

FOCAL's Research Forum on Cuba

Chronicle on Cuba

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Highlights

Domestic Affairs: In the wake of hurricanes Gustav and Ike, Cuban population suffers food shortages. Courts impose harsh punishments for food hoarding, theft, undue appropriation and other illegal activities. Cuba's first Russian Orthodox Church is consecrated in Havana. Opposition leaders denounce repressive measures against the dissident movement.

Economy: Cuba begins leasing land to private farmers and cooperatives. Canadian Sherritt International Corp. cancels its agreement for operations in Cuban waters. High-ranking delegations from Russia and Vietnam discuss with Cuban authorities projects in several economic sectors. Granma newspaper says the implementation of reforms launched by President Raul Castro is going more slowly than hoped. Brazilian company Petrobras signs an agreement to explore for oil in Cuba's offshore fields.

Exile Community: Research from the University of Miami says that many Cuban Americans question US policy towards Cuba. Several Cuban American organizations express disagreement with the migration pact signed between Cuba and Mexico.

Foreign Affairs: Humanitarian aid continues flowing to Cuba from countries around the world. Although two hurricanes swept the island, Cuban authorities do not interrupt cooperation programs with other countries. Spain renegotiates Cuba's debt and funds programs for the re-construction of houses and facilities in the island. Cuban opposition leaders make calls to Spain and the European Union not to be indifferent to the violations of human rights committed by the Cuban government. Moscow expands its relation with Havana. Cuba and Mexico sign a migratory agreement. Vietnam's Vice-President visits the island. The European Union and Cuba re-establish cooperation. The Brazilian President meets in Havana with Fidel and Raul Castro.

Security: Russian news agencies say a delegation of the Tactical Air Defense of the Russian Armed Forces flew to Cuba. Russia invites Cuba to join its satellite navigation system. Granma newspaper says that life in Cuban provinces affected by the hurricanes is still ruled by the Defense Councils.

US-Cuba Relations: Cuba intensifies its campaign to free “The Cuban Five”. Fidel Castro writes several articles on the US presidential election. Cuba opens a campaign to generate world pressure to end the US embargo. The UN General Assembly votes overwhelmingly for the 17th year in a row to demand an end to the US trade embargo against Cuba.

Lo más relevante

Asuntos domésticos: Después del paso de los huracanes Gustav y Ike, la población cubana sufre escasez de alimentos. Los tribunales imponen severas sanciones por acaparamiento, hurto, apropiaciones indebidas y otras actividades ilegales. Queda consagrada en La Habana la primera iglesia Ortodoxa Rusa. Líderes de la oposición denuncian actos represivos contra el movimiento disidente.

Economía: Cuba comienza a otorgar tierras en usufructo a campesinos privados y cooperativas. La canadiense Sherritt International Corp. cancela su acuerdo para operar en aguas cubanas. Altas delegaciones de Rusia y Vietnam discuten con las autoridades cubanas proyectos en varios sectores económicos. El diario Granma dice que las reformas anunciadas por el Presidente Raúl Castro avanzan más despacio de lo esperado. La compañía brasileña Petrobras firma un acuerdo para explorar petróleo en los yacimientos marinos cubanos.

Comunidad de exiliados: Una investigación de la Universidad de Miami sugiere que muchos cubano americanos cuestionan la política de Estados Unidos hacia Cuba. Varias organizaciones cubano americanas expresan su descontento con el acuerdo migratorio firmado entre México y Cuba.

Asuntos exteriores: Continúa el flujo de ayuda humanitaria a Cuba desde países en todo el mundo. Aunque dos huracanes barrieron la isla, Cuba no interrumpe sus programas de cooperación con otros países. España renegocia la deuda de Cuba y financia programas para la reconstrucción de viviendas y locales en la isla. Líderes opositores cubanos hacen llamados a España y a la Unión Europea para que no se muestren indiferentes a las violaciones de los derechos humanos cometidas por el gobierno cubano. Moscú amplía sus relaciones con La Habana. Cuba y México firman un acuerdo migratorio. La Vicepresidenta de Vietnam visita la isla. La Unión Europea y Cuba reestablecen la cooperación. El Presidente de Brasil se reúne en La Habana con Fidel y Raúl Castro.

Seguridad: Agencias rusas de noticias dicen que una delegación de la Defensa Aérea Táctica de las Fuerzas Armadas de Rusia viajó a Cuba. Rusia invita a Cuba a unirse a su sistema de navegación por satélite. El diario Granma dice que la vida en las provincias afectadas por los huracanes continúa regida por los Consejos de Defensa.

Relaciones Cuba- Estados Unidos: Cuba intensifica su campaña por la libertad de “Los Cinco”. Fidel Castro escribe varios artículos sobre las elecciones presidenciales en Estados Unidos. Cuba inicia una campaña para generar presión internacional contra el embargo de Estados Unidos. Por la 17ma vez consecutiva la Asamblea General de

Naciones Unidas vota mayoritariamente por el fin del embargo comercial de Estados Unidos contra Cuba.

Domestic Affairs

October 1: Cubans marked International Day of Older Persons with the inauguration of the 8th course of the University for the Elderly. Thousands of senior citizens over 60 years have already graduated from the higher education course. With a population of more than 800,000, the province of Villa Clara boasts a life expectancy rate of over 78.2 years, one of the highest such indicators in the country, while 20 percent of the local population, some 151,000 citizens, is 60 years or older. In the central Cuban territory, 43 health attention centres for the elderly add to the social stability and high educational level of the aging population. Also included are clubs of the elderly, where persons of old age take exercises and participate in cultural activities that help improve their quality of life, plus a number of elderly homes. According to experts from the National Statistics Office, 1,700,000 Cubans are 60 years or older, which places the country on the top of the list of Latin American countries with the largest aging populations (*ACN*, 1/10/08).

October 2: The Party of Democratic Solidarity, a moderate group within the Cuban opposition, revealed a proposal for the "economic restructuring" of the island through the creation of small and medium independent businesses. The PSD, as the party is known, said that Cuba "demands an urgent economic restructuring" and that the government's "persistence" in following the current economic model confirms that "real socialism as an economic, political and social system has failed." The PSD plan conceives of "an initial process based on independent small and medium companies," which could be private, cooperatives or mixed firms, as a way to revitalize the economy and create jobs. The group said that the small and medium businesses "would help reduce the exodus of Cubans" and would be a "factor to attract capital." In addition, the PSD called for strengthening "the right of Cubans who live abroad to invest in Cuba." The PSD rejected the government's initiative to hand over idle lands to peasants to work, considering it a "negative measure that will not resolve the food crisis in Cuba, which has already lasted 50 years." The group said that peasants, because they are not the owners of the land they receive to work, will try to "get the maximum out of it" and will thus degrade it. "The economic, political and social panorama is dismal and bleak as never before, above all after the passage of the hurricanes," the PSD said (*EFE*, 2/10/08).

October 5: Former Cuban president Fidel Castro has said his country will remain socialist and rejected calls by Western experts to speed up the reform process in the wake of the global financial crisis. In a commentary published in the official newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*, the leftist leader also criticized capitalist countries, especially the US, for the ongoing world financial crisis. "We are not a developed capitalist country in crisis, whose leaders are going crazy today looking for solutions amid depression, inflation, the lack of markets and unemployment; we are and should remain socialists," the 82-year-old former president said. "The production and distribution of food and construction materials, I reiterate, have an absolute priority at this time," Castro said, referring to the recent damage that the island sustained from two hurricanes. Fidel

Castro's latest commentary, like other recent commentaries he has written, focussed on the economic situation in Cuba, which is suffering from shortages of food, fuel and other essential products ([We Are and We Should Be Socialists](#); *Indo--Asian News Service*, 6/10/08).

October 6: A rapprochement between Cuban and Muslim culture is being promoted with the exhibition of a copy of the Koran at the Majagua Municipal museum, in the island's central Ciego de Avila province. The book will be exhibited through October in this facility thanks to its loan by Gladis Jatib, daughter of Lebanese businessman Alejandro Jatib Jatib, who lived in Cuba from 1927 until his death a couple of years ago. The Majagua Museum contributes to the cultural enrichment of all ages of people in this municipality, with several activities held on a regular basis, explained Yulieyka Echemendia, who runs the facility (*ACN*, 6/10/08).

October 6: Blogging has finally hit Cuba, despite the challenge of gaining access to the Internet and the limited number of home computers on the island, and the emergence of a Cuban community of bloggers may soon be more than just wishful thinking. "I think blogging from Cuba is an important way of making our reality and opinions known and of communicating with the rest of the world," Roger Trabas, a self-taught computer programmer and author of a site called "Kilometro Cero", told the press. "The biggest challenge is getting an Internet connection," admitted Trabas, who has to access the Internet from work and also deal with problems such as low speed. Only 5.2 percent of the respondents to the 2007 Survey on Access to Selected Information and Communication Services, conducted by the National Statistics Bureau (ONE), used a computer at home, while 88.8 percent used computers at their place of work or study. Government policy has prioritised access to the new information and communication technologies in scientific and educational centres, cultural institutions and state bodies, over individual use. "It's not easy, but it all depends on how determined you are," observed Trabas, who writes about a variety of subjects on his website, from computer programming to aspects of life in Cuba. Nobody knows exactly how many blogs are produced in this Caribbean island nation. The Bloggers Cuba directory lists a mere 14 personal web pages, while the site "Blogs sobre Cuba," which includes blogs hosted from other countries, attests to some 650. For its part, the directory of the non-governmental Cuban Journalist Union (UPEC) indexes a total of 174 blogs (*IPS*, 6/10/08).

October 6: The president of the Christian Liberation Movement (CLM), Oswaldo Paya Sardinas, has denounced the aggression against Cuban prisoner of conscience Luis Enrique Ferrer Garcia, who has been placed in solitary confinement and denied all communication with his family. In a press release, Paya explained that Ferrer, who is also a member of the CLM and a founder of the Varela Project, was "condemned in April of 2003 to 28 years in prison. He is currently confined to the Mar Verde prison in Santiago de Cuba." Likewise, he said, "Luis Enrique has been in solitary confinement and has been denied the right to communicate via telephone with his family, something that he was able to do a few minutes per week before." After revealing that "the prison guards threatened to dress him in a prisoner's suit in order to provoke him, as the majority of the prisoners wear civil dress or true rags due to the calamitous conditions in which they are

held,” Paya underscored that “Luis Enrique Ferrer has a skin infection that has persisted for months and is now affecting parts of his head.” The guards, “under the direction of State Security,” Paya continued, “harass and molest him constantly under diverse pretexts, in a true psychological war in the midst of the inhumane conditions of the prison” (*CNA*, 7/10/08).

October 7: Preparations for the 18th International Book Fair ‘Cuba 2009’, scheduled for February 12-22, 2009, are underway in the Caribbean nation. Organizers of the event announced that Chile will be the guest of honour this time. The fair will also be dedicated to renowned writers Fina Garcia Marruz, winner of the National Literature Award, and Jorge Ibarra, and also to the Havana-based Casa de las Americas cultural centre on the occasion of its 50th anniversary (*ACN*, 8/10/08).

October 8: Fruits and vegetables are getting hard to find across Cuba after hurricanes wiped out crops, but the government is tapping food reserves to bolster the monthly food ration that Cubans have received for decades. It said it would step up imports when needed to make sure no one goes hungry, a situation that could arise by December when diplomats estimate Cuba's reserves will run out. A survey of major cities and the hardest-hit provinces found that supplies of vegetables and fruits had dried up, even in the usually well-supplied black market. But starches and proteins could still be found with an effort. "The problem is you have to be at the markets when something comes in, because supply is irregular," said Carlos Pena, a state worker in Holguin province. Cubans say the monthly ration usually provides enough basic food to get through about two weeks, and then they have to supplement it with purchases. Across much of the country the ration has been increased with additional rice, beans, sugar, cooking oil, a few cans of fish and meat, crackers and other basics, according to people interviewed. They said they had been told the additional food would be provided through March, which is when the government has said it expects the shortages to ease (*Reuters*, 8/10/08).

October 8: Cuba broke its record for domestic and foreign students studying medical sciences in the communist island country, with a total of 200,000 this year, the Communist Party daily Granma reported citing public health ministry sources. Close to 23,000 of the students are foreigners, most them coming from developing countries, Granma said, claiming that this is a result of the Cuban government's traditional policy of international solidarity. Cuba has four medical science institutes, 24 schools of medicine, four of stomatology and four devoted to nursing and technology, Granma said. More than 26,000 people teach medical science courses on the island (*DPA*, 9/10/08).

October 10: Cubans gathered at Havana’s colonial section to pay tribute to Carlos Manuel de Cespedes, known as the Father of the Cuban Homeland, for having been the initiator of the Independence war in 1868. Cespedes, a landowner in the eastern locality of La Demajagua, freed his slaves and called on them to fight the Spanish colonial rule, a historic action that marked the start of the Independence war against Spain in the 19th century. The Tribute-paying ceremony took place at the monument of Carlos Manuel de Cespedes raised at Havana’s Plaza de Armas. Attending the gathering were the director of the Jose Marti Program Office, Armando Hart Davalos; Revolution Commander Juan

Almeida Bosque; the Historian of the city, Eusebio Leal, and leaders of grassroots and political organizations (*ACN*, 10/10/08).

October 10: The president of the Cuban parliament, Ricardo Alarcon, presided over the national act held in Manzanillo to mark the 140th anniversary of the start of the independence wars in Cuba. He said the Revolution really emerged 140 years ago, when a group of Cubans expressed their commitment to fight for the total independence of the island. Alarcon said the Cuban nation emerged in 1868 with the beginning of the longest, cruellest and most unequal wars of the American continent that ended with a painful defeat of the Spanish colonialists. Alarcon made reference to the provisional government founded by Cuban independence leader Carlos Manuel de Cespedes in the city of Bayamo, between October 1868 and the following January. During that term, a black man and a worker were part of a government for the first time and the people were directly involved in the government decisions. The methods used at that time became the foundations for the current people's power assembly, explained Alarcon (*ACN*, 10/10/08).

October 10: In several provinces State Security forces and government supporters prevented members of the Central Dissident Coalition (CCO) from celebrating the 140th anniversary of El Grito de Yara, a historical date which marks the beginning of the war of independence against Spain. In Cienfuegos, dozens of people surrounded the homes of Alejandro Tur Valladares, co-President of the CCO, and of Ricardo Pupo Sierra, territorial delegate of Plantados Hasta la Libertad y la Democracia en Cuba. Ernesto Mederos was detained in Colón, Matanzas. In Santa Clara, Yuniesky García was arrested while the homes of Idania Yanes, Yesmy Elena Mena, Idalberto González, Yoel Mariano Bencomo, Roque Emilio Martínez, Celestino Hernández, Ana Alfonso and Guillermo Fariñas were also surrounded. The police took the identification cards of Fidel Rodríguez, Alexis Oms y Yordi Tápanes and placed them under house arrest. The same happened to Ángel Luis Gallardo, and Luís Silvano Omen, in Báez. In the city of Placetas, Amado Ruiz Moreno was taken to the police station; while Blas Fortín, Dora Lara and Loreto Hernández were put under house arrest. Similarly, the homes of Orestes Suárez, Nancy García and Félix Reyes were besieged in Ranchuelo, as was that of Guillermo Pérez, in Manicaragua. (*Cubanet*, 17/10/08).

October 11: Cuba is limiting the quantity of basic fruits and vegetables people can buy at farmers markets, irritating some customers but ensuring there is enough to go around. Cubans who initially worried about getting enough to eat now seem confident they won't go hungry, despite the destruction of 30% of the island's crops last month by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. However, there are long lines and food is not plentiful. The government is delivering all items distributed each month through the universal ration that provides Cubans with up to two weeks' worth of food, including eggs, beans, rice and potatoes. Extra food has been added in some hard-hit provinces. But the food available at farmers markets has dwindled, prompting the government to limit purchases and cap prices (*AP*, 11/10/08).

October 11: Cuba has already received over 230 international relief aid shipments worth 17 million dollars out of the 478 offers -worth 51 million dollars- that have been made after the passage of hurricanes Gustav and Ike, an official source reported. According to Ministry of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation coordination and planning Chief Agustin Cabello, donations have come from 71 countries and 12 international organizations. Over 135,000 have benefited from donations consisting of items of personal hygiene, clothes, shoes, tents, blankets, bottled water and roofing material, he added. Granma daily said humanitarian food aid is being given free of charge to residents from hurricane-hit provinces such as Pinar del Río, Guantánamo, Holguín, Las Tunas, Camagüey and the Isle of Youth. In Pinar del Río's Los Palacios municipality, which was hit by the two hurricanes, 48 storm-proof houses will be built with the help of the Venezuelan government. Over 2,500 tons of relief aid has been received, as part of an unprecedented solidarity drive worldwide and within the island state. All donors or their representatives are allowed to have control of their relief aid upon arrival to its final destination, according to officials from the ministry of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation (ACN, 11/10/08).

October 12: Courts in Havana have imposed punishment ranging from prison time to fines on 85 people for "hoarding, theft, undue appropriation and other illegal activities" in the wake of the hurricanes that recently hit the island, the official press reported Sunday. City of Havana People's Court Chief Judge Armando Torres told the weekly Tribuna that punishment was meted out to the "authors of serious lack of social discipline, speculators and resellers of food and essential articles" after Hurricanes Ike and Gustav hit the island. Hurricane Ike, which battered the island September 7-9, and Gustav, which hit western Cuba on August 30, wiped out hundreds of thousands of hectares of farmland, damaged or destroyed 500,000 dwellings and caused total losses of more than \$5 billion, according to the Cuban government. The punishment ranges "from deprivation of freedom for the authors of serious crimes, as repeat offenders, to correctional work, with or without confinement, and fines," the judge said. The Cuban government said September 29 that it would punish speculators and those who hoarded food in the wake of the natural disasters. Police have launched operations in recent weeks targeting the sale on the black market of all types of products, seizing property and arresting numerous suspects (EFE, 12/10/08).

