutiérrez Romero, a journalist who had been under house arrest since August, has been transferred to prison because she continued her journalistic activities in defiance of a court order. The report, which has been confirmed by the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN), said Gutiérrez was incarcerated in the Mantonegro women's penitentiary in Havana province on 11 October. She is the Nueva Prensa Cubana correspondent on the Isle of Youth, where she lives. Gutiérrez, who was sentenced on 9 August to seven months of house arrest for "resisting the authorities and civil disobedience," joins the 23 other journalists currently imprisoned in Cuba. (*RWB Press Release*, 27/10/05)

**October 28:** Fidel Castro participated in the graduation of 3,092 arts instructors of the second national graduation in this specialization in Cuba. Like the first graduation group, the members of this one are to become part of the José Martí Brigade of Arts Instructors, a vanguard detachment in the mass promotion of a general and comprehensive culture. That provides at least one instructor in the 4,898 kindergarten, elementary, junior high, special and senior high schools in the country. [[Fidel Castro's speech](#)] (*Granma International*, 27/10/05)

**October 28:** Celebrations for the 13th anniversary of Ibero-American Culture honored the mutual discovery of cultures from the Old Continent and New World. The presentation of the book, "Identity, Emancipation and Cuban Nation", by Rigoberto Pupo, was a very important moment in the 13th Ibero-American Culture celebrations. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/10/05)

## **Economy**

**October 3:** Chilean Representatives of travel agencies and tour operators received first-hand information about Cuba's tourist offers. The presentation, sponsored by Havanatur, was a good opportunity to promote the establishments the group Occidental Hotels and Resorts runs in the Caribbean island. According to sources from the tourist sector, more than 12,000 Chilean tourists have spent their vacations in Cuba this year. (*Dominican Today*, 3/10/05)

**October 5:** Over 500 experts from 20 nations are attending in Havana the 10th Latin American Congress of Internal Audit (CLAI) to analyze banking supervision in the Cuban financial system. The event, opened at Havana's Conference Center, coincides with the 10th anniversary of the Latin American Federation of Internal Auditors (FLAI), created in September 1995 to exchange and foster efficacy in management. (*Prensa Latina*, 5/10/05)

**October 5:** Caracas and Havana plan to conduct cooperation projects in 25 areas in the course of 2006, representatives of both governments said at the closing of the sixth Joint Commission on the Cuba-Venezuela Agreement. The parties signed a joint declaration listing the projects, which principally involve the areas of health, education, agriculture, mining and culture. The declaration was signed by Venezuelan Energy and Oil Minister Rafael Ramirez and Cuban Foreign Investment Minister Marta Lomas and conforms to the policies laid out in the 2000 Cuba-Venezuela Agreement. Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage was present at the last session, at the head of a delegation of 46 high-ranking officials, including seven ministers. Closing ceremonies were led by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. (*EFE*, 6/10/05)

**October 6:** The Chinese-Cuban Biotech Pharmaceutical Co. opened its Beijing factory on the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two socialist countries. According to the Cuban newspaper "Ahora", this facility will produce a monoclonal antibody to treat neck and head cancer. The German drug maker Oncoscience is also interested in this medicine. Two days before the Beijing plant was opened, a vaccine factory using Cuban technology started up in China's northeastern Jilin province. (*London Guardian*, 6/10/05)

**October 6:** Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Perez Roque told an Economic Club of Toronto that 600,000 Canadians will visit Cuba this year, a number that is increasing by 20 per cent annually, out of a total tourist trade of 2.3 million visitors. But while there has been investment by some Canadian resource companies -- notably Sherritt International Corp., as well as offshore oil explorer Pebercan Inc. -- Canadian corporations are "absent" from the development of Cuban tourist facilities. The country is adding 3,000 to 5,000 hotel rooms a year "and it is, I think, a sector of our economy in which Canadian companies are not working today," the minister said. The Cuban economy, after shrinking 35 per cent in four years during the early '90s following the collapse of the Soviet Union, has been growing at about 4.5 per cent annually in recent years, and the government hopes for expansion of seven to eight per cent this year, Perez Roque said. (*The Canadian Press*, 6/10/05)

**October 11:** The number of buses operating in Havana has dropped 75 per cent in the last 17 years— from 2,700 to barely 700—, creating a public transport crisis which Cuban authorities blame on the US embargo. The total number of buses in service can only carry 600,000 passengers a day, in a city of 2.3 million inhabitants, according to a report by the Cuban Ministry of Transport. (*AFP*, 11/10/05)

**October 16:** Hundreds of young people took control of Havana's gas stations that accept dollar-pegged pesos in a drive apparently led by Fidel Castro to eliminate pilfering at the pump. Clad in black T-shirts, they were busy pumping gas, managing state credit cards and jotting down everything from car license plates to how much gas people bought and whether it was with cash or credit. "They arrived by surprise and sent all the attendants home at full pay for 45 days," a cashier told the press, asking that her name not be used. "They plan to compare data with the previous 45 days and see how much gas is pumped, how much gas state companies really use. In short, how much is being stolen," she said. The young people said they were part of a special force of social workers developed by Castro in recent years to tap into youthful enthusiasm for revolutionary ideals and combat socialist bureaucracy. Although the social workers have been instructed to manage the pumps and help customers, their inexperience has caused delays at some of the busiest gas stations in the city. "It's unbelievable. I've been here at this service station for more than half an hour and they still haven't helped me because these boys don't know anything about how to sell gas," one irritated Havana driver commented while he waited in line to fill up. The measure comes amid widely circulating reports over the past few weeks about a possible 10 percent fuel price hike. (*Reuters, EFE*, 16,17/10/05)

**October 16:** The Cuban Ministry of Finance and Prices and that of Audit and Control will carry out a "special" audit of 20 % of state companies on the island. The audit aims to address "indiscipline, illegalities and cases of corruption", said an article in *Tribuna de la Havana*. (*AFP*, 17/10/05)

**October 17:** Building 8,000 new homes in 2006 represents a challenge for all the institutions in Las Tunas province related with this major project. Although this number of new homes is still not enough, provincial authorities consider it's a good first step. Such a number of homes has never been built in only one year before. Authorities responsible for addressing housing problems in Las Tunas consider that 47% of current housing in that Cuban province are in regular or bad shape. (*Granma*, 17/10/05)

**October 17:** The maintenance activities at one of the main electricity generating stations in Cuba that have led to long power blackouts in some parts of the country will continue for some more days, the government said. After a summer marked by frequent and lengthy blackouts, Cubans got a respite in September, but the blackouts have been reinstated for several hours each day in various cities, including Havana. The Cuban Electrical Union attributed the new outages to supply limitations at the Antonio Guiteras electricity plant, one of the country's most important power stations, which is undergoing maintenance. (*EFE*, 17/10/05)

**October 18:** A bus manufacturer in central China's Henan Province will export 630 buses to Cuba, the largest deal in the country's bus industry of the year, according to the company's spokesman. The deal, involving 430 end products and assembly parts for another 200 buses, is worth nearly 50 million US dollars and will be delivered to the end user, Astro Bus, by January 2006, said the spokesman with Zhengzhou Yutong Bus Co. Ltd., which is located in Zhengzhou, the province's capital. The spokesman said the company was awarded the new contract because Astro Bus had been satisfied with Yutong buses delivered under an earlier agreement signed in April, which involved 400 buses. Both deals were reached with the help of the Beijing Branch of China National Aero-technology Import and Export Corporation. (*Xinhua*, 18/10/05)

**October 18:** Hurricane Wilma, the 12th hefty storm of the Caribbean storm season, doused Cuba with heavy rainfall, prompting the evacuation of thousands of people from the eastern section of the island. Flooding had occurred in the provinces of Guantánamo, Santiago de Cuba und Granma, where landslides were also reported. About 200 buildings have been damaged, the reports said. (*Monsters and Critics. Com*, 18/10/05)

**October 19:** Cuba has begun prospecting for new deposits of nickel in the northeastern part of the island. “The prospecting will guarantee future supplies to the three processing plants located in (the municipalities) of Moa and Nicaro”, in the province of Holguín, said Rafael Pérez, principal specialist of the Geominera Oriente Company. Pérez did not disclose the number of deposits being prospected for. In two years Cuba foresees to increase nickel production from 75,000 tons to 121,000 tons, with Canadian and Chinese investments. (*AFP*, 19/10/05)

**October 20:** A natural and ecological line of cosmetics containing highly mineralized Cuban mud and water as active ingredients is entering the international market in diverse forms: dermatological soap, nutritive masks, thermal clay, anti-cellulite mud, facial toners and sunscreens. Ricardo Páez, from the José Isaac Corral Central Laboratories (LACEMI) where the cosmetics are produced, said that the company’s production capacity is small in terms of the demand for these so-called dermo-cosmetics, marketed by international natural pharmacies in Cuba and for exportation primarily to Spain and the Dominican Republic. (*Granma International*, 20/10/05)

**October 20:** Hurricane Wilma has prompted the evacuation of thousands of Cubans across the island. Civil defense officials said by midday more than 370,000 people had been sent to safer places, most in the island's west closer to the storm, and the island is prepared to evacuate up to 500,000 people. Although most evacuees stay at friends' homes, 20 percent rely on state-run shelters, which are staffed by doctors and cooks and stocked with medicine and food. Residents from La Coloma and all 5,125 residents of Surgidero de Batabano, in the south of western provinces of Pinar del Río and Havana, were being evacuated, said Hedilberto Lugo, a local civil defense official. Commercial flights between Havana and Cancun, Mexico, and between Havana and Nueva Gerona, in the Cuban southern Isle of Pines were canceled. (*CNN, EFE, AP, Sun Sentinel*, 21/10/05)

**October 21:** Export Assistance Canada, in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce of Cuba, is organizing a Canadian trade mission to Havana, in the tourism industry sector from December 11 – 15, 2005. During that trade mission, participating Canadian companies will have the opportunity to personally meet the main Cuban hotel chains, such as Hoteles Melia, Grupo Cubanacan, Grupo Gaviota; and personally meet the Cuban officials from departments related with the tourism sector. (*West Can Cuba Press Release*, 21/10/05)

**October 24:** Massive waves churned by Hurricane Wilma crashed into Cuba’s capital city, flooding a coastal highway and seeping into nearby neighborhoods of old, crumbling buildings. Rescuers in inflatable rafts and amphibious vehicles pulled nearly 250 people from flooded homes. The ocean spread up to four blocks inland, inundating streets and buildings with water up to three feet deep. The extent of damage in Cuba's north was not immediately known. Red Cross workers said several people had suffered cuts as they scrambled through water and debris, but there were no immediate reports of storm-related deaths. State-run broadcasts said the flooding in Havana was the most extensive in three decades, outdoing even a memorable 1993 storm that inundated large swaths of the city. (*The New York Times, AP, CNN, Sun Sentinel*, 24, 25/10/05)

**October 24:** The outer bands of hurricane Wilma drenched western Cuba and flooded evacuated communities along the island's southern coast after the hurricane clobbered Mexico’s Yucatan Peninsula. Basement apartments were submerged. The government in recent days evacuated more than 625,000 people, particularly in the island's west. Guanimar, a small fishing village of wooden houses due south of Havana, was totally under water, with floodwaters as high as 3 feet in some places. The community frequently floods during hurricanes and its several hundred residents were evacuated as a precaution. (*The New York Times, AP, CNN, Sun Sentinel*, 24, 25/10/05)

**October 25:** Army General Raul Castro Ruz, Second Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) and minister of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), congratulated the people of the province of Pinar del Rio for their efforts in preventing any loss of life and minimizing economic damages during the passing of Hurricane Wilma. In a telephone conversation with Maria del Carmen Concepcion, first secretary of the provincial PCC, the FAR minister

spoke highly of the discipline and organization in which the people of Pinar del Rio confronted the hurricane. (*Granma*, 26/10/05)

**October 26:** The crashing waves that flooded Havana's coast brought another destructive element besides water: salt. The sea salt will contaminate and corrode hundreds of already precarious buildings, some older than 100 years, experts said. It's a risk the city's housing stock, already strained from massive overcrowding and years of neglect, can hardly endure. "The floods will make everything worse," said Florida International University professor Nicolás Quintana, a former city planner in Cuba. "Will the floods ruin the buildings? These buildings are already ruined. "I don't think half the people will be able to go back to their homes, and they don't have anywhere to go." In Hurricane Dennis in July, 1,800 homes were damaged in Havana alone, the government said. During Hurricane Charley, 2004, the government reported 65 Havana buildings collapsed. Hurricane Lili in 2002 affected 76,000 homes, ruining 15,000. In 2001 alone, 38,000 families were left homeless by bad weather, a Cuban government report said. (*The Miami Herald*, 26/10/05)

**October 26:** During a press conference in Caracas, Cuban Ambassador Germán Sánchez said that over 26,000 Cuban health professionals work in 40 countries around the world. "Only in Venezuela there are 20,000 doctors and other health related professionals as part of those 26,000", Sánchez said. According to ONE, Cuban National Statistics Organization, in 2004 the island had 69, 713 doctors. (*AFP*, 26/10/05)

**October 26:** High season for tourism may come early this year for Cuba, as travelers originally bound for Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula change their plans due to Hurricane Wilma's destructive assault on resort cities like Cancun. Damages to Cuba's own tourism industry from the storm were minimal, and tourism officials are evaluating travel agency requests for hundreds of rooms for tourists moving their destination from Mexico to Cuba, Tourism Minister Manuel Marrero said. "Cuba's tourism infrastructure resisted the strength of this hurricane -- the damage is insignificant," Marrero told a news conference in Havana's historic Hotel Nacional. The ocean smashed in windows and doors of seafront hotels, but of 14 hotels in the city that were evacuated ahead of the storm, Marrero said only three remained out of operation. Repairs on the three hotels, as well as tourist cabañas on the northern key of Cayo Levisa, would be made in upcoming weeks. The tourism ministry also suffered damages after the waves pummeled through the building's ground floor, shattering windows and tearing down doors. Of the 35,000 tourists in Cuba as Wilma approached, just under 1,750 were evacuated, Marrero said. The tourism minister also reported that three male tourists from Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy were killed in a car accident over the weekend on the highway between Havana and Trinidad, a colonial city in southern Cuba. "They had a car accident, which is being investigated," he said. "But it had nothing to do with the hurricane." (*AP*, 26/10/05)

**October 27:** The air route between Barcelona, in Venezuela, and Havana, aimed at transporting 700 Venezuelan patients to Cuba daily, was opened and will take two hours and forty minutes. Pointing out that before patients had to go to Caracas, Anzoátegui Governor Tarek William said that departure from Barcelona, 248 miles from Caracas, would also make it easier for patients from the nearer Caribbean islands to receive medical treatment in Cuba in the future. The treatment of patients in Cuba and the new airport are part of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, that aims to strengthen Latin American and Caribbean integration. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/10/05)

**October 31:** Businesspeople from 42 nations gathered at the 23rd International Havana Fair (FIHAV 2005). FIHAV is the biggest Cuban commercial commodities exchange, headquartered at Expocuba's exhibition site. More than 1,800 national and foreign firms will exhibit their products and technologies. The Fair's inaugural day honored the delegations of Spain and Canada. It will also honor the national days of Venezuela, Mexico, France, Brazil, Germany and the Peoples Republic of China. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/10/05)

**October 31:** Venezuela has become Cuba's top trading partner, selling the Caribbean island \$1.4 billion in oil and other goods annually, Cuba's government said. Trading has increased amid strengthening political ties between the two countries under the leadership of presidents Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Fidel Castro of Cuba, who also share a

close friendship. Cuba is now buying \$1.1 billion worth of Venezuelan oil annually along with another \$300 million in food, construction materials, and other products, Foreign Commerce Minister Raul de la Nuez said on the first day of the island's annual trade fair. De la Nuez predicted trade between the two nations could reach \$2 billion annually by the end of 2006. "At this moment (Venezuela) indisputably is Cuba's top trading partner," he said. (*AP*, 1/11/05)

**October 31:** Rains associated with Hurricane Wilma benefited drought-stricken Cuba, filling reservoirs to 76 percent of capacity, the state-run *Trabajadores* newspaper reported. The hurricane did not make landfall on the island, but rains from its outer bands pounded eastern and western Cuba for several days as the storm made its journey through the Caribbean before shooting into the Gulf of Mexico. Conversely, the rains have been too much for the island's coffee crop. Recent storms caused many coffee beans to ripen too quickly, prompting workers to scramble to pick the beans before they go bad. Students and teachers have been sent to help in Maisi and Yateras, the principal coffee-growing regions of Guantanamo Province, *Trabajadores* reported. (*AP*, 1/11/05)

### Exile Community

**October 4:** A group of Florida International University students fasted to show solidarity with two jailed Cuban dissidents who are on a hunger strike protesting long prison terms and dismal conditions. The FIU students, some of them Cuban Americans, organized the fast with the help of Directorio Democrático Cubano (Cuban Democratic Directorate), a Hialeah-based organization that supports pro-democracy movements on the island. (*The Miami Herald*, 5/10/05)

**October 5:** Blanca Reyes, wife of Cuban journalist, poet and dissident, Raúl Rivero, met leaders of the European Parliament's political groups to promote the candidacy of the Ladies in White— a movement of wives and mothers of political prisoners in Cuba— to the Sakharov Prize. The Ladies in White are among the finalists for this year's edition of the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, awarded by the European Parliament. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 5/10/05)

**October 11:** Raúl Rivero, a Cuban poet, journalist and former political prisoner was able finally to appear before the Americas' main press organization to deliver his report on how the Communist regime quashes freedom of expression, calling on media and governments not to forget the 26 independent reporters still jailed on the island for trying to inform the citizenry. Rivero, released from jail in Cuba last year on medical grounds and now an exile in Spain, addressed the general assembly of the Inter American Press Association in person for the first time. For more than a decade, Havana denied one of the island's most prominent intellectuals the right to travel abroad. In his speech to the IAPA meeting in Indianapolis, Rivero implored editors, publishers and media executives from throughout the hemisphere not to forget their colleagues condemned to prison in Cuba for defending freedom of expression. (*EFE*, 11/10/05)

**October 10:** Twenty-four Cuban oppositionist organizations agreed in Madrid on a "Road Map for the democratization of Cuba" during a meeting that in spite of differences demonstrated the almost unanimous rejection of violence. Some 80 delegates from liberal, social-democrat and conservative groups of Cuban residents of the US, the UK, Sweden, Portugal, Costa Rica, France, Belgium, Cuba and Spain, met in the Centro Cubano in Madrid. [[Posición común de los Demócratas Cubanos](#)] (*AFP*, 11/10/05)

**October 12:** A delegation of Cuban exile women "M.A.R. por Cuba" (Mothers and Women Against Repression) and representatives of "Plantados hasta la Libertad y la Democracia en Cuba" (Firm Until Cuba is Free and Democratic), displayed a big Cuban flag with a black crepe, as a symbol of mourning for the suffering of the Cuban nation, a few steps away from the official grandstand of the military parade on Spain's national day. (*Infonet*, 13/10/05)

**October 13:** Miami Dade College's Florida Center for the Literary Arts invited Cuban poet and journalist Raúl Rivero for his first public appearance in South Florida. He read his works to a captive audience after two whirlwind days of stops on Calle Ocho, where he was honored with a proclamation from the likes of City Manager Joe Arriola and was presented a pen by the Cuban American National Foundation's Jorge Mas Santos. Himself the beneficiary of negotiations with Castro - the Spanish government secured his release - Rivero encouraged the use of dialogue to free Cuban political prisoners. "It would be selfish, stupid and miserable if I tell the governments to slam the door to dialogue," he said. "I respect the people who feel that way, but for my own personal dignity, I cannot call for that door to be closed." Rivero criticized the Latin American governments that ignore the Cuban opposition, while the European Union works hard on their behalf. (*The Miami Herald*, 14/10/05)

**October 14:** Cuban dissidents asked a Spanish court to indict Fidel Castro on charges of genocide and other offenses, resorting to a Spanish doctrine that allows criminal charges in human rights cases even if the offense is alleged to have been committed abroad. The suit was filed at the National Court by a dissident group called the Foundation for Human Rights in Cuba. Besides genocide, it accuses Castro of crimes against humanity, torture and terrorism. The court must now decide whether it will consider the petition, but the request is almost certainly doomed because Castro is still in power and thus enjoys immunity from prosecution. (*AP*, 14/10/05)

**October 16:** The twenty-five member organizations of Consenso Cubano organized a three-day workshop. The organizations, ranging from socialist democratic leftist groups to conservative ones, agreed to work together to reach their "objective" of a democratic Cuba, indicated Julio Pich, Director of the Cuban American National Foundation. That means we need to have a strategy. What's important, said Carlos Saladrigas, director of the Cuba Study Group, is not "how the conflict that leads to the transition is going to end; the important thing now is to prepare ourselves for its beginning". (*El Nuevo Herald*, 17/10/05)

**October 18:** During a Congreso hearing, senators had few questions for a Cuban exile from Miami who was a top Latin America policy advisor in the Bush administration and is now on the verge of becoming director of the US Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services. Emilio González, introduced to the Senate Judiciary Committee by two Florida Republicans, Senator Mel Martinez and Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, said he would "bring an understanding of national security and my own personal immigration experience to bear" on the new job. González, whose family fled Cuba when he was 4, was an advisor on the National Security Council and served 26 years in the US Army. (*The Miami Herald*, 19/10/05)