October 13: The Country's Economic Plan and Budget for 2009 will be at the centre of debates by all Cuban workers during November, according to an announcement recently made by the Cuban Workers Confederation (CTC). During a meeting held by the general secretaries of all 19 national unions that make up the CTC, the head of the organization, Salvador Valdes Mesa, underscored the importance of the discussion process, given the inevitable adaptation of economic plans and budgets to the country's new circumstances and to the strategy drawn up by the Cuban government aimed at recovering from the damage inflicted by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. The discussion and analysis process will be centered on issues such as the need to increase production, productivity and income levels; lower costs, boost saving strategies, particularly in the areas of electricity and fuels; fine-tune programs aimed at improving working and health conditions at work centers, as well as other tasks linked to rigorous control of budgetary expenditures (ACN,

13/10/08).

October 13: Following a recommendation by the Politburo of the Central Committee of Cuba's Communist Party, the Cuban Council of State decided to promote Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas to the post of Vice President of the Council of Ministers. According to a note read on Cuban television, the new VP will oversee and coordinate the work of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and the Ministry of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation as well as activities carried out in those areas by other bodies of the central administration of the state (*ACN*, 14/10/08).

October 14: Jorge Chaple González was released after 18 days in prison at the Capri police station, in the City of Havana. On September 26th, eight police officers burst into his home with a search warrant under the pretext of dismantling an illegal shoe factory. They removed stickers with the word CHANGE from the door. Chaple, who is the president of the dissident group "Fraternal Brothers for Dignity," has been a shoemaker for a long time and holds a self-employment license. They seized shoetrees, shoemaking tools, a pocket radio, several CDs on civic activism in Eastern Europe, copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a photo of Antonio Maceo, namesake of the small independent library that Chaple runs. The authorities could not charge him with anything and released him after he paid a fine of 200 pesos. (*Cubanet*, 17/10/08).

October 14: The results of a study on the use of mangrove trees for treatment of gastro-duodenum ulcers will be presented at a forum to take place in the province of Havana. Dr. Luz Maria Sánchez told the local press that the natural medicine made from of mangrove tree does not cause side effects and has proven more effective than other drugs currently used to treat the condition. Sánchez said the mangrove pill will now undergo clinical trials and if approved will replace imports of similar medicines. The effects of the product on other conditions such as stomach cancer are also under study (*ACN*, 14/10/08).

October 14: Cuba gives priority to the delivery of essential nutrients enriched food to vulnerable groups such as pregnant women, children and elders, in order to cover basic diet needs in the country. Alvaro Garcia, director of the Cuban Research Institute of the Food Industry, declared to the local press that the Institute is paying special attention to the adding of minerals as iron, and B complex vitamins, after the battering of hurricanes Ike and Gustav to the food industry. He mentioned as examples the compotes and milk for children, and the milk supplements given to pregnant women, though he highlighted that other sectors will benefit as well (*ACN*, 14/10/08).

October 14: Dissidents in Cuba charged that President Raul Castro's government reversed decades of policy and signed UN human rights agreements only as a "deceitful strategy" seeking international approval. "This was a deceitful strategy used to court international public opinion to lend legitimacy to the new president" Raul Castro, 77, said a statement from the outlawed Cuban National Liberal Party (PNLC). "We are convinced there is no interest whatsoever in implementing what is set out in the (UN) agreements," it stressed. On February 24, four days after being officially named to succeed his ailing

brother Fidel, Raul Castro had Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque sign the agreements, which Fidel Castro had ruled out. On August 7, in coordination with 13 opposition groups, the PNLC asked Cuba's National Assembly to publicize the content of the UN agreements, and foster a national debate on them, so that Cubans -- in a country where the government controls the media -- are aware of their internationally recognized political rights. But 68 days on, there has been no answer, the party statement said, underscoring "the paralysis of the political will of Cuba's rulers," they charged (*AFP*, 14/10/08).

October 14: After a two-week hunger strike, political prisoner Julián Antonio Mone Borrero was sent to the Guantanamo provincial hospital in critical condition. Mone, who was arrested last September 30th and is accused of "assault," for which he might face a sentence of up to 5 years of prison, has demanded to be released immediately (*Cubanet*, 17/10/08).

October 16: Yosbel Yordis Torres, dissident and promoter of the Corriente Martiana Movement, has remained in detention since his arrest by the National Revolutionary Police (PNR), in Camaguey, on October 12th. "Yosbel, 25, was detained for selling sewing thread at the train station in Camaguey. This is how he was supporting his family, since he couldn't find a job due to his dissident activities," said Yosiel Hernández, delegate in Camaguey of Corriente Martiana (*Cubanet*, 16/10/08).

October 16: The population in Central Cienfuegos province welcomed an increase in the offer of meat, including goat, lamb and pork, at state and farmer markets amidst the shortage of products caused by the strong impact on the island food sector by recent storms. Cienfuegos' citizens in the different municipalities and the main city have access to a steady supply of those commodities provided by the local EGAME Livestock Enterprise. Enterprise director Julio Jovas told the Cuban News Agency that out of the total livestock production in the eight municipalities, 30 percent of lamb and 39 percent of goat are funnelled to local markets, as well as to maternity homes and senior citizen clubs. The population also has the option of purchasing live animals to be raised in home backyards (*ACN*, 17/10/08).

October 16: Authorities referred to the "¡Curadores, go home!" exhibit as "propaganda with clear political purposes" and accused its organizer, artist Sandra Ceballos, of "playing along with the servants of the empire," according to an official statement from the National Council of Plastic Arts (CNAP). Sandra Ceballos accused the CNAP of "defamation and slander" and defended "the work in favour of art, and only of art," that the Espacio Aglutinador project has carried out for fourteen years. Ceballos asked CNAP to show "proof" that the exhibit is a "political show" and challenged authorities to produce the alleged list of guests "with the names of individuals and representatives of the government of the United States" referred to in the official statement (*Cubaencuentro*, 17/10/08).

October 17: Dissident leader Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello condemned in a report that Robert Alcides Riveras Yanes, son of Idania Yanes, was hit by a policeman on October

15th during an operation against several dissidents. According to the document, “a Special Brigade officer shoved Idania’s 8-year old son, Robert Alcides Riveras Yanes, in the chest, causing him to fall down.” The child had several bruises, adds the report. Roque Cabello says that after being released, the parents of Riveras Yanes went to “the Military Provincial attorney's office” to make a formal complaint. The following dissidents were arrested during the police raid: Ana Margarita Perdigón Brito, Yunieski García López, Loreto Hernández García, Juan Ariel Rivero, Ernesto Mederos Rosarena, Miguel Cabrera Cabrera, Jorge Luis García Pérez Antúnez, Iris Pérez Aguilera, Idania Yanes Contreras, Alcides Riveras Rodríguez and Aramilda Contreras Rodríguez. They were released very late in the night and taken to their respective municipalities (*EFE*, 18/10/08).

October 17: The roofs of school and health facilities in eastern Las Tunas province (660 kilometres east of Havana city) are being repaired with 4,000 zinc sheets and 5,000 wooden strips donated by the Dominican Republic. Granma newspaper said that, just a few hours after the beginning of the distribution of this aid, everybody agrees that it was the right thing to use those resources to repair these facilities severely damaged by Hurricane Ike’s winds that battered Cuba last September. This decision, analyzed in the Civil Defence Council at the request of the provincial government, will benefit some 1,420 families whose children study in 13 schools currently being repaired. Also several senior citizen clubs are being repaired in Jesus Menendez, Puerto Padre and Manatí municipalities, as well as a maternity home and a dozen medical facilities (*ACN*, 17/10/08).

October 17: The Provincial Popular Court of Holguin prosecuted 25 people for exhibiting pre-criminal behaviour potentially leading to danger to society, and sentenced them to four years in prison, reported the official weekly paper “¡Ahora!” Judicial authorities told the local publication that the prosecuted individuals “had not committed any crime, but given their antisocial tendencies could commit them at any time” (*Cubaencuentro*, 19/10/08).

October 19: Cuba's first Russian Orthodox church was consecrated in Havana, in a ceremony attended by Cuban President Raul Castro. The consecration was part of a day of activities to celebrate improving Cuba-Russia ties. Russian diplomats and members of Cuba's small Russian community crowded into the cathedral for the service. The gold-domed Our Lady of Kazan cathedral was built over the last four years, discreetly and slowly, mirroring the development of ties between Havana and Moscow. Most of the construction of the church, which is located in historic old Havana surrounded by Spanish colonial architecture, was paid for by the Cubans. Castro, dressed in a dark suit and tie, joined the congregation as the cathedral was consecrated, but left before the liturgical service began. International press was not allowed during the ceremony. Metropolitan Kirill, the head of foreign relations for the Russian Orthodox Church, had travelled from Moscow to perform the ceremony, accompanied by several government ministers. "This is a monument to Russian-Cuban friendship and all the efforts that have preserved our relations including the most difficult moments of the Cold War," he said (*BBC*, 20/10/08).

October 20: Political prisoner Ariel Sigler Amaya is in “critical health condition” in the Cienfuegos provincial hospital Gustavo Aldereguia Lara. The dissident’s wife, one of the Ladies in White, Noelia Pedraza Jimenez, said that 46-year-old Sigler Amaya, has been in hospital since last September 22nd, “confined to a wheelchair, affected by polyneuropathy, according to doctors of the Ministry of Interior.” Sigler Amaya was sentenced to 20 years in prison during the summary trials that sent 75 dissidents to jail in the spring of 2003 (*Cubanet*, 20/10/08).

October 20: Racism has been gaining ground in the last several years since the emergence of the inequalities brought about by the crisis of the 90’s, forcing Cuba look for a national debate to address the issue through measures and laws. “No country in the world can solve social problems without an interaction between the government, society and the community,” said bibliographer Tomas Fernandez during the presentation of a book on the topic. Last December the Communist Party (PCC) created a commission to deal with this issue and Cuban television has been airing ads against racism. ‘Cuban color’, a project by the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC), raises awareness on racial problems, whereas the illegal Civil Committee for Racial Integration (CIR), calls for a national debate. “There has been a lack concrete policies to corner racism, and the debate needs to be taken to the people,” said moderate dissident Manuel Cuesta, also a member of the CIR (*AFP*, 20/10/08).

October 21: Cuba's official press said that the island's courts are handing down tough sentences to people caught trying to exploit the emergency created by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. "The courts are acting with greater severity (...) against those who try to obtain illicit personal benefit in the special scenario created in each territory by the passage of the hurricanes," Communist Party daily Granma said. Granma said that "the majority of the people are immersed" in the reconstruction, but "some are committing crimes and social indiscipline" that forced authorities to "raise the rigor and efficacy of the courts' actions." With the aggravation of Cubans' already difficult living conditions, "unscrupulous people" - Granma said - began "speculating with the prices of food products, hoarding resources, removing telephone (and) electrical (...) wires, appropriating property and illegally sacrificing livestock." Also, the paper said that "there have been cases of (people) appropriating construction materials allocated for the reconstruction, disruptions and other illicit economic activities." The response of the Supreme Court came on September 22 with an instruction issued to the judiciary to act with greater rigor in handing down sentences. The courts are applying Article 53 of the Penal Code, which governs crimes that "take advantage of the circumstances of a public calamity" (*EFE*, 21/10/08).

October 23: Dissident Idania Yanes Contreras, member of the Central Opposition Coalition, has been on a hunger strike since October 15th in demand of justice for the beating of her son and several activists that day, at her house, during a police raid. The dissident said that former political prisoner Jorge Luis García Perez (Antunez) joins her in her protest (*Cubaencuentro*, 23/10/08).

October 23: In a country long accustomed to shortages, the back-to-back assaults of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike in late August and early September spurred widespread shortages of food. Most of the flour in the hands of the state was diverted to the hardest-hit provinces. "There's no flour anywhere," said Olga, a 57-year-old entrepreneur who pays the state a monthly \$35 fee for the right to sell pizza. She supplemented the flour she purchased from the state with cheaper supplies bought under-the-table from bakeries. Not anymore. The state has started a zero-tolerance crackdown on anyone suspected of profiteering from the national suffering, including those accused of stealing state resources or price gouging on food. "If they catch me with flour bought under the table from the bakery, they'll put me away for 10 years," said Olga, who asked that her full name not be used for fear of reprisal. Cuban media said that courts are getting tough on price gouging and other post-hurricane crimes, handing down jail sentences to nearly one-fourth of the people tried in September and October for allegedly stealing government materials or setting prices above government limits. Fidel, a 50-something-year-old Havana resident, said police caught him last month with eight packages of crackers sold at state-run bread shops. He said he intended to sell them for a slight profit. He shared a cell that day with another man jailed for possession of 100 head of garlic. On October 21, Fidel began serving a one-year jail sentence for his offence. "I'm not a thief or a terrorist," he said. "I was just struggling to make four pesos" (*Sun Sentinel*, 23/10/08).

October 27: Cuba's Education Minister Ena Elsa Velazquez Cobiella toured the north and central zones of the province of Las Tunas, where the school year has still not begun at 10 boarding schools affecting 2,355 students. Seven weeks after the damage caused to 4,200 schools in Cuba by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, workers with the Ministry of Education are speeding up their efforts to repair schools and to provide special attention to students who started class late, reported Granma newspaper. Velazquez said that new roofing material has begun to arrive in Holguin, Las Tunas and Camaguey, and that UNICEF funding is helping to turn out zinc roofing material made in Las Tunas (*ACN*, 27/10/08).

October 27: A multiple disciplinary medical brigade is providing health care services in the communities most affected by the latest hurricanes. This is a new experience in westernmost Pinar del Rio province. The brigade is made up of 13 specialists, including orthopedics, gynecologists, surgeons, psychiatrists, psychologists and dentists, the last one with portable chairs in order to perform extractions or fillings, depending on the patient's needs. This initiative, besides avoiding the moving of patients and their relatives to the province's main city or to Havana City health centers reinforces the human factor in Cuba's health system, and it brings the doctors and people closer. This medical brigade has given over 1,600 consultations in a number of municipalities (*ACN*, 27/10/08).

October 28: Oswaldo Paya, leader of the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL), criticized the regime's "offensive" against the collection of new signatures for the Varela Project taking place in the whole country. "We began collecting new signatures several weeks ago, from province to province, and the repression is really unbearable and the language is more and more intolerant," said Payá. The Citizen Organizing Committee of

the Cuban Forum project is conducting the new signature collection campaign (*Cubaencuentro*, 28/10/08).

October 28: Cubans across the island paid tribute to Camilo Cienfuegos, one of the fighters of the war against Fulgencio Batista, on the 49th anniversary of his death. As is tradition, Cubans, including children gathered in groups to walk to the sea shore, sea walls or rivers to throw flowers for the revolutionary fighter, who died in a plane accident as he was flying to Havana from Camaguey after fulfilling a mission in that region (*ACN*, 29/10/08).

October 28: Raul Castro attended the inauguration of the 21st International Ballet Festival at the Garcia Lorca Hall of the Great Theater of Havana. During the opening gala, Culture Minister Abel Prieto read a letter sent by Fidel Castro, congratulating the Cuban National Ballet on its 60th anniversary and its director and founder, prima ballerina assoluta Alicia Alonso. The letter praised the exceptional merits of Alicia Alonso, who won the highest laurels even before the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Prieto also praised the Cuban International Ballet Festival, the oldest and most prestigious dance festival in the world, which was held even during the difficult times of the Cuban economic crisis of the 1990s or the so-called 'Special Period' (*ACN*, 29/10/08).

October 31: Debates on a social security bill to be introduced in Cuba have shown a wide support. Changes in the bill are based on the imminent aging of the Cuban population. More than three million workers have attended the debates and have supported the basic changes proposed by the Social Security Ministry to the present resolution, which includes extending the retirement age for men and women by five years. Alfredo Machado, with the national secretariat of the Cuban Workers Confederation (CTC) said 91 percent of all workers affiliated to the organization have participated in the discussion meetings. The meetings are due to end at the beginning of November to give way to provincial assemblies. Provincial deputies will analyze the suggestions made by the workers during the debate process, prior to the discussion by the National Assembly (*ACN*, 1/11/08).

Economy

October 1: The Cuban government is sending extra shipments of foods like beans and rice to the state markets to guard against supply shortages. The government-run daily *Juventud Rebelde* reported that the administrator of a market in the Cuban capital told the daily that "there exists a quantity of black beans that the state is going to allocate so the markets don't have a deficit of that product, and a quantity of tons of rice so that it remains stable and available to the public." Miyorquis added that the authorities summoned the heads of all the capital's markets to give them the information and reorganize some things that she did not specify. The daily reported, in addition, that the government approved an increase in the price paid to rice producers, adding that there had already been an increase in the supply of the grain. Independent farmers markets in Havana reacted by not displaying products for sale after the government decision

announced on Monday to respond with law enforcement to the higher prices. The government announced on September 29 that independent food markets would have to roll back prices to where they were before Hurricanes Gustav and Ike devastated Cuba. "Any attempt to break the law (...) will receive a quick, energetic reply," the government said in a statement. Juventud Rebelde confirmed that placing limits on the prices charged by agricultural producers is not a "definitive solution" and said it was making a tally of the lack of supply in capital markets. It added that the government's decisions "have not been understood fully by many vendors and not even by some consumers, so several markets (...) appeared almost deserted and with very scanty supplies" (*EFE*, 1/10/08).