**October 27:** The European Parliament's decision to award Cuban activists its annual Sakharov Prize is a highly deserved honor, but the European Union must do more to hold the Cuban government accountable for its ongoing human rights abuses, Freedom House said. "The Ladies in White are the wives, sisters, and daughters of Cuban political prisoners, and through their dignified and courageous acts of defiance they have awakened the world's conscience to the brutal nature of the Castro regime," said Freedom House Executive Director Jennifer Windsor. "The EU's decision to honor and support the work of Cuba's Ladies in White, while commendable, must be followed by a renewed commitment by European leaders to support the peaceful work of Cuba's democracy advocates and to hold the Cuban government accountable for its continued violations of individual freedoms and the rule of law," said Ms. Windsor. (*FH Press Release*, 27/10/05)

## **Foreign Affairs**

**October 1:** Cuban Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas concluded a one-week visit to China, where he attended ceremonies to commemorate the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. (*Prensa Latina*, 1/10/05)

**October 3:** Canada's Foreign Minister Pierre Pettigrew pressed Cuba on its human rights record and expressed particular concern about three dissidents who are on hunger strike. Pettigrew said he had told visiting Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque of Canada's "deep preoccupation" about the government's human rights record. "We believe very much that Cuba has to address this issue very, very squarely," Pettigrew told reporters in Ottawa. "I expressed particular concern (about) the 75 individuals who were arrested in March 2003. Three of them are now on hunger strike and I have expressed to the minister that Canada was particularly concerned with those three on hunger strike." Roque had replied by explaining the "difficult situation" that Cuba was in, Pettigrew added. Canada is now the largest foreign investor in Cuba and around 600,000 Canadians visit the island each year. (*Reuters*, 3/10/05)

**October 3:** Germany invited Cuban dissidents to its national day reception, splitting with a European Union decision in January to end the practice that had brought relations with Havana to the breaking point. Cuban officials boycotted the evening reception at the German Embassy and one held earlier in the day without dissidents in hopes of attracting the officials. "Cuba is clearly very upset with this as they wanted Germany to invite dissidents another day, but negotiations broke down," a European diplomat said. "German unification was the result of a failed planned economy," German Ambassador Ulrich Lunscken said in a brief speech in the evening, before inviting guests to view the German film "Goodby Lenin" on the reconstruction of the former German Democratic Republic. Pro-democracy activists appeared pleased with Germany's move, and have criticized the EU for what they see as a softening position toward Havana. (*Reuters*, 3/10/05)

**October 4:** A Mexican fishing boat rescued four Cuban rafters in the Caribbean Sea as the fragile craft in which they fled Cuba was on the verge of sinking in the midst of tropical storm "Stan". (*EFE*, 4/10/05)

**October 4:** Iran's Ambassador to Havana Ahmad Edrisian and Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Abelardo Moreno exchanged views on Iran's nuclear issue and the cooperation trend of the two countries. A report released by Iran's embassy in Havana said that during the meeting, Edrisian briefed Moreno on the latest developments on the issue. For his part, Moreno underlined Iran's right for access to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and said that all nations are entitled to such a right. "We trust Iran as a friendly country and have confidence that Tehran's nuclear activities are based on peaceful objectives," he added. (*IRNA*, 5/10/05)

**October 5:** During a visit to Ottawa to mark the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Canada and Cuba, Felipe Perez Roque, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba, acknowledged that relations between the two countries have been revamped after a period in which they were "frozen". "It is true that a few years ago, former Canadian prime minister, the Honorable Jean Chretien, said that Canada would put some ice on the relation with Cuba, but now I think we have brought some sunlight from the Caribbean to this relation," the minister said. Pérez Roque added that relations between Cuba and Canada are at a very mature point, although on human rights the perceptions are different. "Cuba doesn't have anything to regret on this matter. Cuba feels proud of what it has done in this regard for the benefit of all Cubans," he added. (*VOA*, 5/10/05)

**October 5:** Cuba is one of the "most democratic countries in the world" because it has two presidents, Fidel Castro and Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, affirmed in Caracas Cuban Vice-President, Carlos Lage. At the end of a meeting to review bilateral agreements, Lage said "they accuse our country of lack of democracy, but in events like this we realize that we are the most democratic, since we have two presidents, Fidel and Chávez". (*AFP*, 6/10/05)

**October 5:** The leader of the Christian Liberation Movement, Oswaldo Payá, said that the Embassy of Spain in Havana met with several dissidents "to talk", but did not disclose the objective of the meeting. Dissident representatives held a

“formal” meeting at the British Embassy with European ambassadors, whom they expressed “the urgent need to demand the release and a more humane treatment of political prisoners”. (*Europa Press*, 6/10/05)

**October 5:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, an admirer of Fidel Castro, criticized the US trade embargo against Cuba in a speech and thanked Fidel Castro for a program that has sent thousands of Cuban doctors to treat Venezuela's poor. "Cuba and Venezuela are one single fist," Chavez said. "Latin America will be one single fist." Chavez says he is leading Venezuela toward socialism, though he has said he doesn't plan to copy the Cuban system. (*AP*, 5/10/05)

**October 6:** Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque discussed trade and bilateral ties with his Canadian counterpart, Pierre Pettigrew, and other officials during a four-day visit to Canada, according to an official Cuban government statement. The statement, published by the official Communist newspaper Granma, said the meetings illustrated "the good state of Cuban-Canadian ties, especially with regard to trade and cooperation." The visit also showed "the possibilities for expanding and deepening the ties between these two countries in the future," it added. Canada is Cuba's fourth-largest trade partner, after Venezuela, China and Spain, and the leading source of tourists to the island, with some 600,000 Canadians a year visiting the Americas' only Communist nation, according to the statement. [[Statement by the Cuban Foreign Affairs Ministry](#)] (*AFP*, 6/10/05)

**October 6:** Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Perez Roque made a keynote address to Canada's business community at the Economic Club of Toronto. Mr. Roque was in town to beg for more Canadian investment, defend Cuba's questionable human rights record, promote the island nation's 60 years of diplomatic relations with Canada -- and take a few pot shots at US imperialism for good measure. Tourism is big business in Cuba and it's a good thing, too, since the Soviet Union's collapse killed Cuba's sugar daddy. Fortunately, altruistic Canadian companies lent a hand in rebuilding Castro's economy, Mr. Roque said. "That was a special symbol for us," he cooed. "It was a very difficult moment for our people." Cuba hasn't forgotten that corporate largess, and the country wants to do more business with Canada, he said. As for Cuba's oft-criticized human rights record, the Minister said that many countries violate basic human rights. Besides, 75 jailed dissidents -- several currently on a hunger strike -- are US operatives. "They had a trial," he told reporters. "Those dissidents were working for foreign powers -- they were receiving money. I think we have the right to defend ourselves against foreign aggression." That's not exactly how the Canadian government sees it. The Club, which hosted more than 60 events last year, is a catalyst for driving public policy dialogue throughout Canada and for engaging leaders in business and politics in that dialogue. (*Financial Post*, 7/10/05)

**October 6:** Reporters Without Borders voiced relief at the decision by imprisoned Cuban journalist Víctor Rolando Arroyo Carmona to end the hunger strike he had begun 25 days before, but the organisation stressed that it was still very worried about his state of health. Reporters Without Borders has decided to publish a letter of support for Arroyo which fellow journalist Raúl Rivero wrote just before he called off the hunger strike. Rivero, who is also a writer and poet, has been living in exile in Madrid since April. [[Raúl Rivero's letter](#)] (*RWB Press Release*, 6/10/05)

**October 6:** A son of the fugitive Puerto Rican independence activist who was recently killed in a shootout with FBI agents joined Fidel Castro and other Cuban authorities in remembering his late father, Filiberto Ojeda Rios. "Filiberto lives," the son, Edgardo Ojeda, told an evening gathering of hundreds of top Cuban officials and young people, saying his father's death was "an act of terrorism of state" by the US government. Castro, dressed in his typical olive green uniform, sat in the front row of the event at Havana's Karl Marx Theater. Many other top officials were on hand, including Ricardo Alarcón, president of Cuba's parliament. Edgardo Ojeda also oversaw a simple ceremony in which a memorial plaque with his father's name was unveiled at a monument honoring numerous political leaders and social activists in a seaside government plaza facing the US Interests Section, the American mission in Havana. (*AP*, 6/10/05)

**October 6:** The relatives of 75 jailed Cuban dissidents pleaded with Spanish King Juan Carlos I for help to gain from Cuba's communist regime the political prisoners' "immediate and unconditional" release. "They have committed no crime, except exercising their right to free speech," the "Women in White" said in an open letter sent to Madrid's

embassy in Havana. The women's group, which wears white and includes prisoners' wives, was formed after 75 dissidents were arrested in a crackdown in March 2003. The group urged the Spanish monarch to "intervene before the highest Cuban government authority to gain the immediate and unconditional release of all 75 prisoners of conscience of Black Spring 2003." (*AFP*, 6/10/05)

**October 6:** Spain's ambassador in Cuba, Carlos Alonso Zaldivar, received representatives of the Communist island's internal dissidence movement at the Spanish Embassy in Havana. Attending the meeting were Marta Beatriz Roque, the leader of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society; Vladimiro Roca of All United; Elizardo Sanchez of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and Reconciliation, or CCDHRN; and Manuel Cuesta Murua, of the Progressive Arc. Spain, headed the agenda during the nearly two-hour discussion, the dissidents said afterward. Cuesta Murua said that all persons present "fully agreed" about the need to find appropriate formulas to end the acts against the opposition and added that "dissidence seems to be on the agenda of the Salamanca meeting." Also, Roca said it was possible that the matter of the internal dissidence movement would be discussed at bilateral meetings between the governments of Cuba and Spain at the summit. Roque said that Zaldivar was "very receptive" to the complaints of an increase in the regime's "harassment" of the dissidents, while Sanchez said that the Cuban government "is entrenching and hardening its position." (*EFE*, 6/10/05)

**October 6:** Miriam Makeba has paused in Cuba on her global farewell tour to unload some criticism on the US government of President George W. Bush for its response to black communities after Hurricane Katrina. She also used the occasion to praise Cuba for its co-operation with African nations, particularly in health care. "I am 73 years old, and have been to many different countries of the world," the singer known as Mama Africa said at a news conference in Havana. "Since I'm feeling a little tired now, I decided I should return to many of the countries (...) that applauded me during my career." (*The Canadian Press*, 7/10/05)

**October 7:** Mexico accepted a Cuban donation of 24 tons of food and medicine for those affected by the torrential rains in the southeastern part of the country. (*Granma*, 8/10/05)

**October 10:** Havana almost doubled its medical contingent working in Guatemala by sending another 200 physicians to the country to help persons affected by Hurricane Stan, which killed hundreds throughout the region, authorities said. The doctors dispatched to Guatemala in the past few days are part of the Henry Reeve international brigade, created recently by the Cuban government to provide medical help in nations that suffer natural disasters. Havana also offered to send medical specialists to El Salvador on the weekend, but the Salvadoran government said that it had sufficient physicians to care for its population. (*EFE*, 10/10/05)

**October 11:** After sending hundreds of doctors to disaster-battered Guatemala, Cuba has offered Pakistan at least 200 doctors to help victims of a killer earthquake which shook that Asian nation and may end up killing over 33,000. Fidel Castro sent a letter to his Pakistani counterpart Pervez Musharraf, in which he informs of Havana's readiness to send physicians with medical provisions. The note underlines the medical team could be ready in 24 hours to travel by air. The Cuban head of State told Musharraf that the island would cover the costs of transportation and food. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/10/05)

**October 11:** Cuba and Peru were chosen to join the 21-country UNESCO's Committee of World Heritage, an entity responsible for admitting monuments or sites valuable to humanity. Cuba, which failed being elected to the committee by one vote at the first voting round, was selected at the second round while Peru was selected in the third. Spain, Canada, South Korea, the United States, Kenya, Israel, Madagascar, Morocco, Mauricio Isles and Tunis have been also picked to be part of the committee board. (*RHC*, 11/10/05)

**October 11:** The French foreign minister demanded directly from his Cuban counterpart that Havana free its political prisoners. The meeting between Philippe Douste-Blazy and Felipe Perez Roque, which took place during at the Quay

d'Orsay, focused "exclusively" on the human rights situation in Cuba, according to the spokesman for the French Foreign Ministry in a brief communique. He said that Douste-Blazy "firmly recalled our positions and demanded the freedom of the political prisoners (...) in Cuba." For his part, Perez Roque "stated the traditional position of his government on this point," said the spokesman. "The two ministers have stated, therefore, their disagreement," read the statement. The tone of the communique was unusually direct, which has been interpreted as a sign of France's unhappiness with the lack of a response from Fidel Castro's government to the European Union's decision in June to extend for one year the suspension of its political sanctions against the island's Communist regime. (*EFE*, 11/10/05)

**October 11:** The International Committee for Democracy in Cuba founded by former Czech Republic President Vaclav Havel called for the participants at the Ibero-American Summit in Salamanca, Spain, to hold Havana to the commitment to respect basic rights it made at a previous such conclave. The obligations stem, ICDC sources told the press, from the Viña del Mar Declaration ratified during the 1996 summit in that Chilean city, a document signed by Fidel Castro. Havel's committee, which will deliver the request to all Latin American and Iberian governments, said it harbors "deep concern about the lack of freedoms, violation of human rights, (and) persecution of dissidents, opponents, human rights activists and independent journalists" in Cuba. The ICDC call makes reference to paragraph 39 in the declaration's sixth chapter entitled "Our Commitment," and it has been supported by Ibero-American members of the committee, including several ex-presidents and prominent intellectuals. (*EFE*, 11/10/05)

**October 11:** Venezuela and Cuba are making great strides in sports cooperation as part of the bilateral Integral Cooperation Agreement. The Cuban delegation working in Venezuela provides Venezuelan coaches and referees with technical advice, as well as collaborates in sports promotion. Osvaldo Narvaes, director of the Inter-government Relations Office at Venezuela's National Sports Institute (IND), highlighted in a news conference the island's experience in this field. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/10/05)

**October 11:** The so-called "Women in White" - a movement of more than two dozen wives and relatives of imprisoned Cuban dissidents - sent a letter to the heads of state and government participating in the Ibero-American Summit in Salamanca, Spain, asking them to intervene with Havana and secure the release of their loved ones. "We hope that this meeting will also be memorable for your actions, as a result of which in Cuba we can move toward achieving the democracy you are trying to deepen in your countries and the respect for our political and civil rights," said the letter, which was released in Havana. (*EFE*, 11/10/05)

**October 11:** Cuba has recently committed to expanding and strengthening its traditional cooperation in education and training with Vietnam. Fernando Ramirez, a member of the Cuban Communist Party Central Committee, called for stronger ties between the two nations in the area while meeting with a delegation led by Nguyen Minh Hien, Minister of Education and Training in Havana. Ramirez said Hien's visit is a symbolic representation of tremendous friendship, solidarity and cooperation that have existed between Cuba and Vietnam over the past years. Earlier, Hien held talks with the Cuban counterparts. The two sides informed each other of their respective educational reform and training development programs. (*VNA*, 13/10/05)

**October 12:** Spain kept its policy of rapprochement with the government of Fidel Castro by not inviting Cuban dissidents to a reception in Havana on the occasion of its national day. "It has been a necessary rectification. It should have always been like that", said the Cuban Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bruno Rodríguez. "They are not opponents, but individuals financed by the US Interests Section in Cuba. They are mercenaries", added the Cuban diplomat. (*Reuters*, 12/10/05)

**October 12:** Fidel Castro and Venezuela's Hugo Chavez are among more than 20 government chiefs and heads of state from Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries scheduled to meet in Spain for a summit which organizers hope will see less of the usual rhetoric and more concrete results. "The latest we have is that he (Castro) is coming and there will be a full delegation from Cuba," said Fernando Pajares, spokesman for the summit's organizing body. The Spanish

government have sought to play down the likelihood that a possible meeting between Castro and Chavez would divert media attention from what they hoped would, for a change, be a serious summit. "This summit aims to get past the rhetorical tendencies normally associated with these events, so we can achieve more concrete actions," said Enrique Iglesias, 74, who was recently elected the first Iberoamerican secretary general. Observers in Spain and Cuba say Castro could very well decide not to come at the last minute. They point out that although he hasn't canceled, neither has he confirmed his attendance. Castro's presence would likely lead to protests by Cuban dissidents and human rights groups. (AP, 12/10/05)

**October 13:** In an interview with the Italian daily La Stampa, Archbishop of Genoa Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone said that Fidel Castro asked the Catholic Church for help in fighting the scourge of abortion in Cuba. Bertone gave an account of his trip and his meeting with "the Lider Maximo, a man of great stature and great intelligence, a dominant figure who looks on the church with great respect", he said. Archbishop Bertone had been to Cuba to escort two Genoese priests sent out to run two parishes in the Santa Clara diocese. The meeting with Castro was a two-hour of talks on the evening of 11 October, shortly before the prelate set off back to Genoa after a week in Cuba. "Fidel Castro emphasized that the spread of abortion is one of the causes of the slump in the country's birth-rate. And it is also a consequence of the scourge of sex tourism. It is only to be expected that Castro should be worried and that I should be ashamed of certain Italians' conduct abroad", Bertone said. "The church can make a contribution on abortion and a low birth rate in a country that has now opened up completely: A high-ranking party official welcomed me at the cathedral door and attended the service. There is no numerical limit on admissions to the seminaries, and there are no constraints on ordination, or, therefore, on believers' freedom". Bertone also said that Castro invited the Pope to visit Cuba. (AFP, 13/10/05)

**October 14:** In spite of the repeated announcements and good offices in the form of prior concessions by the Spanish government, Fidel Castro did not attend the Ibero-American summit in Salamanca. This was announced "in extremis" by the Spanish government, ending the main uncertainty of the meeting. Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, said that Castro was busy and had dealt personally with Cuba's medical assistance to Central American countries hit by Hurricane Stan. (ABC, Reuters, 14/10/05)

**October 14:** Reporters Without Borders voiced deep concern about the condition of imprisoned journalist Mario Enrique Mayo Hernandez after his wife and mother reported that he tried to commit suicide twice and is still determined to end his life. He has been detained since March 2003 and is serving a 20-year prison sentence. "Mayo cannot take any more, physically and mentally, nor can his family," the press freedom organisation said. "Does death offer the only relief in Cuban prisons, as exiled journalist Raul Rivero asked last week when fellow journalist Victor Rolando Arroyo Carmona was on hunger strike. We call on the Cuban authorities to free Mayo and all of the other 22 imprisoned journalists at once." [[Mayo tries to take his life](#)] (RWB Press Release, 14/10/05)

**October 14:** An Ibero-American Summit declaration supporting the peace process in Colombia and condemning terrorism sparked objections from Cuba and Venezuela, Latin American diplomatic sources said. Cuba and Venezuela objected to describing as "illegal" and "terrorist" the armed groups active in Colombia - Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas in particular - which the two nations prefer to call "irregular," according to sources who requested anonymity. But that term was rejected by most of the Ibero-American delegations, which shared Colombia's position that the groups are rightly called "terrorist," and also expressed political support for President Alvaro Uribe's peace efforts. (EFE, 16/10/05)

**October 15:** The 15th Ibero-American Summit drew to a close with the adoption of a Declaration of Salamanca that in six pages outlines the great challenges facing the region and includes 15 special communications of marked social and political content. One of the resolutions reaffirmed the commitment to combat terrorism and called for the extradition to Venezuela of the perpetrator of the bombing of a Cubana de Aviacion plane, which killed 73 civilians in October

1976. The Cuban government accuses anti-Castro activist Luis Posada Carriles of the attack, but his name does not appear in the declaration. (*EFE*, 16/10/05)

**October 15:** Iberoamerican leaders demanded that the United States abide by UN resolutions to end its economic blockade against Cuba, as they concluded a two-day summit with a series of final statements. The 17 leaders began discussing the Cuban issue at the start of the annual summit, prompting the US Embassy in Madrid to object to the word "blockade" instead of "embargo." Spanish officials countered that the word "blockade" had been used in UN resolutions as well. "We call on the United States of America to comply with that laid down in 13 successive resolutions approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations, and to bring an end to the economic, trade and financial blockade it maintains against Cuba," one of a set of final statements said. (*The Miami Herald*, 16/10/05)

**October 15:** President Vicente Fox reasserted Mexico's long-standing position against the economic blockade imposed by the United States against Cuba on his last day at the 15th Ibero-American Summit in Salamanca. Fox said that in his opinion the measure against Cuba was an attack on the welfare of the Cuban people. "Mexico has long held this position, a position that it will not change but maintain out of what we deem to be respect and justice," said Fox during his final press conference of the summit. He stated that to try to solve the Cuban situation by means of a commercial and economic embargo or blockade "is out of touch with reality." (*El Universal*, 16/10/05)

**October 15:** Hundreds of Spaniards and Portuguese marched in Salamanca, Spain, in solidarity with Cuba and Venezuela, present at the 15th Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government. Actions to back Cubans and Venezuelans, known as the Solidarity Forum, took place in spite of hurdles set by local authorities. (*Ahora*, 15/10/05)