October 1: Cuban First Vice-president Jose Ramon Machado Ventura said that the recovery process underway nationwide since the passage of hurricanes Gustav and Ike is working well. In statements to reporters in Bayamo, eastern Granma province, Machado Ventura stressed that the participation of those affected by the hurricanes and members of grassroots organizations and state institutions (including the Revolutionary Armed Forces) has been positive in the several territories hit by the storms. Due to the huge damage inflicted by the two natural phenomena not all problems can be immediately solved; however, the Cuban people and their Revolution will continue to make their efforts, said Machado Ventura, who is also member of the Political Bureau of Cuba's Communist Party. Machado Ventura said that amidst the struggle against the effects of the storms, Cuba currently experiences what he called special situations, which suggest a stronger fight against illegal actions in order to not leave space for those who try to benefit at the expense of collective difficulties (*ACN*, 1/10/08).

October 2: The Cuba-Minas Gerais Business Meeting was inaugurated in Havana aiming at increasing and diversifying bilateral trade relations between the Caribbean country and Brazil. The President of the Cuban Chamber of Commerce, Raul Becerra, said that after the visit to Cuba last January of Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, there has been a sustained development of bilateral trade. During the opening ceremony of the Business Meeting, the head of the Brazilian delegation, Petronio Machado, praised Cuba's development in the health sector, particularly in the production of medicines. He also expressed their interest in strengthening ties in this area and in others such as energy and urban transportation (*ACN*, 3/10/08).

October 3: Holding company AutoKrAZ (Kremenchuk, Center Ukraine) has unloaded the first batch of 20 sets for KrAZ trucks to Cuba, the holding press service reported. Before 1992, Cuba was one of the biggest importers of KrAZ technologies. In different periods of time, over 10,000 high-duty trucks from Kremenchuk were supplied to that market. Cuba's construction ministry asked AutoKrAZ to modernize its vehicles, including to replace the cabin and a number of assembly units. AutoKrAZ has opened a repair enterprise in Cuba's Cienfuegos. The project is being implemented together with local organization Somec on the basis of the functioning enterprise for repair of freight cars. Until the end of 2008, it is planned to unload 140 more sets for assembly of KrAZ trucks (*Ukrinform*, 3/10/08).

October 3: President of the Cuban Chamber of Commerce, Raul Becerra, extolled the importance of boosting economic relations with Brazil. In a meeting between businesspeople of Cuba and Minas Gerais, Becerra stressed the importance for both countries to continue increasing bilateral cooperation. Becerra indicated that from the 10 accords signed during President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's visit to Cuba last January, there was a sustained increase of bilateral trade. In the inaugural session, Petronio Machado, Vice President of Brazil's Chamber of Commerce, highlighted Cuba's effort in the health sector, mainly in the production of pharmaceuticals and expressed his interest in strengthening links in that and other areas like energy and urban transportation (*Prensa Latina*, 3/10/08).

October 3: The global financial crisis has dealt another blow to communist Cuba, already reeling from two powerful hurricanes and soaring import prices, and it could force the government to speed up reforms, Western diplomats and businessmen say. The crisis has made credit tighter and softened demand for nickel, the island's key export. It could also slow tourism revenues and financial support from family members living abroad. It comes at a particularly bad time for Cuba, where there were already signs of a mounting foreign exchange shortage before the crisis surged on Wall Street and hurricanes Ike and Gustav caused at least \$5 billion in damage, equivalent to more than 10 percent of Cuba's gross domestic product. The government began taking steps to ease its financial crunch, said one businessman, who like others interviewed, requested anonymity. "First they insisted suppliers allow 360 days for payment instead of 180. Then they told some suppliers and creditors they needed to restructure debt," he said. "Credit has always been hard to come by and expensive because of their payment history and US pressure. It's hard to see how it could become that much worse, but who knows," a European economic attaché said. When Raul Castro officially replaced ailing brother Fidel Castro as president in February, he instituted some small changes such as the opening of cell phone and computer sales to the public and began broader reforms in agriculture. The changes raised hopes, so far unfulfilled, of more reforms to modernize Cuba's state-run economy. "If Cuba quickens reform, for example opening up the retail sector to private individuals and cooperatives, that would help domestically and be a positive signal even to China," said a leader of the organization of Spanish companies operating in Cuba (*Reuters*, 3/10/08).

October 5: Cuba advanced in recovery work of electric service in the zones hit by hurricanes Gustav and Ike, by adding 250 thousand persons to the recovered areas. The Electric Union (EU) explained this was accomplished by using emergency electric generator groups working as micro-systems, with an additional cost in fuel input of 46 million dollars. Such units were not conceived to work continuously for a long time but do so now to alleviate the damage suffered by the power net and quicken the recovery of the service to the population, daily Granma said. A total of 100 of those generating units currently operate in the provinces of Pinar del Rio, Las Tunas, Camaguey and Holguin, including the special municipality of the Isle of Youth, affirmed EU engineer Ricardo Gonzalez. Even though there is an intensive work of the enterprise's brigades and from other organizations, there are still 80 thousand houses and work centres affected by the lack of power due to the severe damages left by the hurricanes (*Invasor*, 5/10/08).

October 6: A government-backed body is likely to resume accepting new applications for trade insurance on exports to Cuba as early as December, Japanese officials said. Nippon Export and Investment Insurance and Cuba's central bank have struck a basic deal that the Japanese government-backed body will insure up to a total of 6 billion yen in 2009 for business with Cuba, the officials said. The underwriter suspended accepting new trade insurance applications for business with Cuba in August after the central bank failed to pay for Japanese imports on time. The insurer, also known as NEXI, will formally decide on the resumption after seeing whether the central bank will be able to pay part of its liabilities, the officials said. In 2008, it insured a total of 22 billion yen in connection with Japanese exports to Cuba. The central bank, which handles settlements for Cuba with Japanese firms, has a debt of about 25.5 billion yen from NEXI. The central bank has promised to pay its debt to NEXI over the next three to four years, the officials said. Cuba was cash-short on the back of rising fuel and food prices, according to the officials (*Kyodo News*, 6/10/08).

October 6: The Cuban Minister of the Economy, José Luis Rodríguez, said that the country will not fall into a "desperate situation" in spite of multi-million losses and the scarcity of food and other products in the wake of two hurricanes, informed the official weekly newspaper *Trabajadores*. "So solutions need more time, but we are not going to step back, nor will it become a desperate situation," said Rodríguez. He added that, "the leadership of the revolution has instructed us to look for resources wherever they are." The Minister made the announcements during a meeting with the commission of support for the northeastern province of Las Tunas, one of the hardest hit by hurricane "Ike." "Efforts are also focused on guaranteeing essential services to the population, as well as on food rations and food reinforcements," said Rodríguez (*EFE*, 6/10/08).

October 6: Many Cubans thought they'd left behind forever the grim, hungry days that were the norm just after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and, with it, the loss of billions of dollars in subsidies for the Communist state. But what government officials used to call euphemistically "the special period" has returned, thanks to recent back-to-back visits of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, which devastated farm production. Now, years after the economic crisis of the 1990s, Cubans are again facing the spectre of hunger. "There isn't a single province or municipality in Cuba that wasn't affected," said Vice Minister of Agriculture Alcides Lopez. Cubans still receive a monthly food ration, but there's now less to go around. In response, the government has set price limits and harsh penalties for anyone who breaks them. The government imposed the price limits just weeks after it raised the price of gasoline by 70 percent, to \$5.50 per gallon, which made it more expensive for farmers to get their crops to market. A cartoon in the state newspaper painted vendors who profit from the food shortage as enemies of the people. But economist and government critic Oscar Espinosa Chepe told the press that the government shares some of the blame. "It's a desert," he said, referring to the empty shelves of one market. "There's nothing for sale. The government has adopted fixed prices for farmers at a time when the price of gasoline has gone up." That means that many of Cuba's most productive farmers -- those who work in part for profit -- can no

longer afford to sell their goods, he said. Authorities say this crisis could last six months (*CNN*, 6/10/08).

October 6: The two hurricanes that ravaged Cuba at summer's end won't keep tourists from the Caribbean island during the high season but global economic woes might, industry watchers said. They said there have been no cancellations of tours booked for the December-March peak season and that an expected increase in Canadian visitors should help offset any reduction in Europeans put off by rising airfares and other economic problems. "There will be some decline in tourism from Europe as air fares are up 30 percent, but we expect another big jump from Canada to make up at least part the difference, along with new markets like Russia," the representative of a European hotel chain told Reuters on condition his name not be used. Immediately after the storms, some tours to hard-hit areas were cancelled, but not for the months ahead, he said. "The hotels are completely taken by tour operators starting in late December and to date there have been no cancellations of flights or rooms." The bigger uncertainty now, he said, was the financial crisis roiling markets around the world. "We will have to see what happens with the global economy over the next months, but so far we see a good season despite it all." The number of tourists from Canada, already the top tourism country for Cuba, could rise as much as 20 percent to 30 percent because of the weakness of the US dollar and increased marketing, the sources said (*Reuters*, 6/10/08).

October 6: Cuba's economy minister said the island would not face a "desperate situation" despite the estimated \$5 billion in losses caused by two hurricanes that pummelled the Caribbean nation within the space of 10 days, the official weekly *Trabajadores* reported. "There are processes whose solutions will require more time, but we are not going to go backward, nor will a desperate situation be created," Economy Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez said, adding that, "the revolution's leadership has indicated that it will seek resources wherever they can be found." The minister spoke at a meeting with the aid committee in the northeastern province of Las Tunas, one of the regions most affected by Hurricane Ike. The economy minister said Gen. Raul Castro's government has formulated strategies for manufacturing and distributing roofing materials, as well as for importing such products. "The efforts are also focusing on guaranteeing essential services to the population, as well as food rations and bolstering projected food supplies", Rodriguez said after a week in which shortages plagued the markets in Havana. "Despite the enormous economic losses, no need will be left unmet," the economy minister said (*EFE*, 6/10/08).

October 7: Beijing Great Wall Motor Corporation has been awarded an order for 4,500 pick-ups, worth more than 300 million yuans, by the government of Cuba. The company has shipped the first 1,500 pick-ups, which are expected to arrive at the port of Havana at the end of October. The remaining 3,000 pick-ups are scheduled for delivery to Cuba by late 2008 (*ChinaRealNews*, 8/10/08).

October 7: Havana province's tobacco growers are equipping camps, industries and tobacco barns for the upcoming tobacco-leaf harvest, which will be joined by an additional force known as 9th Congress of the Cuban Workers Federation Contingent. At

present, several brigades of workers in the economic sector are repairing the facilities damaged by hurricanes Gustav and Ike, said Adrian Ramirez Fernandez, member of the Tobacco Workers Union's provincial secretariat. The working force involved in the tobacco harvest, made up of women and men from nine Cuban provinces, is characterized by high efficiency and productivity, Ramirez Fernandez stressed. He also underscored the workers' commitment to recover all tobacco-curing sheds that were swept away by the strong winds associated with the two meteors, in order to kick off the harvest as soon as possible (*ACN*, 7/10/08).

October 8: The encouragement of local initiatives to produce construction materials, including the sector of prefabricated elements, is at the centre of a national strategy to contribute resources for the country's recovery from Gustav and Ike. In statements to Cuban television, deputy construction minister Rafael Soler said that in order to step up actions new natural reserves located in the affected territories are currently being exploited to obtain arid materials for construction efforts. The measure will also contribute to lower fuel consumption in the transportation of construction materials coming from quarries in other provinces. The national strategy also stipulates the setting up of mobile brick-construction plants in the affected territories, while local production of roof tiles, water tanks and items is being empowered, said the deputy minister (*ACN*, 8/10/08).

October 10: Communist Cuba has begun leasing land to private farmers, cooperatives and state companies for the first time in decades in a step forward for one of President Raul Castro's main economic reforms, official media said. The move could not come at a better time, local economists said, as the country struggles with food shortages after hurricanes Ike and Gustav devastated crops last month. "First parcels of vacant land handed over in Granma" said a headline in *Demajagua*, the Communist party newspaper for the south-eastern province of Granma. The report was the first mention in Cuba that land has actually been turned over since the plan was announced in July and applications were opened in September. The weekly paper said 33 parcels totalling 350 hectares were leased to farmers, cooperatives, individuals and other entities. *Demajagua* said applications had been submitted for 61,808 hectares of the 76,675 hectares of state lands in Granma. There has been no announcement at the national level that handovers have begun and it is not clear if the process has started in other provinces. Farmers in central Camaguey province told the press they had been advised that land leases there would begin within a few weeks (*Reuters*, 10/10/08).

October 9: The presence of 1,614 tourists in Holguin's resorts shows the gradual recovery of the sector in this eastern Cuban province after the passage of Hurricane Ike, at the start of the high season for the leisure industry. Hugo Huguet, with the Tourism Office of the province, said 15 of the 18 hotels in the area are in service, including the Saetía Key and the Pinares de Mayarí motel. Huguet confirmed that nine airlines have re-established their flights to the province, in particular from Canada, Germany, Italy and Holland (*ACN*, 9/10/08).

October 10: Cuba's First Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, insisted on the need to speed up the planting of short-cycle crops to relieve the agricultural losses caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike in the island. On a visit to the "26th of July" Agricultural Production Unit in Banes, Holguin, Machado stressed that the current situation in the country demands the optimum use of the land and resources in order to achieve the highest yield. Machado Ventura said short-cycle crops like sweet potatoes, corn, beans and squash should be planted to be ready within the shortest time possible for distribution. First Secretary of the Cuban Communist Party in Holguin, Miguel Diaz Canel, who accompanied Ventura on the tour, told the Vice President that more than 16,308 acres of different crops have been already planted in the province (*ACN*, 10/10/08).

October 11: The upcoming Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government, slated for El Salvador, will look at the future of regional cinema, in tune with an agreement reached by the regional Congress on Culture, recently held in Mexico. "The Audiovisual World" was the topic of the congress, which considered the role of cinema crucial for the formation of national identities and the support of the peoples' diversity. Pablo Pacheco, vice-president of the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC) told the Cuban News Agency that among the proposals to be submitted to the Summit is the creation of policies that back regional cinema in Ibero-American scenarios (*ACN*, 11/10/08).

October 12: Cuba's sugar minister said the coming sugar harvest would be similar to the previous one, around 1.5 million tonnes of raw sugar, despite damage inflicted by hurricanes, state-run media reported. "The recovery in the sugar sector in Cuba guarantees the coming harvest will reach at least an output similar to the last one," Minister Ulises Rosales del Toro was quoted as stating in central Sancti Spiritus province as he joined workers in the fields to plant cane. Hurricanes Gustav and Ike struck Cuba in a 10-day period starting August 30, blowing off roofs and causing other damage to just about every mill in the country. The Sugar Ministry said at the time 190,000 hectares of cane were flattened and 108,000 hectares flooded. "Before the storms, conditions existed to increase output 20 percent to 30 percent, nevertheless we can still have a harvest superior to the previous one, not so much in terms of volume of cane but efficiency," the weekly trade union newspaper, *Trabajadores*, quoted the minister as stating. Rosales del Toro, in his first statement since the storms hit, said resources were already present in the country to repair mills, which was not the case during the previous harvest (*Reuters*, 12/10/08).

October 13: Cuban authorities still have not supplied materials for the reconstruction of 88,000 homes damaged by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike in the western tobacco-growing region of Vueltaabajo, Communist Party daily *Granma* said. The newspaper said that in that region of Pinar del Rio province some 88,000 homes remain damaged, "but no materials have been given to their owners to repair them." *Granma* said that, "at the same time, agricultural production is scraping bottom, with the consequent reduction in deliveries to the markets." "Nonetheless, recovery is progressing without chaos or discouragement," the newspaper said. In the tobacco sector, *Habanos S.A.* made a

preliminary estimate that between 800 and 1,000 tons of leaf were lost, more than 3,400 tobacco-curing barns were totally wiped out and almost 2,000 were partially damaged. But the company, a joint venture of the Cuban state and Britain's Imperial Tobacco, says that it guarantees the supply of cigars of the famous Cohiba, Montecristo and Partagas brands for next year, although "undoubtedly" it will need a sizeable infusion of financing (*EFE*, 13/10/08).

October 14: Spain will begin talks soon to restructure Cuba's debt to ease trade between the two countries, Spain's Foreign Minister said, and is to offer credit of up to 100 million euros to help pay for hurricane damage. "The Cuban government wants to begin repayment as soon as the new terms are fixed," Miguel Angel Moratinos told a news conference, declining to comment on the size of the debt pile, being restructured or provide further details. Cuba suspended debt payments in 2001. Spain is also arranging a 50-100 million euro credit line for Cuba to help the island rebuild its hurricane-damaged infrastructure. Spain is Cuba's third-largest trading partner with commercial flows between the two countries amounting to about \$1 billion a year (*Reuters*, 14/10/08).

October 14: Cuba is open to foreign investment "proposals" in the sugar industry and hopes to receive offers, said the Minister of that sector, Ulises Rosales del Toro. "I hope someone approaches us," said Rosales to journalists during the opening of the 10th International Congress on Sugar Cane and its Derivatives, which was held in Havana. The Minister indicated that, for the moment, the Cuban sugar industry does not suffer the effects of the international financial crisis. "We have made the investments and we have the resources here," he said, although he admitted that, "of course, it will have an impact in the future" (*EFE*, 14/10/08).

October 15: The electricity service has been restored in most of the territories affected by hurricanes Ike and Gustav, said power company executive Ricardo Gonzalez at The Round Table TV program. In the province of Camaguey, 99.99 percent of the service has been restored; 98 percent in Holguin and 93.2 percent in Las Tunas. In Pinar del Rio and the Isla de la Juventud the figure is 96 percent, *Granma* newspaper reported. The municipalities of Manati and Puerto Padre in Las Tunas; Gibara in Holguin and La Palma in Pinar del Rio are now at between 80 and 90 percent with power; and Jesus Menendez in Las Tunas has 55 percent hooked up. In these provinces, 72,000 people are still without electricity (*ACN*, 15/10/08).