**October 16:** The 14th Ibero-American Summit has given "a definite signal that this forum can be rescued from its discredited reputation of the last few years", said Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque. He told journalists however, that first there must be Latin American integration for summits to be consolidated. Cuba's foreign minister explained that this regional integration is in process, a task for which Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has hoisted the same flags upheld for decades by the Cuban Revolution, particularly Fidel Castro, in resurrecting the ideas of Bolivar and Marti. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/10/05)

**October 16:** President Amadou Toumani Toure of Mali, who arrived in Cuba, said it was an honor to be in that country and thanked the nation for its solidarity with the African liberation struggle and assistance in training African students. "It is an honor to me to be here because of the great love, consideration and affection the whole African continent feels toward Cuba and our brother Fidel Castro," he told the press upon his arrival in Havana for a State visit at the invitation of Castro. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/10/05)

**October 17:** Supreme Court Judge Ismael Moreno will be in charge of determining whether to hear a lawsuit presented by the Cuban Foundation for Human Rights against Fidel Castro, his brother Army General Raúl Castro, and former regime ministers Osmani Cienfuegos and Carlos Amat, for genocide, crimes against humanity, torture and terrorism. The suit presented by the Foundation and thirteen Cuban citizens recalls a sentence of the Constitutional Court that allows Spanish jurisdiction to prosecute crimes of genocide regardless the nationality of the victims. (*Europa Press*, 17/10/05)

**October 17:** Cuba praised the Ibero-American summit for urging the United States to end its 43-year-old embargo against the communist island and describing it as a "blockade." "It is historic," National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcón told reporters. The summit "spoke in a more precise, exact language," he said. The summit displayed its "rejection of the economic war policy used by the United States against Cuba," said Alarcón, who is in charge of Cuban policy toward Washington. In a resolution attached to the summit's final declaration in Salamanca, Spain, countries called on Washington to "put an end to the economic, commercial and financial blockade that it maintains on Cuba." (*AFP*, 17/10/05)

**October 17:** Cuban dissident Oscar Espinosa Chepe sent a letter to French Foreign Minister, Philippe Douste-Blazy, thanking him for requesting Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, that imprisoned oppositionists be released from jail. The request took place during a meeting in Paris, on October 11. (*EFE*, 17/10/05)

**October 18:** Cuba was re-elected for a fourth term, as a member of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, illustrating the international community's support toward the island, Cuban Ambassador Orlando Requeijo said. Paraguay, Guyana and Haiti were also elected. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/10/05)

**October 18:** The relatives of three young Cuban men who were summarily tried and executed in 2003 for attempting to hijack a small boat testified before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights through a video smuggled out of the island. The identities of the three relatives filmed in the video were revealed during the proceedings, but organizers asked the news media not to publish the names to protect them from retaliation by the Cuban security services. On April 2 of 2003, Lorenzo Copello, Bárbaro Sevilla and Jorge Martínez tried to hijack a Havana ferry with about 50 people on board at gunpoint and force it to sail for the United States. They were caught, tried and executed by firing squad nine days later in a case condemned by the human rights community, the US and other governments. Cuba does not recognize the IACHR's powers because the island's OAS membership was suspended in 1962. Seats reserved for Cuban officials to defend the executions were empty. The IACHR argues that Cuban citizens still enjoy the protections of the Inter-American Declaration of Human Rights, an instrument that Cuba has ratified. (*The Miami Herald*, 18/10/05)

**October 18:** Presidents Amadou Toumani Toure of Mali and Fidel Castro of Cuba held official talks in Havana. Both heads of state reviewed the positive development of bilateral relations and had exchanges on the current situation in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in other parts of the world. Amadou Tomani and Fidel Castro also addressed bilateral cooperation programmes. (*AIN*, 19/10/05)

**October 21:** Around 100 Cuban doctors, nurses and paramedics arrived in Pakistan, ready to work right away to bring relief to survivors of the earthquake that savaged northern areas of the country two weeks ago. A first batch made the 26-hour flight from Havana a week ago and the latest influx brought the total number of Cuban medical staff on the ground in Pakistan close to 200. "We are happy to be here to help our Pakistani brothers and sisters and we are ready to work despite the very long flight," Francisco Rivera, a nurse from Santa Clara, told the press at a military airbase in Rawalpindi, the garrison city next to Islamabad. Cuba's First Deputy Minister Rodrigo Parrilla said the medical teams could stay for at least 90 days, and added that Fidel Castro personally ordered the teams to be sent to Pakistan. The Cubans make up one of the largest foreign contingents of medical workers to have been rushed to Pakistan's aid. (*Reuters*, 21/10/05)

**October 23:** In the face of the huge damage caused by hurricane Wilma in the Yucatan Peninsula, Fidel Castro offered medical assistance for the victims of the powerful storm. The Cuban leader made the offer while participating in the TV news analysis hour, Round Table, which was aired on the island's main TV channels and radio waves. Fidel Castro said that Cuba is ready to offer the Mexican government the support it needs after the passage of the storm. "Given the solidarity that exists between the Cuban and Mexican people, it is a gesture that Cuba is happy to make," he stressed. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/10/05)

**October 23:** Eleven members of a Cuban choir vanished after a Toronto concert and are seeking political asylum. "They evaporated," said promoter Robert Missen, who brought the 40-member Coro Nacional de Cuba to Canada for a 13-city tour. Cuban baritone Ernesto Hermes Cendoya-Sotomayor, a member of the Coro Nacional who decided to stay in Canada, said to the press that 11 of the 41-member choir managed to flee the hotel between 6 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., when Digna Guerra, the choir's manager, discovered the absences. Mr. Cendoya-Sotomayor said the singers did not plan to seek asylum en masse, but instead there was a kind of "domino effect." He imagined there were government informants within the choir. And once they arrived in Canada for their two-week tour, the singers were only given \$20

a day for meals, and their performance pay was withheld, he said. All 11 who defected were taken to the homes of Cuban exiles. The President of the Cuban Canadian Foundation, Ismael Sambra, who is helping some of the defectors, in Toronto, believes that six in the group have already crossed the border and entered the United States where they have relatives. A spokesperson for the Vancouver choir said all but 11 members of the Cuban choir had arrived in British Columbia. (*The Globe and Mail*, 25, 26/10/05)

**October 24:** It will be impossible to strengthen cooperation on human rights if the principles of universality, objectivity, impartiality and non-selectivity are not borne as pillars, the Cuban delegation said in the United Nations. Ambassador Ileana Núñez, Cuba's alternate permanent representative at the United Nations, spoke in those terms at the 3rd Commission of the General Assembly, which debated human rights issues. In her speech, the Cuban diplomat said, "We know in advance that the issue will not be about fostering dialogue, impartiality and non-selectivity according to a group of developed countries." "For them, the promotion and protection of human rights, through genuine and clear international cooperation that respects the principles governing the UN Charter is a dead letter," she added. (*Prensa Latina*, 24/10/05)

**October 25:** Cuba's ambassador to Venezuela condemned the decades-old US embargo that blocks most trade with the island and said Cuba's close ties with the South American country offer an alternative to US economic policies in Latin America. Cuban Ambassador German Sanchez Otero said his country's close relationship with Venezuela offers the region "an alternative, a different path from that which the United States is developing," under an initiative called Petrocaribe. Participating countries will be required to pay 60% in cash and allowed to finance the rest through long-term, low-interest loans. Venezuela, the world's fifth largest oil exporter, has said it will accept goods such as rice or bananas and services as partial payments. Such oil accords represent "an option in the face of US neo-liberalism and its intention of completely absorbing Latin American economies in the function of its own interests," Sanchez Otero told reporters. Despite the close relations between Caracas and Havana, Sanchez Otero noted that calling between the two remains difficult, with those trying often receiving a recording saying all the lines are busy. Sanchez Otero called that situation a "blockade" in itself and said the embassy had taken up the matter with the Venezuelan government. (*AP*, 25/10/05)

**October 25:** The expo "Approaching, from the Santiago de Cuba artist to the plastic arts" opened in the Centre of Ceramique Bonsecours pinacoteca, in Montreal, Canada. Monique Girad, directress of the gallery, opened the exhibition in which Cuban consuls Oscar Coet and Liliana García were present. Art personalities in Québec, directors of galleries and government officials attended the opening. (*Ahora*, 26/10/05)

**October 26:** A Cuban opposition movement, a Nigerian human rights lawyer and an international media organization were jointly awarded the European Union's human rights prize. The "Ladies in White" women's movement, lawyer Hauwa Ibrahim and Reporters without Borders received the 2005 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought awarded by the European Parliament. "Ladies in White" is a group of women that has been protesting peacefully every Sunday since 2003 against the continued detention of their husbands and sons who are political dissidents in Cuba. They wear white as a symbol of peace and innocence of those imprisoned. The prize, named after a former Soviet dissident, is awarded annually to the person or group who are judged to have made a particular achievement in the field of human rights, protecting minorities, defense of international cooperation or promotion of democracy and the rule of law. (*AP*, 26/10/05)

**October 26:** The Ladies in White celebrated the EU's top human rights prize - something they hope will draw attention to their cause. "It puts the Cuban government on notice," Gisela Delgado said after finding out that she and the other "Ladies in White" will share the 2005 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought with a Nigerian human rights attorney and an international media organization. "And it affirms our fight for the liberation of our family members, who are innocent," she said. "Let me say that we're not an organization, but women, wives, mothers and sisters who united," said Gisela Delgado, whose husband Héctor Palacios is serving a 25-year sentence. "It's the first time in 47 years that

women in Cuba go out to the street to protest against unjust imprisonment." Dressed in white and wearing t-shirts and buttons printed with photos of their loved ones, the "Ladies in White" gathered in the home of Laura Pollán, one of the members who is best known among diplomats and the international media. Pollán and several other women were called early Wednesday to the European Union delegation office in Havana, where they met with EU business attaché Sven Kühn von Burgsdorff and other European officials. After the meeting, Pollán said they would try to travel to Europe to receive the prize in December. "We are going to fight to the last moment to go and receive the prize," which she considered a recognition and backing for the group by the international community. ( *AP, IPS, The Miami Herald* , 27/10/05)

**October 26:** The corpse of a woman, apparently a Cuban rafter victim of Hurricane Wilma, was found on the Caribbean island of Holbox, Mexico. No identification was found on the body. Presumably, there had been others on board due to the size of the boat. (*AP*, 27/10/05)

**October 26:** Teachers of surgical speciality departments at the University of the Republic of Uruguay opposed the sending of Uruguayan patients to Cuba to undergo eye surgeries. The doctors protested against the recruiting in public hospitals of patients with surgical diagnoses who would be sent in groups of 25 to 30 a week to the island. Three Cuban doctors have been visiting hospitals in southern Uruguay with that intention as part of a project between Havana and the Uruguayan government. The Uruguayan ophthalmologists propose to finance the surgeries with the savings from airfare to Cuba. (*AFP*, 27/10/05)

**October 26:** Scientific-academic exchange and the training of physicians in Cuba are aspects to be developed with the reestablishment of diplomatic ties between Panama and Cuba, Panamanian Health Minister Camilo Alleyne said. The minister said that the training of doctors on the Caribbean island is an opportunity for poor people to study for free, and to later assist people living in the country's outlying areas. Alleyne recalled that during a recent visit to Havana he updated a series of old agreements with his Cuban counterpart Jose Ramon Balaguer. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/10/05)

**October 26:** The final statement of the upcoming fourth Summit of the Americas will include no mention of terrorism, regional security or Cuba, a Brazilian foreign ministry official said. The 34 nations expected to attend the Nov. 4-5 summit in Mar del Plata, Argentina, will focus on labor issues in a tightly written final statement, said Afonso Jose Sena Cardoso, head of multilateral political coordination of the Brazilian Foreign Ministry. In preliminary talks, there has been no mention of Cuba, regional security or combating terrorism, Sena Cardoso said. (*AP*, 26/10/05)

**October 27:** Independent journalist and former political prisoner, Oscar Espinosa Chepe, sent a letter to Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pierre Pettigrew, thanking him for his defense of human rights in Cuba, during the visit of Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Perez Roque to Canada, "at a time when repression against peaceful dissent mounts, aimed at sowing terror in Cuban society." The letter points out that "most peaceful dissidents in Cuba oppose foreign interference in our own affairs (...) Nevertheless, we think that the international community cannot remain indifferent of the flagrant and increasing violations of human rights in Cuba". (*Cubamet*, 27/10/05)

**October 27:** Fidel Castro criticized the European Union, accusing it of scarcely helping Third World countries struck by natural disasters, subordinating itself to the United States, and defending "mercenaries of the empire". "Europe is a sham, they speak about human rights while they defend mercenaries of the empire", said Castro on local television, one day after the European Parliament awarded the Sakharov Prize for Human Rights to the wives and relatives of Cuban imprisoned dissidents, known as the "Ladies in White". "The Europe that condemns us, that casts its vote (at the UN) obeying the orders of the United States, I dare to send doctors", added Castro. [[Fidel Castro's speech](#)] (*EFE*, 27/10/05)

**October 28:** Cuban authorities banned the reception which was to take place in a Havana hotel, the Czech national holiday, branding it a "counter-revolutionary event." The reception was to mark the 87th anniversary of the establishment of independent Czechoslovakia. The authorities called the event counter-revolutionary as it was to be

attended by members of the Ladies in White, the wives and relatives of Cuban political prisoners. The guests who arrived at the luxurious Spanish-Cuban hotel were informed that the reception had been cancelled and transferred to the residence of Czech Ambassador Petr Stiegler. "The hotel management told me that the hotel cannot be a venue of counter-revolutionary activities," AFP agency quoted Stiegler as saying. The improvised reception in his residence was attended by many ambassadors from European countries, and also by twenty members of the Ladies in White. (CTK, 29/10/05)

**October 28:** During its 123rd regular sessions, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) reported on the activities carried out in relation with Cuba. The Commission continued to receive information on the situation of human rights, particularly on the conditions of detention of persons deprived of liberty because of their political dissidence; on the violation of labor and union rights of workers and the restrictions placed on the exercise of their right of residence and transit of the island's inhabitants". The IACHR also reiterated its position with regards to the US sanctions on the island and said that, "the economic and commercial sanctions imposed by the [US] government produce a grave impact on economic, social and cultural rights of the Cuban community, and urges that they be lifted". (OAS Press Release, 28/10/05)

**October 30:** An Israeli tourist was murdered in Cuba while on vacation with his wife. Initial details from the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem indicate that the man was stabbed to death a short time after leaving his hotel in Havana. Local police said the couple left the hotel when they were attacked by about eight robbers. The couple was forcefully separated and the man was taken into an alley where he was robbed and stabbed to death. According to the Foreign Ministry, his body is to be returned to Israel via Canada, as Israel does not have diplomatic relations with Cuba. (Ynetnews, 30/10/05)

**October 30:** The President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcon, left for Mar del Plata, Argentina to participate at the 3rd People's Summit. The gathering opens the same week that the 4th Summit of the Americas is set to be held in Mar de Plata. The island's delegation is comprised of 300 representatives from community, labor, and student organizations, and well as artists and professionals of all Cuban social sectors. (AIN, Granma, 31/10/05)

**October 31:** During Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's successful presidential campaign in 2002, his Workers' Party received up to \$3 million in illegal campaign contributions from the government of Cuba, according to the cover story in the current issue of Brazil's leading weekly newsmagazine. According to the Veja story, the money arrived in the country's capital, Brasilia, in 2002 by unidentified means. Then, the money was safeguarded by Cuban diplomat Sergio Cervantes, who since has returned to Cuba. The Cuban embassy said in a statement that, "the government of Cuba categorically rejects these slanders and affirms that it has never interfered in the internal affairs of its sister nation." The government of Cuba, which funneled money to selected guerrilla groups and left-wing parties in Latin America through the 1980's but says it has abandoned the practice because of its own moribund economy, also denied the report in emphatic terms. In a statement, the Cuban Embassy in Brasília called the Veja article part of "an orchestrated campaign of lies" motivated by the "aggressive plans of imperialism against Cuba and against Lula," as Mr. da Silva is popularly known. [[Declaración del embajador cubano en Brasil](#)] (The New York Times, BBC, The Denver Post, 1/11/05)

**October 31:** Fidel Castro, in a taped television interview with Diego Maradona, told Argentine viewers that he welcomed the Argentine soccer legend's plans to take part in anti-American protests at the Summit of the Americas. Maradona, who traveled to Cuba to conduct the two-part interview for broadcast on his popular weekly talk show, has said he would ride in a celebrity protest train taking opponents of US President George W. Bush from Buenos Aires to the Argentine resort of Mar del Plata for the summit. Asked about the Organization of American States that organized the fourth Summit of the Americas, Castro told Maradona in the interview that the OAS has a "very pestilent smell" and welcomed efforts by protesters to orchestrate dissent against US president Bush. "We have struggled for various years" against the US, said Castro. As for Maradona, Castro added: "I'm happy that you are going to be there" in the

protests against Bush. Maradona's interview with Castro was broadcast in Argentina on his talk show called "La Noche del 10" -- Spanish for "The Night of 10" -- referring to his No. 10 soccer jersey. (AP, 31/10/05)

## **Terrorism**

**October 7:** The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said that prisoners were on hunger strike at the US Guantanamo Bay prison camp and that the situation there was serious. The humanitarian agency, which last visited the US naval base in Cuba in late September, was in contact with US authorities about the situation, ICRC chief spokeswoman Antonella Notari said. "There is a hunger strike, the situation is serious, and we are following it with concern," Notari told the press. (Reuters, 11/10/05)

## **Security**

**October 27:** Cuban Armed Forces took the port of Havana militarily, after alleged reports of the theft of a container with automatic guns. Defence Minister Raúl Castro named General Moisés Sio Wong head of the operation. (Cubanet, 27/10/05)

## **US-Cuba Relations**

**October 1:** It is official US policy to "undermine" Cuba's planned succession from Fidel Castro to his brother Raúl, 74. Just how that process would unfold is not clear. "We are looking to support a genuine transition to political freedom for the Cuban people," said Caleb McCarry, the State Department official recently put in charge of transition matters for Cuba. McCarry rejects charges that Washington's assistance plan is a blueprint for US control. "The offer is not an imposition," he said, asserting that none of the proposed programs would go into place without the consent of the transitional government on the island. "We need to give Cubans the opportunity for a different future and better future," McCarry said. "What people lack under the dictatorship is hope. They have to hope there will be a better future." (The New York Times, 1/10/05)

**October 4:** After securing deals in August for Cuba to buy \$30 million in agricultural products in the next year and a half, Nebraska governor Dave Heineman announced that he is returning later in October for a second trade mission. The trade mission is scheduled to run from October 30 to November 2 and will include a visit to the International Trade Fair in Havana. (AP, 4/10/05)

**October 4:** The US Department of Homeland Security's US Coast Guard, 7th District, issued a press release informing of the repatriation of 54 Cuban migrants to Bahia de Cabanas, Cuba. The migrants were intercepted at sea, caught attempting to enter the United States. (US Fed News, 4/10/05)

**October 5:** Fidel Castro has survived 10 American presidents who wanted his Communist government to fall and he will make George W. Bush the 11th, Cuba's foreign minister said. The US State Department last year outlined an ambitious plan for a post-Castro Cuba that calls for helping its transition from Communist dictatorship to democracy. "We are expecting to see Mr. Bush retire before he can fulfill that plan," Mr. Roque said yesterday after two days of meetings in Ottawa aimed at deepening ties between Cuba and Canada. (The Ottawa Citizen, 5/10/05)

**October 6:** Miguel Sigler Amaya and Josefa López Peña, along with their children, arrived in the United States. In September, both oppositionists had been detained in Havana by Cuban authorities when they were boarding the plane that would take them to the US. The grounds for the detention were unknown. (*Bitácora Cubana*, 6/10/05)

**October 6:** A Cuban baseball team that was to participate in a qualifying tournament at Puerto Rico for the Central American and Caribbean Games has not received visas from the US government, Cuba's Institute of Sports (INDER) said. "The Cuban baseball team will not visit Puerto Rico because it has not received authorization from the US State Department," said an INDER internet site, calling the Cubans "victims of US political discrimination." (*AFP*, 6/10/05)

**October 6:** Family and friends of 73 people killed when a Cuban airliner was blown out of the sky 29 years ago marked the tragedy's anniversary by bitterly accusing the United States of harboring the bombers. Some 200 people gathered at Havana's main cemetery to remember the victims of what Cuba views as its own 9/11. "What happened September 11, 2001, in the United States is not foreign to us," said Margarita Morales, whose father and the junior Cuban fencing team he coached died in the 1976 plane blast. "The families of the victims in the United States are waiting like we are for justice (...) We demand to stop looking for excuses to protect (Luis) Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch," she told the mourners, many of whom, with tears in their eyes, wore T-shirts or carried placards with pictures of the dead. (*The New York Times*, 7/10/05)