October 15: The Camilo Cienfuegos refinery, located in central Cienfuegos province, will soon have a new 50,000 cubic meter tank, as part of a group of a series of new investments. This deposit will increase the refinery's storage capacity, which already has four 20,000 cubic meter tanks under construction, reported *Juventud Rebelde* newspaper. Julio Sanchez Gil, director of the Expanding Project of the PDV-CUPET joint venture, explained that as part of the fitting-out of this great-capacity tank they already finished the outer part wrapping and sandblasted it and added the first layer of paint. Sanchez Gil announced that the planks will arrive next December as well as other supplies and accessories for all the new storage system. These investments play a key role in the country's economy, which needs to increase its oil storage capacity, an aspect

emphasised by the Cuban Minister of the Basic Industry, Yadira Garcia, in a recent visit to the refinery (ACN, 15/109/08).

October 16: An important delegation from the “Investors’ Club of Romania” will travel next month to Havana to explore the Cuban market and study investment possibilities. According to a note published in the website of the Cuban Foreign Minister (MINREX), the visit of this delegation, made up of 15 businesspeople, will also contribute to the promotion of bilateral trade relations between Cuba and Romania. Some of the members of the delegation are Vasile Dumbrava, Executive President of the Club; Iulian Velicu, Vice President of EXIMBANK; and Ioan Piturescu, President of Small and Medium-Sized Businesses (PIME) of Romania. This group will also be in Cuba for the 26th edition of the International Fair of Havana, the most important international trade event held in the Caribbean nation annually (ACN, 16/109/08).

October 16: Cuban oil officials said that Cuba might have more than 20 billion barrels of recoverable oil in its offshore fields, more than twice the maximum estimate of the US geological survey. Such a large oil find would likely make Cuba an oil exporter and bring prosperity to the communist-run island that now imports half its energy needs. Officials said they hoped to drill the first production wells next year. The estimate, unveiled at a Cubapetroleo, or Cupet, news briefing, is sharply higher than the maximum of 9 billion barrels the US geological survey has said may lie beneath Cuban waters. Cupet exploration manager Rafael Tenreyro Perez said Cuba's estimate was higher because the Cubans had better information about their offshore geology. "We have more data. I'm almost certain that if they (US Geological Survey) ask for all the data we have, (their estimate) is going to grow considerably." The US agency has also said Cuba could have as much as 21 trillion cubic feet of gas, but Tenreyro said Cupet did not have an estimate for offshore gas reserves because they were too difficult to figure out. Cuba has signed production-sharing contracts with oil companies from around the world to drill its offshore fields. Brazil's Petrobras, which has years of deepwater-drilling experience, has been negotiating with Cuba for rights to exploit one of its offshore blocks, but Tenreyro said a deal had not been struck. "We hope to have good news soon," he said (*Reuters*, 17/10/08).

October 16: Cuba's state-owned Cubapetroleo (Cupet) reported that Canadian Sherritt International Corp. has cancelled its agreement for operations in Cuban waters, saying the ventures were not viable. Sherritt's evaluation was that exploration activity was not worth continuing, an option available within its contract, said Cupet Exploration Director Rafael Tenreyro. "They have their reasons for not continuing," he said. Sherritt said it holds 40-100% indirect working interest in seven production-sharing contracts and derives most of its production from oil fields located at Yumuri, Varadero, Canasi, and Puerto Escondido along the north coast of Cuba between Havana and Cardenas. The area lies in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) off northwestern Cuba, where Repsol-YPF SA, StatoilHydro, Oil & Natural Gas Corp., Petronas, Petroleos de Venezuela SA, and PetroVietnam continue to operate. The EEZ covers 112,000 sq km and is divided into 59 exploration blocks which, according to Tenreyro, contain some 20 billion barrels (*Oil&Gas Journal*, 16/10/08).

October 16: "Vietnam National Oil and Gas Group (PetroVietnam) is a trust partner with a huge potential for development," said Rafael Tenreyro, Manager of Exploration of Cuban Petroleum Corporation (CUPET). Speaking to reporters at Puerto Escondido oil field, 80 km east of Havana, CUPET Manager Tenreyro said PetroVietnam has a strong contingent of technicians who work effectively and creatively. PetroVietnam is one of five foreign partners who are carrying out exploration and exploitation projects in Cuba and the group is deploying geological surveys at some lots offshore and on land (*Asia Pulse*, 20/10/08).

October 17: The most famous brands of Cuban cigars were exhibited at the Habanos Day in Moscow to introduce them to Russian cigar aficionados who might not be able to travel to Cuba in February to attend the Festival de Habanos S.A. Tamara Teixo-Balinas, general director in Russia of the INFIFON Corporation, labeled the event as a success. There was also a conference given by Habano Man, Eumelio Espino, which dealt with the works of Cuba researchers to guarantee the exclusive characteristics of the raw materials for this industry. The lecture, History of Cuban Cigars, was delivered by Lourdes de la Noval, Habanos S.A. Communication director (*ACN*, 17/10/08).

October 17: Cuba is pushing state-run companies to adopt new wage policies by 2009 that would allow workers and managers to earn as much as they can, local media said, as President Raul Castro seeks to improve economic performance. The labour ministry, in conjunction with Castro's closest military economic advisers, issued instructions to managers this week on how to design the new system. He ordered it be fully discussed with workers and ready by December, after they failed to meet an August deadline, said Ariel Terrero, Cuba's most popular economic commentator. There is little difference in wage scales set by central planners so someone who does little earns almost as much as someone who works hard, including managers. The plan would replace the current across-the-board egalitarian system with one based on piece work and concrete conditions in each workplace. "The goal is to put an end once and for all to these egalitarian concepts that are so damaging for the economy and socialism and that have done more harm than good during these years," Terrero said (*Reuters*, 17/10/08).

October 17: In an effort to counter the impact of recent storms on local agriculture, the food industry in central-eastern Ciego de Avila province is producing pastas and bread beyond the scheduled yield. Food industry workers are in charge of producing 30 tons of noodles, over the monthly production schedule, to be commercialized in 200-gram packages out of the ration card system, which has guaranteed Cubans part of their basic food basket at subsidized prices over the past 50 years. In order to speed up the fulfilment of the task, the number of workers was increased at the Venezuela and Moron packing factories, and at the cookies and crackers plant in the capital city in Ciego de Avila. Florencio Freddy Rodríguez, director of the food industry in the province said local plants are also producing another 11 tons of pastas to be commercialized in Ciego de Avila and in neighbouring Camaguey province as well (*ACN*, 17/10/08).

October 18: Cuban Vice President Juan Almeida Bosque visited two construction material plants in central-eastern Camaguey province, to assess the works done for the recoveries from the damage caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike, reported Granma newspaper. Almeida guaranteed the workers that the country is determined to alleviate the scarcities caused by the impact of these phenomena in his visit to the Candido Gonzalez floor tile production plant. He spoke of the importance installing the tiles correctly when roofing, in order to maximize their durability and the safety of homes. The Vice President inquired about the fibro-asphalt tiles produced at the plant for roofing tobacco drying houses. This plant has produced 90,100 tiles, and its managers are planning to reach 1.2 million tiles by the end of 2008. Similarly, Almeida was briefed about an investment that has allowed a daily increase to 5 tons the capacity of the plant to process cardboard, speeding up production and enlarging the thickness of tiles (ACN, 18/10/08).

October 18: Ulises Rosales del Toro, Cuba's Sugar Industry Minister, assured the press that the sugar industry is recovering satisfactorily after the passing of hurricanes Gustav and Ike, which allows to predict a level of production similar to that of last year. Rosales del Toro took part in the planting of sugar cane in this central province, as part of the voluntary work journey to revert losses from the hurricanes. In statements to Prensa Latina, he confirmed the 2008-2009 harvest will begin next December, as the country has all the material and human resources ready for the kick-off. He recognized the most recent hurricanes inflicted great damage in five provinces that now have been recovering progressively. He informed that the sugar factories hit the hardest by the weather events were the "30 de Noviembre", in Pinar del Rio, and the "Antonio Guiteras" in Las Tunas, which is the biggest sugar producer in the country and will start at a later date (ACN, 18/10/08).

October 19: The Cuban Ministry of Sugar (MINAZ) has created 2,500 vegetable gardens and organoponics to increase food production, 1,800 of them in different stages of production. In statements to Granma newspaper, Ulises Rosales del Toro, MINAZ Minister, while attending a voluntary work in central Cuba, said that the provinces which show the greatest advances in this task are Villa Clara, Las Tunas, Pinar del Río, Sancti Spiritus, Granma and Santiago de Cuba. These works are part of the restructuring that MINAZ is undergoing, whose goal is to use those lands that were formerly used to cultivate sugar cane or were idle to produce vegetables and legumes (ACN, 20/10/08).

October 19: Vice President of the Russian Duma Liubov Konstantinovna Sliska informed the local press in Havana of a recent meeting with Cuban Vice President of the Council of Ministers Ricardo Cabrisas, where the potential implementation of joint projects was discussed. "When we return to Russia we will analyze the specific proposals, in the Duma and the other corresponding institutions to set them in course and monitor their compliance," said the legislative leader. The majority of the projects are in the energy and oil sectors, and the pharmaceutical industries where Russia will benefit from Cuba's experience in the production of vaccines. Sliska also spoke about expanding Russian tourism to Cuba and said that several Russian companies are investing in the sector including in the creation of resort areas. Another area of cooperation is

transportation. Sliska spoke about the accords signed in April between Cuban authorities and Russian Transportation Minister Igor Levitin (*Granma*, 21/10/08).

October 20: Cuba's First Vice-president José Ramón Machado Ventura toured several Havana municipalities, to assess the development of recovery work that began immediately after the passage of the devastating hurricanes Gustav and Ike. The president of the Civil Defence Council in the province, Ulises Gilarte De Nacimiento, offered the top official a detailed explanation of the main actions carried out in the territory to guarantee the restoration of centers of production and residential buildings, as well as food production. De Nacimiento reaffirmed the commitment of the province's agricultural workers and farmers of contributing to the production of food for its population, the Cuban capital, western Pinar del Río province, and the special municipality of Isle of Youth (*ACN*, 20/10/08).

October 21: Russia has offered Cuba assistance in renovating its transportation system, rebuilding its energy sector and acquiring a fleet of oil tankers, Russia's deputy minister of industry and trade said. "There are gaps in bilateral relations which need to be bridged, such as aircraft for internal flights," Stanislav Naumov said following the Days of Russia, which were held in Cuba on October 18 through October 20. He said that besides Russian participation in Cuban oil and gas projects, equipment manufacturers could also be involved. Naumov said Russia could help Cuba develop a fleet of oil tankers. "Russia has created a United Ship-Building Corporation to meet its demand for tankers, and we can propose similar projects to the Cuban side," he said. The official said Russia's participation in modernizing Cuba's energy system also showed good potential for suppliers of energy equipment, which could positively affect the development of Russia's machine-building sector. "I believe our experts could also be useful to the Cuban side. We actively retrain staff for Russian industry and we could start training staff for Cuba's," Naumov said. He said further development could include investment in joint ventures in Cuba. The official said Russia also proposed renovating Cuba's car and bus fleet, which has a large number of Soviet-made vehicles imported during Cuba's years of cooperation with the Soviet Union. He added that such cooperation programs should last at least 12 years (*RIA Novosti*, 21/10/08).

October 21: Cuban and Nigerian chancelleries signed a cooperation agreement in Abuja, as part of the 5th Intergovernmental Bilateral Commission for Economic Collaboration and Foreign Investment Session between the two nations. The accord deals, among other aspects, with the celebration of consultation meetings about common interest topics, information and experiences exchange and to support mutually profitable economic relations based on equality. The document was signed by Ramon Ripolli, Cuban First Deputy Minister for Economic, Scientific and Technical Collaboration, and by Tijjani Kaura, Nigeria's Foreign Affairs Minister. The signing of the accord took place as part of the visit of Cuban Deputy Minister to the African nation (*ACN*, 21/10/08).

October 21: Cuba is making progress in a salary reform that will ensure waiters don't make more than doctors, but the changes must be handled carefully to avoid economic turmoil, the island's foreign minister said. Appearing before business leaders in Mexico

City, Felipe Perez Roque said reforms within the communist system will help guarantee that people earn a salary more commensurate with their career. "We are in a salary reform that allows people to earn for what they do and resolves the contradiction in Cuba (...) in which the bellboy of a hotel or the employee of a restaurant, with tips, earns more than a surgeon," he said. But he cautioned that the change "has to be done in phases." "If they just start throwing money in the streets without support, there will be inflation and it will damage our currency," he said. Perez Roque also said that Cuba is working toward having a single currency. Cuba has had two primary currencies since the collapse of the Soviet Union wrecked its economy and spurred its turn to tourism. Tourist businesses took US dollars and charged US prices, while the peso was maintained for everyday transactions. A convertible peso, largely linked to the dollar, is now used for tourism and at stores offering goods that are often unavailable in local pesos. Officials have repeatedly said they hope to bring the two systems together, but say that cannot be done until productivity increases (*AP*, 21/10/08).

October 22: Cuban and Vietnamese companies signed a memorandum of understanding in Havana to set up a joint venture in the field of tourism. The document was penned by the president of Cuba's Palmares enterprise, Pedro Lenin Diaz and by the director of the Vietnamese HUD company, Hud Nguyen Dong Nam, during a business forum. Lenin Diaz told reporters that the agreement includes a project to set up golf courses, hotels and other tourist facilities, *Prensa Latina* news agency reported. The signing ceremony was attended by Viet Nam's Vice President Nguyen Thi Doan, who is paying an official visit to Cuba, and by Vice President of the Cuban Council of Ministers Ricardo Cabrisas. Also attending were Vietnamese Labor and Social Security Minister Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan and the president of the Council of Women Entrepreneurs Tran Thi Thuy. The business forum, which took place in the context of the visit by the Vietnamese VP, was aimed at boosting bilateral exchange between Hanoi and Havana said the Vice-president of the Cuban Chamber of Commerce Odalys Ceijo at the opening of the event (*ACN*, 22/10/08).

October 22: The biggest biogas plant in Cuba went into operation to process urban solid waste and generate electricity for 120 homes. The project was carried out with a Swiss contribution of 2.2 million dollars in collaboration with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the government of the City of Havana. The facility processes waste, produces methane gas and also residues used as fertilizers in agriculture, besides having a power generator. The project is also part of the international movement sponsored by UNIDO in order to promote sustainable and cleaner energy (*Prensa Latina*, 22/10/08).

October 22: Cuba's nickel industry was still operating at below capacity six weeks after taking a direct hit from Hurricane Ike, according to local media from the nickel region of eastern Holguin province. "Last week the three nickel plants in the region worked at 81 percent of their plan," Holguin's state-run Radio Angula said. Local state-run television reported that the two most important plants in Moa were operating "practically at capacity" while a third plant in Nicaro was still under repair. The local Communist party newspaper put damage to the industry at 38 million pesos, without detailing what portion was in foreign exchange and what portion was in local currency. Industry sources said the

Pedro Sotillo plant in Moa, Holguin, a joint venture between state-run Cubaniquel and Canada's Sherritt International was operating at capacity. The Pedro Sotillo plant is Cuba's most efficient, with a capacity of 33,000 tonnes of unrefined nickel plus cobalt per year. Cubaniquel also owns the Che Guevara plant in Moa, with a capacity of 33,000 tonnes, and the Rene Ramos Latour plant at Nicaro, Holguin, Cuba's oldest, which has capacity of 10,000 to 15,000 tonnes (*Reuters*, 22/10/08).

October 22: Uncertainty is hovering over the Cuban economy once again, although experts are not yet ready to predict exactly what impact the current global financial turmoil will have on the island. The global crisis coincided with the worst natural disaster to hit this Caribbean island nation in five decades, caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike, which produced an estimated five billion dollars in losses. "A marked slowdown in the growth of Cuba's gross domestic product (GDP) is likely," economist Pavel Vidal wrote in an article for the Economics Press Service, a publication of the IPS office in Havana. In January, the Centre for the Study of the Cuban Economy (CEEC) forecast GDP growth of 5.1 percent for 2008, based on the expansion of investment and growth in sectors like tourism and professional services. This figure, however, already reflected a slowdown that began to be seen in 2007. Soaring food and fuel prices drove up Cuba's foreign debt by 14.3 percent in 2007. Progressive worsening of its financial situation has prevented Havana from honouring some of its international commitments, resulting in a loss of creditworthiness in the eyes of creditors. "The seriousness of an economic crisis originated by the bursting of a financial bubble depends on the extent to which it affects the real economy," wrote Osvaldo Martínez, the chairman of the parliamentary Commission on Economic Affairs, in an article in the governing Communist Party's newspaper, *Granma*. In Vidal's view, "nickel exports and tourism will initially be hit the hardest" in Cuba, although this "could be offset by lower bills for oil and imported food." "Prospects for GDP growth will depend largely on maintaining the expansion in exports of professional services, although these may be limited by restrictions on the Venezuelan economy caused by the fall in the price of oil," Vidal said (*IPS*, 22/10/08).

October 22: Representatives of Cuban and Vietnamese companies agreed to study the feasibility of a project to build golf courses, hotels and other tourist facilities on the Caribbean island, official media reported. The accord was signed during a bilateral business forum in Havana. Cuban Vice President Ricardo Cabrisas said during the forum - held to coincide with Vietnamese Vice President Nguyen Thi Doan's visit to the island - that business opportunities between the island and the Asian country were "limitless." "Year after year, Vietnam consolidates its position as one of the island's leading trade partners in the Asia-Oceania region and even occupies second place in that geographical region, with bilateral trade in goods of over \$450 million," Cabrisas was cited by state news agency AIN as saying. He said trade between the two communist countries will continue to increase in "multiple spheres and disciplines," primarily "to guarantee rice supplies." Doan announced that Vietnam will donate \$300,000 to the island and a shipment of rice valued at \$200,000 for the benefit of those affected by two hurricanes that devastated the island a month and a half ago. Besides her talks with Cabrisas, Doan also met with another of Cuba's vice presidents, Carlos Lage, during the second day of her visit to the island (*EFE*, 22/10/08).

October 23: During the recent 10th International Congress on Sugar and Sugar Cane Derivatives, held in Havana, participants presented projects under the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) aimed at fostering food production and bilateral economic integration between Havana and Caracas. The first four sugar mills currently under construction in Venezuela with Cuban technical cooperation, which will produce ethanol and other sugar cane derivatives, will start operations in late 2010, announced Egly Antonio Ramirez, president of the agricultural subsidiary of Venezuela's state oil company PDVSA, according to Cuba's Opciones business magazine. At present, the works are still in early stages. The sugar plants are expected to process 10,600 tons of sugar cane each every day when in full capacity (*ACN*, 23/10/08).

October 23: Cuba will participate in the 26th International Trade Fair of Havana (FIHAV 2008) with products and services of 317 companies from 22 sectors. The announcement was made by Foreign Trade Deputy Minister Orlando Hernandez during a press conference. The event is scheduled for November 3-8 at the EXPOCUBA exhibition complex in Havana. The president of the organizing committee of the event, Abraham Maciques, announced that more than 1,300 businesspeople representing 457 firms from 53 countries will participate in the fair. Maciques added that the largest delegations will come from Spain, Canada, China, Italy and Germany. He noted that 19 official delegations headed by ministers and presidents of chambers of commerce or international institutions will also attend the event (*ACN*, 23/10/08).

October 24: Cuba's announcement that its still untapped offshore oil fields may hold more than 20 billion barrels of oil has raised eyebrows among outside oil experts who say the big number is hard to believe but not out of the realm of possibility. They said Cuba has excellent geologists, but they would like to see the findings verified by independent experts who have no stake in the Caribbean island's oil future. Speaking only about an oil belt north of the island, Rafael Tenreyro Perez, production manager at the state oil monopoly Cubapetroleo (CUPET), told reporters on October 16 "this belt now has resources, calculated not hypothetical, of more than 20 billion barrels." The geology of the oil belt extends to a basin further north where much larger structures hold the promise of oil, he said. Further out in the Gulf, Tenreyro said, there were structures that were part of the same geological formations off of Mexico and the United States that had produced giant finds such as Mexico's Cantarell and Poza Rica fields. Jorge Pinon, an expert on Cuban oil at the University of Miami, said there was room for doubt because Cuba was basing its claims on comparisons with other geological formations in the world, not on data from actual wells. "Where is it coming from? The number is very far-fetched," he said. "I have to question it because of the methodology." "CUPET is not an independent source. That's just like Exxon or anybody else selling their own product -- you have to have an independent source that comes in and evaluates it," Pinon said. Another Cuba oil expert, Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, said, "I trust they (Cuba's) are legitimate claims, but they must be verified" (*Reuters*, 24/10/08).

October 26: More than 99 percent of Cuban territory has been connected to the national power grid, as a result of hard work to re-establish electricity services damaged by

hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Works will be completed soon in Cuba's westernmost province, Pinar del Rio, as well as in eastern Las Tunas province and the Isla de la Juventud special municipality. Speaking at a ceremony to see off the brigades that carried out the recuperation works, Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage noted the effort made by technicians and experts to repair the facilities damaged by the two hurricanes. "It is a very risky profession that requires good training, will and a spirit of solidarity," he stressed. Lage explained that part of that labour force would work to re-establish power in communities where recuperation has not been completed yet. The Cuban vice president pointed out that after being hit by two devastating hurricanes, Pinar del Rio has the safest system at present, as works also included improvement of the power network. More than 6,500 posts, 526 transformers and some 49,000 lines were installed, and more than 1,000 secondary improvements were made in 54 days of work, he said. "At present, residents in Vueltabajo (as this zone is also known) enjoy a more stable and reliable electrical network," he stressed (*ACN*, 26/10/08).

October 27: Cuba's main tourist resort located in Matanzas province, some 120 kilometres East of Havana, is ready to receive – for the first time - one million tourists in a year. "Thus far this year, more than 700,000 tourists have visited Varadero," the delegate of the Tourism Ministry in Matanzas, Amado Acosta Henandez, told Granma news daily. "There has been a steady growth since the second half of 2007 and this year we have achieved our best results, although we know that we can be more efficient," he explained (*ACN*, 27/10/08).

October 27: Communist Cuba will allow most farmers to purchase basic supplies at stores for the first time since the 1960s, local media said, as Havana seeks to encourage farmers to increase production. Cuba nationalized all small businesses, including wholesale and retail farm supply outlets, decades ago. Since then farmers have had to wait for the state to deliver what they need, down to machetes, rope and rubber boots, in exchange for their products. Farmers complain the cumbersome system does not work, leaving crops to rot and farmers without timely supplies. As of this month, farmers were accumulating credits on top of normal prices in exchange for product delivered to the state, redeemable starting in January 2009 for supplies at special stores, according to Villa Clara province's Communist party weekly, Vanguardia. "To increase production of vegetables, roots, grains and fruit, and direct sales to prioritized sectors, the ministries of agriculture and sugar have decided to make it easier for producers to obtain various supplies," Vanguardia said. "Farmers will be able to use the credits to buy hand tools, work clothes, tires, batteries, spare parts for irrigation systems," the newspaper said. The sugar ministry is an important food producer in Cuba (*Reuters*, 27/10/08).

October 27: Cuba has received a new shipment of 2,500 trucks, buses, tractor-trailers and other heavy-duty vehicles from China, state media reported. The vehicles are destined for use in moving goods and people around the communist-ruled island and to support agriculture and the food industry, Transport Ministry officials told the government's official Prensa Latina news agency. Deputy Transport Minister Damian Fernandez said last month that the government would continue its overhaul of Cuba's transportation stock despite the financial burden of recovering from Hurricanes Gustav

and Ike, which caused around \$5 billion in damage. Havana announced in December 2007 the planned purchase of more than \$2 billion worth of railroad rolling stock, trucks and buses to address Cuba's chronic transportation woes (*EFE*, 27/10/08).

October 28: Brazil officials say the nation's state-run oil company will partner with its Cuban counterpart to produce oil in the Caribbean country. The agreement between Petrobras and Cuba Petroleo will be finalized during the Brazilian president's trip to Cuba. No details on the oil agreement have been made public. Brazilian officials also say their agriculture experts will help Cuba begin large-scale soy farming operations on former sugar lands. A Brazilian association of small farmers will send the experts. They say the aim is to eventually have 40,500 hectares (100,075 acres) of soy planted in Cuba. The Brazilians say they'll first test various types of soy seeds to determine which will work best in Cuba (*EFE*, 28/10/08).

October 28: Implementation of the reforms launched by President Raul Castro to energize Cuba's sluggish economy is going more slowly than hoped, Communist Party daily *Granma* said. The newspaper said that the period has been extended for companies to adopt the "pay for performance" system, a dramatic departure from the rigid egalitarianism imposed by former leader Fidel Castro. The new date postpones by another 4 1/2 months the period set for companies to apply this payment system that Raul Castro has been pushing since 2007, before the ailing Fidel formally stepped down in favor of his younger brother. Deputy Labour Minister Carlos Mateu told *Granma* that all the companies currently have their new compensation regime approved for January 2009, and that in February there will be a national inspection of the "redesigned systems." Performance-linked pay is one of the characteristic features of the "enterprise perfection" model that General Raul Castro, then serving as Defence Minister, established more than 20 years ago in the companies managed by the armed forces (*EFE*, 28/10/08).

October 28: Revolutionary allies Cuba and Venezuela will pour billions of dollars into downstream oil projects in Cuba with the goal of tripling its refining capacity to 350,000 barrels per day (bpd) by 2013, Cuban state-run radio said, citing the country's Basic Industry Minister. Minister Yadira Garcia's announcement came despite falling oil prices which are expected to slow Venezuela's plans to build around a dozen refineries in the region. But oil-rich Venezuela is expected to prioritize Cuban investments in Cuba, which currently has the capacity to refine 130,000 bpd, local experts said. Garcia said the two countries planned to build a new refinery in central Matanzas province in addition to expanding a joint venture refinery in central Cienfuegos province and doubling the capacity of a refinery in eastern Santiago de Cuba. The Cienfuegos refinery, opened a year ago, is producing 65,000 bpd, with plans to eventually produce 150,000 bpd and feed a series of joint venture petrochemical industries at a cost of \$3.6 billion. Investment in the refinery expansion in Eastern Cuba, begun earlier this year with the goal of reaching 50,000 bpd, was recently put at \$850 million by Venezuela. Garcia's announcement of plans to build a refinery in Matanzas was the first made in Cuba, though it was previously announced in Venezuela with a capacity of 150,000 bpd and price tag of \$4.3 billion (*Reuters*, 28/10/08).

October 29: In an deal recently signed by Cuba's food import company Alimport and China's Beidahuang Co., the Asian nation agreed to supply the island with farming inputs and several food products in a term of three years. The letter of intent was penned during the second China-Latin America Business Summit held recently in the Asian country, reported Granma newspaper. The meeting gave the island the opportunity to exchange with several companies participating. The meeting took place in the city of Harbin, Heilongjiang, with 160 companies from Latin America and 240 Chinese firms attending (ACN, 29/10/08).

October 29: Sherritt International Corp. posted a sharply higher third-quarter profit, but said it would suspend expansion work at projects in Cuba and Alberta and review its Ambatovy project in Madagascar due to weak nickel prices. The Toronto-based miner and energy producer earned \$133 million, or 45 cents a share, in the quarter, up from \$65.4 million, or 28 cents a share, a year ago. Stripping out one-time gains, profit was 33 cents a share, ahead of the 22 cents analysts expected. Revenue rose 58 per cent to \$477.2 million, boosted by strong results from the coal and oil and gas operations. In the third quarter, finished nickel production rose 16 per cent to 8,830 tonnes from the year-ago period. The company maintained its 2008 forecast for total output of 32,500 tonnes of nickel and 3,500 tonnes of cobalt, and said mining processing and refining costs will be higher due to rising input costs. (*Toronto Star*, 30/10/08).

October 29: The Cuban government is interested in developing bilateral economic cooperation with Azerbaijan. The prospects of cooperation will be discussed during the visit of a delegation from Cuba at the beginning of December, Marcello Torres, the Cuban Ambassador to Azerbaijan, told the local press. Ricardo Cabrisas, Vice President of the Counsel of Ministers, will lead the Cuban governmental delegation. This second meeting of the intergovernmental commission on economic cooperation between Azerbaijan and Cuba will be held in Baku, Torres said. Economic relations between the two countries entered to a new phase of development last year. The first meeting of Azerbaijani-Cuban intergovernmental commission on economic cooperation was held in Havana at the end of 2007, with major accent on the current state of economic ties and prospects of their growth (*TrendNews*, 29/10/08).

October 29: Juan Gualberto Gomez International Airport will start next January its extension works that will allow it to double its capacity of providing services to travellers to and from Varadero. The airport, responsible of providing services to 25 percent of tourists that visit Cuba, with these investments, takes the challenge of matching the growth of this renowned tourist pole, 142 kilometres east of Havana city, reports Granma newspaper. The Cuban Institute of Civil Aeronautics will devote 30 million dollars to these works that will include the extension of the Departure lounge, Customs and Immigration rooms and one of the three halls that make passengers' access easier (ACN, 29/10/08).

October 30: The 13th Session of the Inter Governmental Commission for Economic, Industrial and Scientific-Technological Cooperation between Cuba and Austria began in Havana, aiming to widen cooperation on vital sectors. The two countries are seeking to

widen cooperation in energy, through the development of alternative sources and to energize the exchange of tourism, railway transportation, biotechnology and sugarcane production. The intergovernmental meeting said Cuba and Austria agreed to strengthen their cooperative ties in diverse areas in order to benefit the development of both countries. Cuba's Deputy Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation Ricardo Guerrero Blanco headed the Cuban delegation, while Austrian Vice Minister for Economic Affairs and Labour Josef Mayer led the Austrian team (*ACN*, 30/10/08).

October 30: Honduras will start on November 3 the exchange of incandescent lights for energy-saving fluorescent lamps (EFL) with the aid of Cuban advisors. This is one of the cooperation agreements framed in the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) and it will have the assistance of 16 specialists from the Cuban Basic Industry Ministry and Cuban social workers. They will advise and transfer their accumulated experiences in the over 15 countries where similar works have been done, reports the Cuban Ministry Foreign Affairs website. Honduran president Manuel Zelaya Rosales, along the Minister of Energy Rixi Moncada, as well as other cabinet members, received on October 27 in Port Cortes the first 2,600,000 EFLs out of the 4 million PetroCaribe promised as donation (*ACN*, 30/10/08).

October 31: A group of Guatemalan entrepreneurs will travel to Cuba in late November to explore ways of enhancing bilateral business relations. During an encounter slated to take place November 24-27 at Havana's Hotel Nacional, the Guatemalan business people will meet with representatives of Cuban companies, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Ministry of Foreign Trade. Meanwhile, over 30 representatives of Guatemalan firms will participate at the 26th Havana International Trade Fair, scheduled to take place November 3- 8 in its usual Havana venue Expocuba (*ACN*, 31/10/08).

October 31: Brazilian state-owned oil company Petrobras signed an agreement to explore for oil in Cuba's still untapped offshore fields, which Cuban energy officials say may hold more than 20 billion barrels of reserves. Petrobras agreed to make an initial investment of \$8 million to begin exploration of the block, just off Cuba's northern coast east of Havana. The contract gives the Brazilians seven years to explore and 25 years to produce oil and gas in a production-sharing contract with Cuba. Cuba has divided its offshore area in the Gulf of Mexico into 59 blocks, about half of which have been leased to seven companies from around the world -- none of them American due to the US trade embargo against the communist-run island. Brazil got block 37 near the onshore fields from which Cuba currently produces most of its 60,000 barrels per day of oil. The fields include onshore wells that use horizontal drilling to draw oil from reservoirs several miles (kilometres) offshore. Petrobras' block covers 1,600 square kilometres and includes waters 1,640 feet (500 meters) to 5,250 feet (1,600 meters) deep. "I don't understand why it took so long to sign this agreement," said Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who presided over the signing ceremony for the deal with Cuban President Raul Castro. Castro joked that "God would not be so unfair to us as to not let us hit anything" while exploring in the Petrobras block. (*Reuters*, *AP*, 31/10/08).

October 31: Presidents Raul Castro, of Cuba, and Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, of Brazil, presided over the inauguration of a branch office in Havana of the Brazilian Promotion and Investment Agency (APEX). During the opening ceremony, Raul Castro said that APEX-Habana, the first office of its kind in Latin America, "has started well and will continue better" (*ACN*, 30/10/08).

October 31: The \$392.8 million owed by the Cuban government to Sherritt International could jeopardize petroleum drilling operations conducted by the Canadian company in Cuba, as soon as next year. According to the company's third trimester report (July-September) for 2008, pending accounts with the Cuban government represent an "exposed credit risk" and compromise agreed plans for expanding operations in 2009. Though the report acknowledges that the Cuban government has expressed intentions to meet its financial obligations to the company "despite the negative impact of two hurricanes and the deplorable conditions of the global economy," Sherritt executives warned that they will take a closer look at future drilling projects with the island-nation. According to the report, made public on October 29, the company expects to establish a framework for payment and will restructure investments before initiating drilling operations scheduled for 2009 in Cuba. The Toronto-based company also indicated that it would hold off on plans to build a refinery in Canada that was conceived as a partnership with the Cuban government. "Just as Cuba is trying to attract foreign investment for drilling (...) the revelations of non-payment to one of its main petroleum partners doesn't sound encouraging," said former petroleum executive Jorge R. Piñón, currently a researcher with the University of Miami (*El Nuevo Herald*, 31/10/08).

Exile Community

October 2: Alina Fernandez, the estranged daughter of Cuban leader Fidel Castro, said she does not expect much to change in Cuba soon after her father's death. She considers her uncle Raul Castro an ardent communist. Fernandez talked about Cuba's future with reporters after she spoke to about 200 people in the student union at Tarrant County College Northeast Campus, Texas. Her talk was part of the college's Hispanic Heritage Month program. Fernandez said that she has heard reports that Cuba might liberalize its economy. But she thinks the country will resemble China more than a Western democracy. "I don't see any changes for tomorrow," she said (*Star-Telegram*, 2/10/08).

October 8: The majority of Cuban-American voters in the Miami-Dade county remain faithful to the Republican and conservative Party in their political thinking. However, those tendencies might change. According to a study by the Institute for Cuban and Cuban American Studies (ICCAS) of the University of Miami (UM), Cuban women, who represent 55 per cent of voters of that ethnic group, are more liberal, progressive and sensitive than men on issues like abortion and gay marriage, which is illegal in Florida. Researchers found that 68.3 per cent of Cuban American women are republican, compared to 67.6 per cent of men. Overall, 68.5 per cent of the Cuban American electorate identified themselves as republican, 16.2 per cent as independent and 15.3 per cent as democrat. For young people, who represent 7.5 per cent of voters, current Cuban

issues and US strategies to democratize Cuba might be put on hold in the voters' agenda (*El Nuevo Herald*, 8/10/08).