**October 9:** The number of Cubans caught this year trying to make the risky voyage across the Florida Straits to the United States -- whether by pattering homemade boats or speedy smuggler's boats -- reached a 10-year high. There was a significant increase this year in Cubans who made it to US shores as well. While no mass migration appears on the horizon, Cuba experts and US officials say Cubans increasingly take to the ocean to flee the island run by Fidel Castro because of chronic economic hardship, repression of political dissent and a hard-line bureaucracy that makes it difficult for even some legal migrants to leave. "Something has to be happening that people would prefer to risk death rather than continue living there," said Ramon Sanchez, founder of the Cuban exile group Democracy Movement. "People just get so fed up with the system, they leave and risk their lives on the high seas." (*CNN*, 9/10/05)

**October 9:** The US government has a plan to provide shelter for terrorists working against Cuba who seek protection in that country, denounced Juventud Rebelde newspaper. The daily claims that what is no less than a circus, apparently legal, has worked for Luis Posada Carriles in El Paso, Texas, and Orlando Bosch Avila years ago, who was even pardoned by George Bush senior. "It is tragic enough that justice be sullied for one murder, but what is worse is to design a strategy to protect everyone inside Operation Condor doing US dirty work," asserts the newspaper. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/10/05)

**October 9:** According to dissidents who met career diplomat Michael Parmly just hours after he took command at the US Interests Section three weeks ago, the first thing he did was listen. Supporting Cuba's dogged but damaged opposition movement will be a top priority for Parmly, who starts his Havana tour at a time when US-Cuba relations are sinking to new lows. "He's very friendly, pleasant, cultured," said Oscar Espinosa Chepe, one of the dissidents who met with Parmly before the diplomatic chief had even spent his first night in Havana. When asked what he hoped Parmly would contribute, he said: "A less confrontational climate would help." Martha Beatriz Roque, another former political prisoner, proudly displays a photograph of James Cason in her cramped front room. "He was a person with a tremendous imagination. He had valor," she said, noting that he had traversed Cuba to meet with prisoners' families before the government imposed a travel ban on him. Of the U.S. propaganda campaign, she said, "My hope is that [Parmly] does the same." Miriam Leiva, who is Espinosa Chepe's wife and participates in silent, weekly marches alongside families of detained dissidents, said the United States has a fine line to walk. "What we would like is for the US government to look for a situation of less confrontation than there is now," she said. Referring to the wave of arrests, house raids, confiscated documents and ongoing arbitrary detentions, she added. "The confrontation helps the hard-liners in the Cuban government to justify their wrongdoing." (*Sun Sentinel*, 9/10/05)

**October 10:** The world's largest "wealth management" firm, UBS, will be investigated by Congress for possibly laundering money for two state sponsors of terrorism, Cuba and Iran, lawmakers told the press. The Swiss bank, which operates a large financial services business in America, will be pressed about \$3.9 billion deposited in UBS accounts by the Castro regime, according to Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Republican of Florida, who first announced the impending investigation on Friday. Possible improper financial dealings with the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saddam Hussein's Iraq will also be subject to scrutiny, she said. In 2003, American soldiers liberating Iraq discovered \$762 million in American currency stashed in hideouts belonging to Saddam. According to Ms. Ros-Lehtinen, a Federal Reserve Bank probe traced the cash to UBS and other international financial firms. While investigating the Swiss bank's possible business relationship with Saddam's dictatorship, it was discovered that the firm - as part of a program with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, in which UBS allowed clients to retire old banknotes and replace them with fresh currency - had also conducted transactions with Cuba, Iran, Libya, and Yugoslavia. (*The New York Sun*, 10/10/05)

**October 11:** For the first time in over 40 years, representatives of the US energy sector will meet personally with their Cuban counterparts at the US-Cuba Energy Summit to discuss the potential for business in oil and gas ventures between the US and Cuba. This Summit will take place at the Westin Resort and Spa in Cancun, Mexico, from December 1-3, 2005. This historic gathering is being organized by Alamar Associates which has organized five previous Cancun Business Summits which have brought more than 500 US executives together with their Cuban counterparts. The Energy Summit is being sponsored by the US-Cuba Trade Association along with Caterpillar, Port of Corpus Christi, Louisiana Department of Economic Development, Valero Energy Corporation, Lafayette Economic Development Authority, National Foreign Trade Council, and USA Engage. "With Spain, China, Canada, Norway, and India exploring in Cuban waters less than 100 miles from our shores in the Gulf, it is time for US firms to understand what is going on and what the future business potential might be," said Kirby Jones, President of the US-Cuba Trade Association," and this event offers US executives the opportunity to do just that face-to-face with their Cuban counterparts." (*PRNewswire*, 11/10/05)

**October 13:** A 6-year-old Cuban boy drowned after a smuggler's boat carrying him and 30 other people capsized as a US Coast Guard vessel attempted to intercept it south of Florida, the Coast Guard said. The boat was spotted on radar about 45 miles south of Key West, according to Lt. Cmdr. Chris O'Neill. The cutter Dauntless gave chase and drew within sight of the 33-foot "go fast" boat, but the boat sped up and pulled away, the Coast Guard said. The Coast Guard cutter lost track of the boat, he said. About 20 minutes later, the crew found the boat capsized with about 30 people clinging to the boat or in the water. After they were rescued they told authorities the 6-year-old boy was missing. While a Coast Guard helicopter searched the water, the crew of the Dauntless tried to right the boat. When they did so, "the youngster was found inside," O'Neill said. The migrants are being held at sea aboard the Coast Guard cutter while US officials decide their immigration status, the Coast Guard said. (*CNN*, 14/10/05)

**October 13:** A majority of executives interviewed in South Florida would be interested in doing business with a post-Castro, democratic Cuba, a survey shows. Hispanics surveyed are most interested in expanding business into neighboring Cuba after Fidel Castro leaves power. But a majority of Anglo and black executives also voiced interest, according to the poll commissioned by Miami-based South Florida CEO magazine. A majority interviewed also think a democratic Cuba would have a positive impact on South Florida and their particular industry, said the survey conducted by Coral Gables-based polling firm Bendixen & Associates. The results are based on phone interviews with 417 business leaders and high net worth individuals in Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties. The interviews were conducted in English and Spanish during the first two weeks of September. (*Sun Sentinel*, 13/10/05)

**October 13:** The Cuban government has taken its campaign against the US embargo on trade and travel to the Internet. Representatives of the island government were online to answer inquiries and comments about the four-decade old policy. Officials were on hand to answer the comments and questions in a bulletin board-type forum, mostly in

Spanish. Many of the messages were from people opposed to the embargo, including groups such as the Kenya-Cuba Friendship Association. Cuban embassies from around the world also posted messages. (*Sun Sentinel*, 14/10/05)

**October 14:** A Cuban-American who won a Bronze Star in Iraq but was not allowed to return to his homeland to care for a sick son said that his children are being allowed to visit the United States. Under an agreement with the State Department and the Cuban government, Sgt. Carlos Lazo's two sons, Carlos Rafael Lazo, 17, and Carlos Manuel Lazo, 19, will visit for three months. In an exceptional move, the Cuban government allowed the two boys to travel to the US although both are under military age. Lazo, a sergeant in the Washington state National Guard, plans to fly to Miami on Friday to meet them. The family's plight prompted US legislators from both parties to complain about the strict travel limits to Cuba imposed by the Bush administration. The rules allow family visits once every three years. "First of all, I'm very grateful for the outcome of this," Lazo said in an interview. (*Sun Sentinel, El Nuevo Herald*, 17/10/05)

**October 14:** Cuba accused the United States of waging "radio and television aggression" by bombarding the island with thousands of hours of propaganda every week, repeating a frequent complaint. The Cuban representative to the United Nations' political and decolonisation committee said the US is violating Cuba's national sovereignty with an "obsessive and sick" policy of seeking to topple Fidel Castro. The delegate said the United States beams 2,300 hours each week from 16 stations in 24 frequencies, programmes that are "totally alien to culture, scientific development and wholesome entertainment, let aside truthful and objective information," said Ambassador Rodrigo Malmierca, Cuba's representative to the UN committee. (*The Hindu Times*, 15/10/05)

**October 17:** Two Cuban parents won their bid for freedom, but at a life-shattering price -- the death of their 6-year-old son during an apparent smuggling attempt. Julian Villasuso Jr. died when the boat he was on overturned as it tried to elude the Coast Guard on its way to Florida's coast. Villasuso was buried at Woodlawn Park Cemetery in Miami. Dozens of friends and family members attended a memorial service for the boy in Coral Gables. The parents, among more than two dozen survivors of the failed smuggling trip, were allowed to enter the United States in a departure from normal procedure under the wet-foot/dry-foot immigration policy. (*NBC6Net, The Miami Herald*, 17/10/05)

**October 18:** Cuba's Parliamentary speaker blamed the US government for the drowning of a 6-year-old Cuban boy during an illegal migration attempt to South Florida. The US diplomatic mission in Havana in turn blamed smugglers and "the Cuban regime." The death of this child is the responsibility of the United States, as are all the others," Parliamentary speaker Ricardo Alarcón told reporters. If you arrive [in the United States] they admit you," said Alarcón, "But you have to make it, escape from the [US] Coast Guard, you have to violate American laws, you have to risk your life." The US Interests Section in the Cuban capital later issued a statement saying, "The culpable parties in this tragic accident were the smugglers in question and the Cuban regime. The regime continues to drive its citizens to risk their lives at sea by abusing their human rights and denying them economic opportunities." The statement added that the United States "is committed to safe, legal, and orderly migration from Cuba to the US" The child, Julián Villasuso, died when the boat smuggling him and 30 others -- including his parents -- capsized in the Straits of Florida. (*CNN*, 18/10/05)

**October 18:** Members of Cuban civil society, dissidents and diplomats attended a video-conference organized by the US Interests Section in Havana as part of its "Series of Conferences on the Transition" on the Communist-ruled island. The video-conference, on the Cuban health care system, was held at the residence of the top US diplomat in Cuba, Michael Parmly, and was conducted from Florida by Cuban-American physician Antonio Maria de Gordon, the co-director of Miami's Westchester General Hospital. The doctor gave a presentation about the state of Cuba's public health system and its future prospects. Among those attending the session were several well-known opposition figures including Vladimiro Roca and formerly imprisoned dissidents Marta Beatriz Roque and Oscar Espinosa Chepe, two of the 14 jailed dissidents from among the so-called Group of 75 who were released by the Cuban regime over the past year for health reasons. (*EFE*, 19/10/05)