October 9: One man wants to send his niece in Cuba money to rebuild a room of her flattened home. Another man wants to get arthritis medicine to his aunt, who moves around in a makeshift wheelchair. One woman looks for ways to send food to a cousin who waits for promised government aid. For two days in September, it was easy. Cubans in the United States could send money directly to hurricane victims on the island, thanks to a temporary easing of federal restrictions on remittances. But federal officials last month amended the license they granted to the Cuban American National Foundation. Now it prohibits direct aid to people on the island. As the foundation appeals the decision, South Florida Cubans struggle to keep hope alive in their homeland. "It's completely frustrating," said Pedro Abigantus, a Pembroke Pines resident whose niece was left homeless in eastern Cuba after Hurricanes Gustav and Ike plowed through her house more than a month ago. About 1,200 people wired money to Cuba through the foundation after the US Department of Treasury first granted the license and after hurricanes damaged more than 100,000 homes on the island. Two days later, the \$250,000 limit the license allowed was hit, the foundation said. Federal officials didn't explain why direct aid was briefly allowed and then taken away, said Sandy Acosta Cox, spokeswoman for the foundation (*Sun Sentinel*, 9/10/08).

October 16: A possible alliance between Colombian leftist guerrillas and factions of El Salvador's Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, could be behind the kidnapping this year in Panama of Cuban-American Cecilio Padrón, according to a source within the Salvadoran Intelligence Service. The source, who asked not to be identified for fear of compromising the ongoing investigation, said inquiries began after an e-mail was uncovered in the laptop computer of fallen guerrilla leader Raúl Reyes of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known as FARC. The e-mail, sent from FARC leader Alfonso Cano on September 2, 2002, to Reyes, spoke of a shared "economic interest." "Regarding the proposal for economic assistance for the elections in El Salvador, we could propose for them to carry out intelligence about an economic objective of \$10-to-\$20 million in Panama to be done in conjunction and divide the profits in equal parts." After reviewing several other e-mails containing reports of FARC activity with leftist elements in El Salvador, the intelligence service of that Central American nation now believes that the economic objective could have been Padrón, who was kidnapped on April 4 in Panama. Padrón, 66, has lived in Panama for 10 years and was a member of the Cuban American National Foundation. He fled Cuba at the age of 19, piloting a crop-duster aircraft. Once in Miami, he joined other exiles that were training in Guatemala for the invasion of the Bay of Pigs, his son Eric said (*The Miami Herald*, 16/10/08).

October 17: Research from the University of Miami suggests that nearly 70 percent of Cuban-Americans identify themselves as Republicans. But many are questioning US policy towards Cuba -- not least a tightening of the longstanding US embargo under outgoing President George W. Bush that placed strict restrictions on family travel and the sending of remittances to the island. "That's going to give the Democrats a lot of Cuban

votes for the first time in a long time," said Uva de Aragon, director of Cuban studies institute at Florida International University and exiled in the United States since 1971. "The change that has occurred in the Cuban exile community with the arrival of new generations after 1980, and the economic circumstances that the United States is experiencing, could result in a tsunami vis-a-vis the Cuban vote." Hernan Santiesteban, 79, a lifelong Republican, intends to vote for Obama. "We have had 50 years of governments saying they were going to do something for the freedom of Cuba, and yet we have seen nothing," Santiesteban, who was born in Cuba, told the press. "I was with Obama at a meeting with other Cubans and I was convinced. He has a willingness to take into account not only Cuban exiles, but also those on the island," he explained. "We all have family there" (*AFP*, 17/10/08).

October 20: Mexico agreed to deport Cubans who sneak illegally through Mexican territory to reach the US, a step toward cutting off an increasingly violent and heavily used human trafficking route. The agreement, signed by Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and Mexican Foreign Secretary Patricia Espinosa, takes effect in one month. Lazaro Mendez, a Miami-based radio personality whose fishing boat was stolen by migrant smugglers plying the Cuban trade, doubted that the accord would stem the problem, in which Florida vessels are increasingly being snatched to run Cubans to Mexico. "Is it gonna stop? No, until communist Cuba becomes a free nation," Mendez said. Andy Gomez, a senior fellow and assistant provost at University of Miami's Institute for Cuban and Cuban American Studies, said stopping the wave of migrants coming through Mexico will be difficult because smugglers often pay off Mexican authorities. Even if the smuggling route through Mexico is successfully cut off, Gomez predicted that Cuban migrants will land in the Florida Panhandle, northeastern Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas. "Currently, the resources of the US Coast Guard are quite limited and the square miles (kilometers) they cover are quite limited," said Gomez. "These smugglers are very good. In most cases, they're going around the authorities. It's a very lucrative job." Henry Louis Gomez, managing editor of the Miami-based *babalublog.com*, called the smuggling problems a "byproduct" of the US's so-called "wet-foot, dry-foot" policy. "But in the absence of wet-foot dry-foot, what do you do?" he asks. "There would be no need for the policy if people weren't dying, literally, to get out of Cuba" (*The Miami Herald*, 21/10/08).

October 20: Three Cuban men forced to work 16-hour shifts at 3,5 cents an hour repairing ships for a Cuban joint venture in Curacao won an \$80 million judgment in US federal court in Miami. Alberto Justo Rodríguez, Fernando Alonso Hernández and Luis Alberto Casanova Toledo -- Cuban nationals who now live in Tampa -- sued the Curacao Drydock Co., alleging the company conspired with the Cuban government to force them into virtual slave labor. Lawyers called the deal a "Faustian bargain" hatched so the Cuban government could pay off its debt with Curacao Drydock by providing free labor, and at the same time skirt the US embargo by working on American ships in a third country. "These arrangements have been the lifeblood of the regime for 15 years," attorney John Andres Thornton said. "And those days are over." The plaintiffs tearfully testified about their 3 p.m. to 7 a.m. shifts -- sometimes 45 days straight -- in harsh and dangerous work conditions. They slept in 20-foot cubicles they shared with 20 other men

and often did not sleep: They needed to stay up for their turn at the shower. On their time off, they were forced to watch hours-long videotaped speeches of Fidel Castro. They were paid the average Cuban salary of \$16 a month (*The Miami Herald*, 20/10/08).

October 21: Several groups among the Miami Cuban exile community expressed disagreement with the pact signed between the communist island and Mexico whereby Havana agreed to take back all undocumented emigrants detained in that country. "In no way can it seem good to us to return people who are trying to find freedom and to return them to their jailers" on the island, Omar Lopez, a director of the influential Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), told the press. However, Tomas Rodriguez, of Agenda Cuba, said he agreed "in principle" with the memorandum signed in Mexico City, since in his opinion "it's going to mean a reduction in the number of deaths" as a consequence of the illegal trafficking of Cubans. In the judgment of the CANF's Lopez, the new agreement violates Mexico's tradition of "sheltering people who are fleeing from dictatorships in Latin America." Rodriguez said that the accord will help reduce the "amount of money that that Cuban-Mexican mafia" is amassing with illegal trafficking operations. Even so, he expressed his concern over the fact that Cubans who have decided to "desert" the island for political reasons "are being threatened" with the possibility of being repatriated to Cuba. Ramon Saul Sanchez, of the Democracy Movement, acknowledged that the accord could put an end to any kind of "mafia that profits from the pain of the Cubans and has caused deaths and security problems." He emphasized, however, that this type of agreement to "repatriate all people who enter illegally" does not adhere to the "international law of protection of the person who is seeking political asylum" (*EFE*, 21/10/08).

October 24: The number of packages sent by US mail from South Florida to Cuba is at its greatest volume since President George W. Bush prohibited the shipment of nonessential items to the island nation four years ago. Shipments have increased despite limitations imposed by Washington in 2004. A postal service spokeswoman said the post office shipped approximately 34,000 Cuba-bound packages from South Florida between December 2006 and the middle of last year. That number increased to nearly 111,000 from December to June. The post office charges \$29 to ship up to 4 pounds of goods. With the exception of food items, each person can send one package per month to immediate family members. A package's value cannot exceed \$400 (*AP*, 24/10/08).

October 30: Hispanics have registered to vote in the 2008 election in key locations at record levels. In south Florida, the numbers are up 20 percent from two years ago, and many of those new Hispanic voters are registering Democrat. In Miami, the changes mean that a long-time Republican base, Cuban-Americans, no longer dominates the political scene. Hispanic groups across the country have registered hundreds of thousands of new voters. Only days ahead of November 4, street teams like one in Miami are making sure the record number of registered Hispanic voters actually cast a ballot. "We go to areas that are mostly Hispanic, because our focus is get those people to go out and vote," said Abraham Pereira, who is canvassing for the non-partisan Immigrant Orientation Center. In Miami's Cuban-American community, the changes are having

dramatic consequences. Early voting lines in Cuban neighbourhoods have swelled with Democrats (*VOA*, 30/10/08).

October 31: Florida's Cuban-Americans have voted Republican for years. But the party could lose its grip on the heartland of exile opposition to Fidel Castro on November 4, signalling possible change in US policy toward Cuba. Polls show Democratic presidential hopeful Barack Obama slightly ahead or running even with his Republican rival John McCain in the state that decided the 2000 election for President George W. Bush after a disputed recount. At the local level, in a shift almost unthinkable until recently, three Miami-based Cuban-American Republicans who serve in the US House of Representatives and have long run almost unopposed are locked in tight races with Democrats. Like Obama, their Democratic challengers want to end restrictions imposed by Bush, and bank on the conviction that Miami's hard-line anti-communism has started to fade. Miami-based Cuban American National Foundation has morphed from a staunchly Republican anti-communist pressure group under its former leader Jorge Mas Canosa, who died in 1997, into a non-partisan organization that gave Obama a warm reception on a visit to Miami in May. Mas Canosa's son, Jorge Mas Santos, now heads the group. He endorsed Obama in an opinion column in *The Washington Post*. "US policy toward Cuba is at best static and at worst counterproductive, a source of increasing frustration to many Cuban-Americans," said Santos, who wants to see the next president lift Bush's restrictions on family travel and cash remittances and open more channels of contact with Cuba's civil society (*Reuters*, 31/10/08).

Foreign Affairs

October 1: A Cuban official said that the first meeting between Cuba and the EU to formalize the political dialogue with the 27-nation group would take place when "the bases" are laid "as equals." Cuban ambassador to Spain, Alberto Velazco San Jose, made those remarks during a press conference where he said that no date "has been set yet" for the meeting. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain, Miguel Angel Moratinos, had announced the day before that the meeting would take place "shortly." The head of the Spanish diplomacy said that the first "formal" meeting would take place between Cuba and France, as EU president this semester. He did not specify the date or the location of the meeting (*EFE*, 1/10/08).

October 1: The bilateral ties between Cuba and Sierra Leone are at a very special moment, said visiting Sierra Leone's Foreign Minister Zainab Hawa Bangura. She made the remarks during a meeting with her Cuban counterpart Felipe Perez Roque. The two ministers discussed the ongoing cooperation between the two countries, especially in some priority areas such as personnel training and medical service. They also discussed the preparation for the forthcoming visit to Cuba by Sierra Leone's President Ernest Bai Koroma and the ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement slated for April 2009. "We believe in the South-South cooperation...and we expect to strengthen the ties with Cuba," Bangura said (*Xinhua*, 1/10/08).

October 3: British Royal Navy's Tanker Wave Ruler anchored in Havana's harbour for an authorized stopover on its route back to the UK. The ship was welcomed in Havana by British ambassador to Cuba Dianne Melrose, Defense advisor Neil Salisbury and the Chief of Operations of the Cuban Revolutionary Navy, Captain Pedro Roman Cisneros, as well as other officers of both countries, Granma daily reported. During its five-day stay in Havana, the 81 crew members of the Wave Ruler will visit the Granma Cuban Naval Academy, the Jose Marti Memorial and the Hemingway Museum, among other sites of historic and cultural interest (ACN, 3/10/08).

October 3: As part of a national campaign for the release of the five Cubans imprisoned in the United States a delegation from the Caribbean country is traveling to India. The Cuban delegation made up by Rosa Aurora Freijanes, wife of Fernando Gonzalez, and attorney Nuris Piñero, continued its tour of municipalities and states of India, following an invitation by that country's Solidarity-with-Cuba Committee. An emotional and massive welcome took place in Kochi, an important municipality in the state of Kerala. Organizers coordinated a march from the place the Cuban women were staying to the one where the rally took place, in which over 400 people participated (ACN, 3/10/08).

October 3: Chile sent 13 tons of humanitarian aid to Cuba as a contribution to the ongoing recovery efforts in the Caribbean country after the devastation caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. According to an official communiqué of the Chilean government, a plane of the Chilean Air Force took off heading for Havana with a cargo that includes mattresses, electricity generators and wires. Along with the material aid, Chilean President Michelle Bachelet sent a message to her Cuban counterpart, Raul Castro Ruz, expressing her sorrow for all the damage caused by the two hurricanes and her solidarity with the Cuban people. This is the second cargo of humanitarian assistance that arrives in Cuba from Chile (ACN, 3/10/08).

October 3: Cuba's Pacific Ambassador Jose Garcia has promised his country can provide scholarships for Cook Islanders, especially in the areas of medicine. The Cook Island News reports Mr Garcia is on a five-day visit to Rarotonga and will meet with the deputy prime minister and minister of health Sir Terepai Maoate to give him more information about the scholarships his government can offer. Mr Garcia said Cuba has a large health training system with many schools and universities and currently offers around 400 scholarships a year to South Pacific countries. So far island nations like Kiribati, Tuvalu, Nauru, and the Solomon Islands have taken up the offer of scholarships. Diplomatic relations with Cuba were established in 2002 but this is the first visit of an ambassador (ACN, 3/10/08).

October 3: A brigade of some 200 people from 20 countries will participate in the recovery effort after the two recent hurricanes, Ike and Gustav, left a trail of destruction after their passing. These friends of the Caribbean country had originally organized to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, this coming January, but considered their participation in the recovery works Cuba is undertaking would be a greater sample of friendship, reported Granma newspaper. Convoled by the Cuban Friendship Institute (ICAP), the international contingent will help out in the

eastern provinces of Granma and Santiago de Cuba, as well as participate in several meetings (*ACN*, 3/10/08).

October 3: The telecommunications company of Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim sent 51 tonnes of humanitarian aid to Cuba for victims of deadly Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, a statement said. Telmex and its foundation sent a cargo from the eastern Mexican port of Veracruz with basic food and building materials "to show solidarity with the Cuban people," the statement said. The cargo included 10 tonnes of rice, 10 tonnes of beans, 5,250 liters of cooking oil and 5,000 kilos of refined salt (*AFP*, 3/10/08).

October 3: The General Assembly of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) named Spain, Argentina, Cuba and Uruguay to its Board of Governors. According to reports, Turkey, Romania, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Malaysia and New Zealand will also be part of the 35-member board, IAEA president Gianni Ghisi of Italy said. The Board of Governors is an executive organ of the IAEA, which monitors global nuclear security. Among the pending issues before the board are the atomic programs of Iran and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and the choice of a new director general to replace Egypt's Mohamed El Baradei, who plans to leave office at the end of his third four-year term late next year (*Xinhua*, 3/10/08).

October 3: South African President Kgalema Motlanthe expressed his sorrow for the loss caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike in Cuba. President Motlanthe announced that his country will send a brigade to Cuba to help in the recovery process in the Caribbean archipelago, recently hit by the two storms. During the ceremony of accreditation of the new Cuban ambassador to Pretoria, Angel Villa Hernandez, the South African Head of State reiterated his country's willingness to continue expanding bilateral ties with the Caribbean nation. On September 25, following an agreement by the African National Congress (ANC), Kgalema Motlanthe replaced Thabo Mbeki and became the third president of South Africa after the defeat of the Apartheid regime in 1994 (*ACN*, 3/10/08).

October 5: A Royal Navy backup ship has visited Cuba for only the second time since the country's revolution 50 years ago. Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) Wave Ruler docked in Havana Bay on October 3 for a five-day stay. The trip is a courtesy visit, linked to the battle against the illegal drugs trade in the Caribbean. Senior Cuban anti-narcotics officials boarded the vessel for a series of meetings with the crew about how they can work together in the future. The vessel was greeted by a Cuban military band. Chief officer David Eagles told the press that Cubans take the issue of illegal drug-running very seriously, have impressive intelligence and are keen to become more involved. The crew of RFA Wave Ruler also assisted during the relief operations following the trail of destruction left behind by Hurricane Gustav in the Caribbean in August this year (*BBC*, 5/10/08).

October 5: The Latin American Federation of Journalists (FELAP) has called on the United States to immediately end the almost five-decade economic ban on Cuba. The FELAP, comprised of 80,000 journalists from Latin America, made the remarks in

response to a call by Cuban writers and artists, posted on a website, to reject Washington's policy toward Havana. A petition signed by more than 7,000 intellectuals from about 100 countries has said that the US pretence of providing aid to Cuba for the damages caused by two powerful hurricanes is ridiculous, because the United States denies Cuba the possibility of acquiring the materials to rebuild the country. "We call on intellectuals and artists from all over the world to immediately demand the lifting of the criminal US ban and to promote support and aid actions for Cuba," the petition said (*Xinhua*, 3/10/08).

October 6: Citizens and residents of St. Kitts and Nevis will have the opportunity to assist the people of Cuba in the recovery process from damage and suffering caused by the passage of recent hurricanes. Cuba was hit by two category 3 storms, Hurricanes Gustav and Ike that left significant damage estimated at US\$5 billion, including the complete destruction of over 500,000 homes. Members of the Cuba Alumni Association of St. Kitts-Nevis, the Parents Association and the St. Kitts-Nevis Association of Solidarity with the Cuban Five are collaborating to bring to the attention of the people of St. Kitts and Nevis the dire need to provide tangible assistance to the people of Cuba in their time of great need (*The Democrat*, 6/10/08).

October 6: Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque heads the Cuban delegation that will participate in a Meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Foreign Ministers that begins in Brazil. According to Granma news daily, the meeting, which takes place as a preparatory event for the First Latin American and Caribbean Summit on Integration and Development, will take place in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The First Latin American and Caribbean Summit on Integration and Development will take place in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, on December 16-17. The heads of State and Government of the 33 countries of the region have been invited to participate in the meeting (*ACN*, 6/10/08).

October 6: Regardless of the heavy rain, over 30 people gathered in front of the US consulate in Vancouver to demand the release of the five Cubans imprisoned in the US since 1998. A report posted at the Free the Cuban 5 Committee-Vancouver's website, says the picket action marked the end of a successful international period of action to free the five Cuban men. The campaign began on September 12, the day Gerardo Hernandez, Antonio Guerrero, Ramon Labanino, Fernando Gonzalez and Rene Gonzalez, known as The Cuban Five, were arrested 10 years ago. Committee Coordinator Noah Fine introduced the picket condemning Luis Posada Carriles' bombing of the Cubana plane, and the murder of 73 innocent people on board, on the 32nd anniversary of that terrorist act, the report said. Noah also read a letter recently written by Gerardo Hernandez in commemoration of 10 years of imprisonment (*ACN*, 6/10/08).

October 6: Sir Frederic Goodwin, the Queen's Representative in the Cook Islands, a country that faces the serious challenges posed by climate change, talked about strengthening friendship and cooperation with Cuba. His Excellency met the Cuban diplomat Jose Luis Robaina, who presented his credentials as non-resident ambassador to the Cook Islands. "We face very similar challenges [climate change] and therefore, we can and should cooperate in areas like public health, education, and particularly in programs to face the effects of climate change, which is threatening the existence of

numerous insular states," said Sir Frederick. For his part, Robaina, who is the head of Cuba's mission in Wellington, New Zealand, said Cuba is willing to evaluate different cooperation projects with the authorities of the Cook Islands. This cooperation, he pointed out, can be developed in the fields of health, education, and the training of human resources, without any political preconditions. This is the first time that Cuba has accredited a non resident ambassador to the Cook Islands (*ACN*, 6/10/08).

October 7: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque welcomed Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's initiative to call for a Latin American-Caribbean Summit, scheduled for December 16-17. In statements to local media during a recess of the meeting of foreign ministers to prepare the Summit, Perez Roque stressed that it would be a historic event. It will be the first time the presidents of all 33 Latin American and Caribbean countries will meet, he told reporters at the Marriott Hotel, in Copacabana. The head of Cuban diplomacy said it was a paradox that Latin American and Caribbean leaders met for the first time, because they had met so far with other regional interlocutors. "We hope the objective will be the beginning of a process that will not conclude at the Summit, but that will start from there. A process towards unity, integration and cooperation among Latin American and Caribbean countries," Perez Roque pointed out. He added that he is also looking forward to the creation of a future mechanism of new summits and agreements that should be followed up, as well as a final declaration to establish the framework and principles for unity and integration. "What should bring us together is not the past, but the future, the risks and the common challenges that we all are facing," the Cuban foreign minister said (*Prensa Latina*, 7/10/08).

October 6: Cuba's ambassador to Algeria, Eumelio Caballero, described relations between the two countries as excellent; this followed the presenting of his credentials to the president of the North African republic, Abdelaziz Bouteflika. During the meeting, held in Algiers, the Cuban diplomat expressed his satisfaction with the current state of bilateral links and his interest in strengthening ties of friendship and cooperation (*ACN*, 6/10/08).

October 7: Upon the request of the Cuban, Haitian and Jamaican governments, whose countries were ravaged by a series of hurricanes last August and September, Brazil has stepped up its humanitarian assistance actions to the Caribbean region. A flight carried with 14,7 tons of food reached Havana on September 12th. The donation consisted of rice, beans, sugar, cassava flour, noodles and powdered milk - enough food to feed over 3 thousand people during 15 days. Furthermore, another aircraft taking the same amount of food will depart from Brazil to Cuba on the 13th of October. Until now, the humanitarian assistance provided by the Brazilian government to Haiti, Cuba and Jamaica amounts to around US\$ 1,2 million, including the transport of the relief (*Relief Web*, 7/10/08).

October 7: Cuba's Public Health deputy Minister, Joaquin Garcia Salabarría, led the Cuban delegation to the 48 directive council of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) underway in Washington DC. During the event's sessions, Garcia Salabarría explained the damages caused by the passing of hurricanes Ike and Gustav through the

Caribbean nation, and referred to the Cuban's people attitude to face this adversity and the health professionals' role in this stage. The Cuban deputy Minister used this opportunity to reiterate his country's gratitude for the solidarity expressed by institutions like PAHO and WHO, as well as for the humanitarian aid sent by many governments of the region (ACN, 7/10/08).

October 7: Cuban Ambassador to Guatemala Omar Morales welcomed his country's delegation to the Third Americas Social Forum, which will meet through October 12 at the San Carlos University, reported Prensa Latina. The Cuban group is made up of members from more than 24 women's, youth, labor, farmers, religious, academic, artists and intellectuals' organizations. The delegates will participate in different work sessions within the forum. Jose Miguel Hernandez, of the Cuban Workers Federation (CTC), said Cuban delegates will take part in debates on the effects of Free Trade Agreements, the neoliberal policies in the region, integration models, as well as the situation of women. They will also discuss with participants from other nations the effects of the US blockade against Cuba and they will speak about the case of five Cubans imprisoned in US jails (ACN, 8/10/08).

October 7: Some 500 demonstrators gathered in front of the US embassy at London's Grosvenor Square to demand the release of five Cubans held in US jails and family visits for their wives. The peaceful demonstration, organized by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign (CSC) in Britain, brought to a close a month of actions to mark the 10th anniversary of the incarceration of Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labanino, Rene Gonzalez, Fernando Gonzalez and Antonio Guerreor, known in Britain as the Miami Five. Demonstrators participated in the annual CSC vigil for the Five along with Olga Salanueva and Adriana Perez, wives of Rene Gonzalez and Gerardo Hernandez. Olga and Adriana have been denied entry visas by US authorities for 8 and 10 years in a row, reads an article on the CSC web site (ACN, 8/10/08).

October 8: The Pakistan-Cuba Friendship Society (PCFS) was founded during a ceremony held in Islamabad to mark the second anniversary of the services given by the Cuban medical personnel to the Pakistani population after the earthquake that hit that nation in 2005. The new society is aimed at promoting links particularly related to cultural, historic and geographic issues of bilateral interest, reads an article published by the Associated Press of Pakistan. With those purposes, the organization will coordinate bilateral visits by Cuban and Pakistani writers, journalists and other professionals. Speaking at the founding ceremony, Cuban ambassador to Pakistan Gustavo Machin Gomez welcomed the setting up of the new organization and reiterated his country's willingness to achieve closer relations between the two nations. Gomez said that Cuba will always be ready to help the Pakistani people (ACN, 8/10/08).

October 8: Cuban authorities have detained Spanish aid worker Garcia Regojo and are making arrangements to send her back home. The Spanish mission in Havana said they had no idea why Regojo, who arrived in the eastern city of Santiago to help Cuba's storm victims resettle, was detained. Spain had been instrumental in lifting a five-year European Union diplomatic sanction against the communist ruled island and only weeks back

helped in opening up a dialogue between the two to accelerate development of the island economy. Regojo was being held at Havana's Jose Marti international airport by immigration officials to be flown back to Madrid, Spanish consulate-general said. In Madrid, senior leader of the main opposition Popular Party Jorge Moragas said Regojo had been held in custody in Cuba for 15 hours. At a press conference, Moragas said that his party knew of the detention through the family of the woman, who works for a non-governmental organization that collaborates with the Cuban Catholic Church (*EFE*, 8/10/08).

October 9: Twenty-five young Solomon Islanders are confirmed to undertake medical studies in Cuba under the Cuban government medical doctor scholarship arrangement in 2009. The National Training Unit Director, Mr. Selu Maezama, told the National Express that a meeting was held to look at a list of applicants, some short listed from the previous year. He explained that the main purpose of the meeting was to get in touch with pre-service applicants who were awarded a scholarship so that they could confirm their names. Meanwhile the Under Secretary for the Ministry of Health and Medical Services Dr. Cedric Alependava said it was a great privilege for Solomon Islanders to study in Cuba. Dr. Alependava said he really appreciates the Cuban government for its on-going assistance in sponsoring "more of our students' and securing spaces for them to do their studies in Cuba" (*Solomon Times*, 9/10/08).

October 9: Cuban ambassador to Spain Alberto Velazco thanked the Spanish people for the support to the Cubans in their efforts to recover from the damage caused by the back-to-back blows of two hurricanes. In an interview published by La Republica newspaper, the Cuban diplomat said the help offered by the Spanish from the very first day after the hurricanes hit Cuba has been impressive. Velazco said that the actions taken by a number of organizations in solidarity with Cuba, which have spontaneously opened bank accounts and carried out activities to collect money to contribute to the Cuban recovery efforts was very much appreciated (*ACN*, 9/10/08).

October 9: The National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO) donated another container of food supplies to the residents of Cuba. Rene Mendez, Communications Officer for NEMO, said that, "Belize is again assisting hurricane victims in Cuba". At the ceremony at the Phillip Goldson International Airport a consignment of 1,000 pounds of food supplies was presented on behalf of the government and people of Belize to the government and people of Cuba. In making the presentation NEMO's National Emergency Coordinator, Mrs. Noreen Fairweather stated that while this is a small token it is a show of Belize's support to Cuba. In accepting the donation of food supplies, Cuban Ambassador to Belize Manuel Rubido Diaz thanked the government and people of Belize for the donation that will go a long way in assisting the hurricane victims. "Worthy to mentioning is that Cuba assist Belize in areas of health and education as well as agriculture, forensic sciences and other sectors. In turn Belize offers fulltime scholarships for Cubans to study English at the University of Belize. To date there are seven Cubans are studying English in Belize," Mendez said (*LoveFM News*, 9/10/08).

October 9: Jorge Marti, President of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP) arrived in Italy to attend a new Meeting of European Solidarity with Cuba in the city of Terni. The meeting will have the participation of representatives of Cuba friendship groups and organizations in over 20 European nations and will work in working commissions to approve a final declaration on October 12. Attending the venue are Adriana Perez and Olga Salanueva, wives of Gerardo Hernandez and Rene Gonzalez, two of the five Cubans who are in US prisons. The main themes under debate are the struggle against the US embargo imposed on Cuba, and the demand for the release of the five Cubans imprisoned in the United States (ACN, 9/10/08).

October 9: The Namibian government donated one million dollars to Cuba to help in the recovery actions underway throughout the island from hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Claudia Grace Uushona, ambassador of the African nation in Havana, gave the donation to Cuban Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration (MINVEC) Marta Lomas, who received it on behalf of the Cuban government. The director of MINVEC's coordination and planning department Agustin Cabello, told the press that to date Cuba has received 478 offers of aid valued at 50 million dollars, from 71 countries and 12 international organizations. Of those donations, 230 consist of cash, foodstuffs, fertilizers, cleaning items and building materials valued at 17 million dollars (ACN, 9/10/08).

October 9: Operation Miracle, a program that provides free vision correcting surgery, was launched in Barbados with the treatment of 450 patients at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. The program is sponsored by Cuba and headed in Barbados by Dr Maritza Miquele, former head of the Ophthalmology Department at the Pando Ferrer Hospital in Havana (ACN, 9/10/08).

October 9: Cabinet has decided that the South African government, working with civil society, should participate in the global humanitarian assistance effort to support the people of Cuba, following the devastation caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. The hurricanes left seven people dead; 3.1 million people were evacuated; 444 000 houses were extensively damaged and agricultural fields were destroyed in Cuba. "The Cuban government and its people must be commended for the extensive evacuation effort which saved millions of lives". "The South African Government will work with civil society to ensure that a national humanitarian assistance programme is launched to assist the people of Cuba," said government spokesperson Themba Maseko. The Department of Foreign Affairs, which has already pledged R3 million to this effort, will be the coordinating department (BuaNews, 9/10/08).

October 11: Grenada is building a monument to Cubans who died during the 1983 US military invasion of the Caribbean island. Foreign Affairs Minister Peter David says the 24 Cuban construction workers should be remembered because "they were making a contribution toward the development of this country." He said that the Cuban and Grenadian governments are deciding on the best site for the monument. He spoke at the third annual Conference of Solitary with Cuba, an event organized by Grenadians who studied in Cuba in the 1980s. The US invaded the island on October 25, 1983, after an

extremist Marxist faction executed Prime Minister Maurice Bishop and several of his supporters. Forty-five Grenadians and 18 Americans were also killed in three days of fighting (*The Miami Herald*, 11/10/08).

October 11: Lebanese friends of Cuba held a day of tribute to the Argentinean-Cuban guerrilla Ernesto Che Guevara and for solidarity with five Cubans imprisoned in the United States. Over half a million people called by the Lebanese Committee of Solidarity with the Five gathered in the UNESCO Palace in Beirut to demand the freedom of the five Cubans. Cuban Ambassador to Lebanon Dario de Urrea expressed his gratitude for the Lebanese and Palestine solidarity. The event was attended by Lebanese members of parliament, Palestine political leaders, president of the Lebanon-Cuba Friendship Association Maurice Nahra, and President of Honor of the Lebanese Committee of Solidarity with the Five Samir Kantar, who was imprisoned in Israel for 30 years (*Prensa Latina*, 11/10/08).

October 13: A group of Cuban philosophers, sociologists and writers will participate in the 8th World Encounter of Intellectuals and Artists in Defense of Humanity that begins in Caracas, Venezuela. Isabel Monal and Fernando Martinez Heredia, both winners of the National Award in the category of Social Sciences, as well as philosopher Aurelio Alonso and writer Jorge Angel Perez make up the Cuban delegation that will participate in the event along with nearly 200 intellectuals from 60 countries. On this occasion, the main theme of the meeting, which begins at the Teresa Carreno Theatre, will be: "Transitions towards Socialism: Cultural, Social, Economic and Political Aspects" (*ACN*, 13/10/08).

October 13: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque began an official visit to Spain, on an invitation by his Spanish counterpart Miguel Angel Moratinos. Perez Roque's visit will continue the inter-ministerial exchange in the context of the traditional ties of friendship existing between the peoples of Cuba and Spain. Moratinos visited Cuba last April. Perez Roque's agenda includes talks with his Spanish peer and other authorities of that country, the daily states. The Cuban Minister is accompanied by Deputy Foreign Minister Alejandro González, and by Europe and Multilateral Affairs desk chiefs, Jorge Quesada and Rodolfo Reyes, as well as by Cuban Ambassador to Spain Alberto Velazco (*ACN*, 13/10/08).

October 13: An Argentinean lawyer, representing the family of a military officer assassinated by a leftist group in 1974, demanded the detention of Raúl and Fidel Castro as he considered that Havana has responsibility in the case for having trained Argentinean insurgents and promoted guerrillas throughout Latin America in the 60's and 70's. The Argentine newspaper La Nacion reported on the request from Javier Vigo, lawyer for Maria Cristina Picon, widow of Army captain Humberto Viola. The captain and his five-year-old daughter died on December 1, 1974 as a consequence of an attack attributed to the now dissolved People's Revolutionary Army (*EFE*, 13/10/08).

October 13: The Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture of Botswana, Gladys K. Kokorwe, met with the Cuban ambassador in this African nation, Jorge Luis Lopez Tormo, and thanked him for Cuba's assistance and cooperation with her country.

During the meeting, Kokorwe and Lopez Tormo spoke of topics related to youths, sports and culture in both countries. For his part, the Cuban diplomat expressed his country's willingness to continue developing and strengthening bilateral cooperation in this area and delivered a letter from the President of the Cuban Institute of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation (INDER), Christian Jimenez, inviting Kokorwe to visit the Caribbean nation (ACN, 14/10/08).

October 14: A high level delegation will hand in a petition to the US Embassy in London calling for visitation rights for the wives of five Cuban nationals imprisoned for ten years in the US. Human rights activists will be joined by leaders from major unions in the US and the UK to submit the 10,000 signature-strong petition, signed by MPs, nine Nobel Laureates, as well as personalities from the worlds of media, law and arts, which is also asking for freedom for the men. Two of the wives of the Five, Olga Salanueva and Adriana Perez have been denied visas to visit their husbands since their trial ten years ago. The protest follows an announcement by Amnesty International that the human rights group will launch a world wide campaign among its 2.2m members for visiting rights for the wives describing their treatment "unnecessarily punitive and contrary to standards for humane treatment of prisoners and states' obligations to protect family life" (*Health Business Week*, 16/10/08).

October 14: Visiting Cuban Deputy Minister of International Cooperation, Mr Ramon Ripoll has bestowed a Medal of Friendship on Botswana's Vice President Lt Gen. Mompoti Merafhe. Mr Ripoll said the medal was from the Cuban President, Mr Raul Castro and was in honour of General Merafhe, who is former minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. The medal was presented to the vice president at the end of the Botswana/Cuba Joint Permanent Commission for Cooperation meeting (*BOPA*, 16/10/08).

October 14: The Director and founder of the Cuban National Ballet, prima ballerina assoluta Alicia Alonso, will receive the Gold Medal of Merit in the category of Fine Arts granted by the Spanish Government. The awarding ceremony will take place on October 15, at the Teatro Colon in La Coruna, Spain, with the presence of the King and the Queen of Spain. Other personalities who will receive the award on this occasion are Cecilia Bartoli, Daniel Barenboim, Antonio Banderas, Marisa Paredes, Maria Pires, Manuel de Oliveira and Roberto Verino, among others (ACN, 14/10/08).