**October 19:** Washington and Havana rip apart Cuban families with travel policies that violate civil rights, Human Rights Watch said in a 69-page report that marks the first time the group investigates two countries in the same study. Based on interviews with dozens of Cubans and Cuban-Americans, the report documents the terrible human cost of these restrictions, which have torn young children away from their parents, and prevented adults from caring for ailing relatives—including in some cases dying parents. “The US and Cuban travel restrictions reflect an utter disregard for the welfare of families,” said José Miguel Vivanco, Americas director at Human Rights Watch. “Both countries are sacrificing people’s freedom of movement to promote dead-end policies.” The report notes that Fidel Castro had long used travel restrictions to control defections, silence critics and punish people. But it also faulted the Bush administration for tightening rules on travel to Cuba last year, on the ground that trips home by Cuban expatriates were providing the government with much needed hard currency. The report calls on Cuban and US authorities to ease all travel restrictions. [[Families Torn Apart: The High Cost of US and Travel Restrictions](#)] (*The Miami Herald, BBC, Chicago Tribune, The New York Times, 19/10/05*)

**October 19:** A senior State Department official said Caribbean nations have been successfully resisting efforts by Cuba and Venezuela to “drive a wedge” between the United States and nations of the region. “Caribbean countries have not been lured by failed static ideologies,” said Dan Fisk, a ranking official in the State Department’s Western Hemisphere Affairs bureau. But he warned that the region’s particular circumstances could, over time, create opportunities for a variety of transnational threats, including terrorism and inroads by criminal organizations. Fisk testified before a House International Relations subcommittee. Close engagement between the United States and the Caribbean is essential at a time when “Cuba and Venezuela are promoting an alternative and regressive vision for the region’s future,” he said. Fisk said Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has two relatively recent meetings with Caribbean counterparts and plans are under way for another meeting early next year. (*AP, 19/10/05*)

**October 21:** US business executives, Cuban-American ones and "Anglos" alike, are anxious to pour billions of dollars into Cuba in the tourism, agriculture, real estate, manufacturing, communications and other sectors once Communism there goes the way of other disappeared Marxist regimes. The Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce estimates that post-Castro investment from the United States will amount to more than \$2 billion a year. The results of a new survey of Miami-area executives by veteran pollster Sergio Bendixen revealed that many business leaders plan to take advantage of this opportunity. Of the 417 respondents to the survey, 64 percent said they would be interested in setting up business operations in Cuba. The poll also showed that some 72 percent of Cuban-American executives said they planned to do business with Cuba once restrictions on trade with the island are lifted, compared with 63 percent of "Anglos" and 50 percent of African-Americans. (*EFE, 21/10/05*)

**October 25:** North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson said 11 people will accompany him on a trade trip to Cuba. The delegation will attend the Havana International Trade Fair October 31 through November 5. "The Cubans have said up front that they want to buy at least 20,000 metric tons of dry peas from North Dakota, and that they are also very interested in other commodities, including wheat, pulses, potatoes and onions," Johnson said. The president of Cuba's state food-buying agency invited North Dakota to take part in the trade fair, Johnson said. (*WestCan Cuba, 25/10/05*)

**October 26:** US Coordinator for Transition in Cuba, Caleb McCarry, defended in Madrid the importance of the “democratic allied forces” working together to promote “a real transition” on the island and of being prepared to support that process. McCarry participated in a forum on the future of Cuba and met with “high officials” of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In a press conference he said he had a “good discussion” and pointed out that “this has been only the first visit”. He added that one of his objectives is for all democratic nations to play a positive role “in favour of a genuine transition and to not be content with a mere succession”. (*EFE, 27/10/05*)

**October 26:** The Chief of the US Interests Section in Cuba, Michael E. Parmly, said he had requested Washington’s aid for those affected by Hurricane Wilma on the island. “We have offered the Cuban government our assistance in a

diplomatic note sent to Havana last Monday, the 24 th", said an official from the State Department. The official added that the aid includes medical supplies and other items for emergencies, as well as a disaster assessment and control group. "Up to this moment the Cuban government has not replied", he said. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 27/10/05)

**October 27:** Lina de Feria, one of the most prominent writers of Cuban contemporary poetry, requested political asylum in the United States. De Feria arrived in Miami after spending a few hours in the Brownsville, Texas, immigration camp where she was taken after crossing the US-Mexico border. The writer was a candidate this year for Cuba's National Prize for Literature. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 27/10/05)

**October 27:** On learning of the award bestowed by the European Parliament on Cuba's Damas de Blanco (Ladies in White), the Bush administration offered its congratulations to the women's group. In a statement, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said: "The United States congratulates the Damas de Blanco of Cuba on being awarded the 2005 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought by the European Parliament." McCormack also praised the women's measured response to the repressive tactics of Fidel Castro. "Damas de Blanco have held peaceful protests every Sunday since the March 2003 dissident crackdown on their husbands and sons, the majority of whom remain imprisoned in Cuba," he said. "Despite regular harassment and abuse by the Castro security forces, the Ladies in White peacefully and nonviolently demonstrate the enduring freedom-loving spirit of the Cuban people. They vow to continue their silent protests until the release of all of the 75 dissidents arrested in the March 2003 crackdown by the Castro regime." Finally, McCormack said: "The United States calls on the Castro regime to release all prisoners of conscience." (*USINFO*, 27/10/05)

**October 27:** Cuba has accepted a US offer of emergency assistance following Hurricane Wilma, the first time in the memory of State Department officials that the island nation has accepted such an offer, according to State Department spokesman Sean McCormack. Cuba accepted the offer, also via diplomatic note, on October 26, and a three-person team from the US Agency for International Development's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance currently is preparing to travel to Cuba to survey the damage and recommend appropriate assistance, McCormack said. He added that any assistance would be provided through independent nongovernmental organizations. "I think in everybody's memory this is the first time that they have accepted an offer of assistance, at least in the collective memory bank here at the State Department," McCormack said. (*USINFO*, 27/10/05)

**October 27:** Fidel Castro denied that his Communist government had accepted US aid for the first time in the wake of Hurricane Wilma. Havana's reply to the US offer, read out by Castro on a live television broadcast, said Cuba had not requested international aid. "That is not an acceptance of aid," the Cuban leader said. Castro, annoyed that Washington was distorting Cuba's intentions, said Havana had only accepted a visit by the assessment team in an effort to build regional cooperation in dealing with the growing danger posed by hurricanes. He agreed with the idea that the US, Mexico and other countries in the area should help each other in disaster situations, such as hurricanes, which are more frequent and stronger. "We have no objections at all to the three officials visiting us, to know their assessment and exchange views on these matters," Castro said. "We won't close the door." "This does not mean we are accepting Washington's aid," he ratified, and added that Cuba considered cooperation must extend to all the Caribbean and Central America. (*Reuters, Prensa Latina*, 27/10/05)

**October 27:** Argentine soccer hero Diego Maradona promised Fidel Castro he would be at the front of an anti-Bush march in Argentina next week. US President George W. Bush will attend a summit of leaders from all countries from the Americas -- except Cuba -- in Mar del Plata, Argentina. "I think Bush is a murderer (...) I'm going to head the march against him stepping foot on Argentine soil," Maradona said, appearing on Cuban television with Castro. "I promised the 'Comandante' that I would do it and I will," the 44-year-old football legend said, referring to Castro. "For me he is a god," Maradona said of the 79-year-old left-wing Cuban leader, whom he considers a friend and a father figure who helped him kick drugs. Maradona was in Havana to interview Castro for his weekly television show in Argentina. (*The New York Times*, 28/10/05)

**October 27:** Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles no longer needs to worry about whether the US government intends to deport him to Venezuela, his adoptive country. The 30-day deadline to appeal an immigration judge's September 26 ruling against Posada's removal to the South American country expired; the federal government did not appeal the decision, Posada's lawyers said. This means that unless the Bush administration finds a third country willing to take Posada or pursues Venezuela's extradition request in federal court, Posada is now virtually guaranteed permanent protection in the United States. Deportation to Cuba, Posada's country of birth, was ruled out earlier. US officials had no comment on the lack of appeal, but noted that the immigration judge ordered Posada removed -- albeit neither to Venezuela or Cuba. "The immigration judge has ordered that Mr. Posada be removed from the United States," said Dean Boyd, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement spokesman. "ICE intends to carry out that order." José Pertierra, an attorney who represents the Venezuelan government in Washington, said the Bush administration can still pursue the case in federal court if it decides to file Caracas' extradition request for Posada. "We expect the US government to follow this route," Pertierra said. Posada's attorneys said it would be unlikely that a federal court would consider such a request because Posada could be tortured if returned to Venezuela. (*The Miami Herald*, 28/10/05)

**October 29:** The US government refused a visa to a Cuban scientist arguing that his presence would be prejudicial to that country's interests. The San José, California Technical Museum awarded one of its annual prizes in the health category to the team of specialists who worked on obtaining the Cuban vaccine against Haemophilus influenzae Type B, the bacteria that causes meningitis, pneumonia and other infections in under-fives. Dr. Vicente Vérez Bencomo was supposed to travel to the award ceremony scheduled for November 9 at the museum itself, but the US government refused him a visa. (*Granma International*, 29/10/05)

**October 31:** There are a variety of US products on display at Havana's annual trade fair. More than 300 representatives of 171 American firms confirmed they would attend the International Fair of Havana, said Pedro Alvarez, head of the Cuban food import company Alimport. "We have a larger American participation this year despite the (US) restrictions," Alvarez said as he toured the Expo Cuba fairgrounds on Havana's outskirts. "But the (Bush) administration has created serious obstacles for small and medium-sized companies." Marvin Leherer, of the USA Rice Federation, said the trade group he represents indicates that American rice sales to Cuba this year have been down, "mostly because of the problems with the terms of payment" created by US rules. "It's definitely made things harder," Leherer said as he set up the Rice Federation's booth at the fair. But rice farmers are determined to keep selling as much to Cuba because it is a key future market, Leherer added. "This is a huge market for rice. We have to be here," he said. "Cuba imports as much or more than Mexico with just one-tenth of the people." (*AP*, 31/10/05)

**October 31:** During an interview with former soccer player Diego Maradona, broadcast in Argentina, Fidel Castro warned US President George W. Bush to stay away from the summit of leaders of the Americas, to which Cuba was the only nation not invited. "It would be better for him to find a pretext and not go. This is seriously an error, the FTAA is already dead and buried," Castro said during a five-hour interview. (*Reuters*, 31/10/05)

**October 31:** A federal appeals court jolted Miami with another electrifying ruling in the case of five Cuban men accused of spying for Fidel Castro -- reinstating their original convictions in the 2001 trial. The 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals threw out a ruling in August by a three-judge appellate panel that had overturned those convictions. Now the appeals process starts all over again. The Atlanta appellate court must decide whether the five Cuban defendants -- convicted of infiltrating Miami's exile community and trying to pass US military secrets to Havana -- received a fair trial in a community that despises Castro. This time, a majority of the 12-member appellate court has agreed to rehear the so-called Cuban Five's appeal, which leaves the case in limbo for several more months. (*The Miami Herald*, 2/11/05)