October 14: The Spanish Secretary of State for the European Union, Diego Lopez Garrido, said that after the transfer of power to Raúl Castro improvements in Cuba are "clearly insufficient" both from a political and economic point of view, as well as in terms of human rights protection. During a news breakfast with the Association of Parliamentary Journalists, Lopez Garrido said that the Castro regime "has to move" and "take steps" toward liberalization if it wishes the dialogue with the EU to be productive. He also added that the right path for Cuba's progress is dialogue, not "the embargo or sanctions" (*EFE*, 14/10/08).

October 14: The prime minister of Spain, which played a key role in persuading the European Union to lift diplomatic sanctions against Cuba, has accepted an invitation from President Raul Castro to visit next year, a Spanish official said. Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos said details of the trip by Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero still need to be worked out, but Moratinos believes it will go ahead. The minister made the announcement after meeting with his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Perez Roque. In the talks in Madrid, Spain also agreed to fund a two-year 24.5 million euro (US\$34 million) program to help Cuba rebuild homes, schools and other structures destroyed by hurricanes Gustav and Ike this summer, Moratinos said. Spain has also agreed to restructure part of Cuba's 1.5 billion euro (US\$2.1 billion) debt with the Spanish government, and open up a new line of credit worth 50 million (US\$69 million) to 100 million euro (US\$138 million), Moratinos said (*AP*, 14/10/08).

October 14: Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Perez Roque met with King Juan Carlos of Spain at the La Zarzuela Palace, as part of the minister's visit to the Iberian country. The talks between Perez Roque and King Juan Carlos focused on the relations between the Caribbean nation and the European Union, in which the Spanish government has played a special role. Prior to this meeting, there was a press conference given by Perez Roque and Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos, in which both confirmed the satisfying situation of bilateral bonds and announced several actions to be taken in the near future (*ACN*, 14/10/08).

October 14: On February 24, four days after being officially named to succeed his ailing brother, -- legendary revolutionary Fidel Castro, Raul Castro had Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque sign UN human rights agreements, which Fidel Castro had ruled out. Perez Roque announced in New York that he had signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. For decades, Havana had refused to sign the pacts, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966, saying to do so would be to cede to US pressure. The minister said such pressure played no part in the decision to sign them. It was the first international move taken by the new leadership of Raul Castro, whom many analysts believe is under tremendous pressure to improve the cash-strapped economy reeling under pressure from low wages and scarce food. Spain's Ambassador in Havana, Carlos Alonso Zaldivar, told reporters in Oslo that a meeting was held with representatives from Spain, Switzerland, Norway and Cuba on the agreement on economic, social and cultural rights, leading him to believe "we have evidence Cuba is really preparing to ratify and implement the agreements it has signed" (*AFP*, 14/10/08).

October 14: Cuba's foreign minister warned that President Raul Castro will never renounce socialism, just days before Havana holds landmark talks with European Union leaders. "There has not been reform in Cuba, but a deep social revolution" and "this process has to be continually perfected," Felipe Perez Roque told a press conference in Madrid when asked about reforms undertaken by Raul Castro since he replaced his ailing brother Fidel two years ago. If the reforms imply that "Cuba is renouncing socialism, we have to say that they are not," he said, following a meeting with his Spanish counterpart Miguel Angel Moratinos. On October 16, the European Union is to hold its first

ministerial talks with Cuba since 2003. The initiative follows the EU's lifting of sanctions against Cuba last June. Perez Roque expressed optimism that the talks could help improve relations between Havana and Brussels. "Our country is interested in talks on all issues," he said. "Of course in this exchange the EU has something to say and we are sure it will help the development of our relations." EU sources said that Perez Roque will hold landmark talks with an EU troika composed of French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, his Czech counterpart Karel Schwarzenberg and EU Development Commissioner Louis Michel. Perez Roque said the meeting would take place in Paris (AP, 14/10/08).

October 14: The Czech junior government Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL) presented a project designed to point to the continued human rights violations in Cuba and other countries, at a press conference attended by Cyril Svoboda, Czech minister and head of the Government Legislative Council. Svoboda (KDU-CSL) criticized the European Union for the abolition of the sanctions towards Cuba where the communist regime has ruled for almost 50 years. Czech diplomacy also agreed with the lifting of the sanctions in June and Svoboda said that he considered this a mistake. The project entitled "Political prisoners, we know about you" will every day present one foreign political prisoners on the KDU-CSL website. According to KDU-CSL spokesman Martin Horalek, there are 35 people in the database, so far only from Cuba. Svoboda said, however, that he could not rule out the possibility of including political prisoners from other non-free countries in the database (CTK, 14/10/08).

October 14: Spain's prime minister has accepted an invitation to visit Cuba next year and could become the first western European leader to travel to the communist-run island in nearly a decade. Details of Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero's trip still needed to be worked out, Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos said after meeting with his Cuban counterpart in Madrid. He said Spain was satisfied with Cuba's advances in human rights. But, Zapatero later told reporters that "there is a proposal" and "we'll see when the time comes if it is carried out and how it is carried out." A government spokesman insisted Zapatero was not throwing doubt on the possibility of the visit but simply saying it was not known when exactly it would happen. Zapatero's Socialist government played a key role in persuading the European Union to lift diplomatic sanctions against Cuba last June and in pressing the island to improve its human rights record (AP, 14/10/08).

October 15: The Operation Miracle program carried out in the South American country by Cuban eye doctors have treated more than 8,000 low-income Paraguayans which have had their sight restored in the last three years. Some 5,000 residents and local and national authorities attended a ceremony held in recognition of the project in the city of Pilar, reported Prensa Latina news agency. Several speakers at the activity, mostly patients, praised the work of the 23 Cubans providing their services at the Maria Auxiladora Ophthalmological Centre (ACN, 15/10/08).

October 15: Thirteen Cuban migrants are in Honduras after spending two weeks at sea in a homemade boat. Immigration officials said the 11 men and two women arrived in

Puerto Cortes on Honduras' Atlantic coast, one of Central America's principal ports. They left Cuba on September 25 and arrived on October 11. At least 175 Cubans have arrived in Honduras under similar circumstances this year. Authorities often extend 15- or 30-day humanitarian visas to the immigrants. Many wind up continuing their illegal journey, hiring smugglers to take them to the United States (*AP*, 15/10/08).

October 15: Cuba is confident that Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero will become the first Spanish prime minister to make an official visit to the island since 1986, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said. Zapatero would also be the first Western European leader to visit the island since 1999, when his predecessor Jose Maria Aznar and then Portuguese president Jorge Sampaio attended an Ibero-American summit in Havana. Perez Roque spoke in the southern Spanish city of Cordoba, which he visited after meeting his counterpart Miguel Angel Moratinos in Madrid. Moratinos said Zapatero had accepted an invitation from Cuban leader Raul Castro to visit the island in 2009. Zapatero, however, said the plan was only a "proposal." "We will see if it is carried out and how it is carried out," he told reporters. The invitation had been "accepted in principle" though the date had not yet been set, Perez Roque said (*DPA*, 15/10/08).

October 16: The president of the Christian Liberation Movement, Oswaldo Paya, called on Spaniards not to be indifferent to the violations of human rights committed by the Cuban government, because "being on the right, in the centre or on the left" is not a license "to support a system without rights like that of Cuba." In a conference call, Paya said everybody in Spain knows about the violations of human rights carried out by the Cuban Communist regime. "It is a scandal that some justify, support and even enjoy. Others increase their support and over-calculate the risks and the benefits, with little generosity," he stated. Paya recalled that in Cuba, "There are dozens of people in prison solely for peacefully defending the rights of Cubans, solely for promoting the Varela Project which calls for rights for everyone." He pointed out that as long as these people are kept in prison, "all Cubans are under threat, and the message being sent to the world is that in order to have full relations with the Cuban state, it must be accepted as normal that Cubans are marginalized in their own country and that they are citizens, or rather servants, without rights" (*Catholic News Agency*, 17/10/08).

October 16: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque described as useful a three-day official visit to Spain, where he verified the willingness of the Spanish government to promote bilateral relations in all fields. Speaking to Prensa Latina news agency, the Cuban diplomat stressed that all the goals of his visit were attained and he added: "We have developed a varied and respectful dialogue with the main Spanish authorities." Likewise, Perez Roque highlighted the interest and commitment of the Spanish government to play a constructive role in the improvement of relations between Cuba and the European Union (EU). During his stay in Madrid, Perez Roque met with King Juan Carlos and with the First Vice President of the Spanish government, Maria Teresa de la Vega. He also held official talks with his Spanish counterpart, Miguel Angel Moratinos (*ACN*, 16/10/08).

October 16: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque was received by the French Senate during his official visit to France, aimed at formally starting the political talks with the European Union (EU). Gérard Larcher, speaker of the Senate, said that he is confident that Perez Roque's visit will be beneficial for both Cuba and France in their interest to strengthen bilateral economic and political bonds. The Cuban Minister previously held a meeting with the France-Caribbean Friendship Organization, which was attended by Jean Pierre Bel, president of the Socialist representation at the Senate, as well as by senators Bernard Piras (Socialist Party), Vice-President of the France-Caribbean Friendship Organization, and Jean Desessard (Green Party). Perez Roque arrived in Paris to hold talks with the EU, after that bloc decided to lift the unjustified sanctions against Cuba, reported Prensa Latina news agency. The Cuban official is also scheduled to meet with his French counterpart Bernard Kouchner. The French Chancellor is currently the semester president of the EU, and will be accompanied by Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg and Louis Michel, European commissar in charge of Development and Humanitarian Aid (ACN, 16/10/08).

October 16: Cuba is interested in developing cooperation with Russia and in expanding contacts at various levels in the field of education, Francisco Ferreira, Cuban First Deputy Minister of Education, told the press in Havana. "An opportunity has arisen to resume exchanges of students between the institutions of higher education of the two countries. This is a possibility which is currently under discussion," Ferreira pointed out. The Deputy Minister emphasized that people in Cuba "are gratified to note that prospects for restoration and development of Cuban-Russian contacts in education have re-emerged again". Many teachers, who cooperated with Cuba in Soviet times, "have not lost contact with us. We maintain permanent contacts with some of them up to now," Ferreira said (*Itar-Tass*, 16/10/08).

October 16: Representatives of Cuban dissident groups say a visit to the communist-ruled island by Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero would only make sense if it is accompanied by a commitment by Havana to free political prisoners. The visit "would be very positive if there were a response on the part of the Cuban government in the sense of freeing the peaceful prisoners of conscience and respecting human rights," economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, one of 75 government opponents arrested and sentenced to lengthy prison terms in Spring 2003. "If that were the case, we would welcome the visit; but if not, it makes no sense" because "in practice it would serve as (tacit) support for totalitarianism," said Espinosa, released from jail on medical grounds. The leader of the opposition group Agenda for the Transition, Marta Beatriz Roque said for her part that "undoubtedly any freeing of political prisoners, anything that means the release of prisoners or the ending of the repression would be welcome." Roque, the only woman among the 75 convicted in 2003 and also paroled for health reasons, said it is unfortunate that the visit is "part of a policy of support on the part of the Spanish government for its Cuban" counterpart. But the leader of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, Elizardo Sanchez, told the press that a "visit by any representative of a democratic government to Cuba will always be positive, given the anti-democratic nature of the island's government." He added, however, that "it will always be difficult for some dignitary of a democratic country to come to Cuba and

find that the jails are full of political prisoners, including 60 prisoners of conscience adopted by Amnesty International." Hector Palacios, another member of the Group of 75 who was released for health reasons, said it was "regrettable" that Zapatero plans to visit the island "without the Cuban government having taken serious, viable and concrete steps" to improve its human rights record. The leader of Cuban Change, Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo, asked rhetorically: "What is (Zapatero) coming here to see? That here we have the same dictatorship of 50 years ago?" (*EFE*, 16/10/08).

October 16: The European Union has offered hurricane aid and other help to Cuba at the first talks between officials since the bloc imposed diplomatic sanctions against the Caribbean island in 2003. The establishment of formal dialogue, along with the elimination of the sanctions in June, is seen as the first step towards normalization of what have been strained relations between the 27-nation EU and communist Cuba. "The European Union confirms its availability to bring post-disaster aid to Cuba, and more generally to restart a co-operation with the country," the French Foreign Ministry said in a statement after the meeting. Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque led the Cuban delegation in the talks with French and Czech Foreign Ministers Bernard Kouchner and Karel Schwarzenberg, and Louis Michel, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid. France holds the rotating presidency of the EU until the end of the year when the Czech Republic will be in charge. Michel is due to visit Havana from October 22 to 25. "It's my wish that my visit to Havana next week can mark the formal take-up of co-operation between the European Commission and Cuba," he said in a separate statement. The co-operation could focus on sectors such as the environment, trade, science and technology, cultural exchanges and natural disaster prevention, he said. That would include rapid assistance in the reconstruction process following hurricanes Ike and Gustav. The French statement said the participants had a deep discussion about civil and political rights and the Europeans stressed that it expected improvements (*Reuters, ACN*, 17/10/08).

October 16: "It is the first step on a long path," said Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg after a EU-Cuba meeting in which he took part. The EU thereby launched a new series of contacts with Cuba with the aim to encourage the transformation of the communist regime into democracy. Along with Schwarzenberg, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel participated in the meeting. "It has been the first contact," Schwarzenberg said, adding that the EU representatives assured Cuba that they were willing to launch a new dialogue. Schwarzenberg, however, pointed out that the EU kept its firm stance on the human rights observance and insisted on the release of political prisoners in Cuba. The EU-Cuba meeting also discussed the consequences of the worldwide financial crisis and its impact on Cuba. Schwarzenberg, however, noted that the possible EU aid to Cuba would be on the agenda at another occasion. Schwarzenberg also said Kouchner and Spain shared the opinion that openness and an accommodating approach could stimulate positive changes in Cuba, but the Czech Republic would be rather careful in this respect with regard to its historical experience (*CTK*, 16/10/08).

October 17: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque described as profound, respectful, open and comprehensive a meeting held with the Troika of the European Union (EU) at the headquarters of the French Foreign Ministry in Paris. According to Prensa Latina, Perez Roque, who met with his French and Czech counterparts, Bernard Kouchner and Karel Schwarzenberg, respectively, and with Louis Michel, the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Assistance and Development, said that this meeting was a step towards the normalization of the political dialogue between Cuba and the EU. "In general, the meeting was positive. A new path opens after the EU lifted the sanctions against Cuba and we have reiterated that our country does not accept any imposition that undermines our sovereignty," said the Cuban diplomat (*ACN*, 17/10/08).

October 17: United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's representative to Cuba, Marcio Porto highlighted Cuba's efforts in order to achieve world food security. In statements to the local press at the celebration of the World Food Day, the official explained that the Caribbean nation is the main provider of knowledge and human resources to the tripartite South-South cooperation program developed by FAO. Porto praised Cuban contribution to risk assessments and protection of agriculture in the face of natural disasters, such as tropical cyclones, meteorological events that destroy thousand of hectares of crops and represent an ever latent threat to the region. "Existing technology should be shared and reach every producer in order to make progress, but there must be political willingness" said Porto, and added: "Developing countries, with the help of rich countries should become aware that food security is a matter of national security and a top priority" (*ACN*, 17/10/08).

October 17: China will provide a batch of construction material to Cuba to help it repair houses damaged by hurricanes "Gustav" and "Ike," according to an agreement signed by the two sides. The agreement was inked by Chinese Ambassador to Cuba, Zhao Rongxian, and Cuban Minister for Foreign Investments and Economic Collaboration, Marta Lomas. The batch of galvanized zinc tiles, used to repair roofs, was worth some 11 million yuans, some 1.6 million US dollars (*Xinhua*, 17/10/08).

October 17: Cuban and Italian cinema institutions signed a protocol that includes the co-production of a full-length fiction film in 2009. The General Director for Cinema of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Assets, Gaetano Blandini, and the president of the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC), Omar Gonzalez, signed the agreement, which establishes mutual commitments in the production, exhibition, distribution, restoration and preservation of films, and also in the training of personnel (*ACN*, 20/10/08).

October 17: Dimitri Medvedev, president of the Russian Federation, signed a decree bestowing the Friendship order to Cuban Vice-President Ricardo Cabrisas and Jorge Marti, president of the Cuban Friendship Institute (ICAP). This award acknowledges the two Cuban officials' contributions to the development of the relations between Russia and Cuba, reports Prensa Latina news agency. The Cuban Vice-President has directed the Intergovernmental Commission for Economic and Technical-Scientific Collaboration between the two nations. Meantime, Marti was the Cuban Ambassador to Moscow for five years, and during that time he was decorated with the Alexander Pushkin medal for

his contribution to the spreading of the Russian language around the world (*ACN*, 17/10/08).

October 17: A large delegation from the Russian Federation arrived in Havana to participate in the activities for the Day of Russia in Cuba, as part of a tour for several Latin American countries. Stanislav Alexandrovich Naumov, Industry and Trade deputy Minister, heads the delegation, made up of Viacheslav Yurievich Sinyugin, Energy deputy Minister along other Russian government officials that will exhibit the developments, culture and traditions of the Russian people. Metropolitan Kirill, a permanent member of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and head of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations, heads the delegation that will participate in the consecration of the Russian Orthodox Church cathedral, built in Havana city, reported *Granma* newspaper. All these activities are part of the inauguration of the Day of Russia in Cuba, which will include the exhibition of films, documentaries, and cartoons, as well as works of artists that won the Arts International festival in Moscow (*ACN*, 18/10/08).

October 18: The Russian Duma (lower chamber) approved to make a call to the United Nations demanding the end of the US blockade against Cuba and to send humanitarian aid after the battering of hurricanes Gustav and Ike to the Caribbean nation. The resolution was approved by 439 votes, which represent a 97.6 percent acceptance, with one abstention, and no votes against, reported *Granma* newspaper. The proposal was introduced by Iván Melnikov, Vice-President of the Russian Federation Communist Party, and backed by Yuli Kvitsinski, a deputy from the Foreign Affairs Committee (*ACN*, 18/10/08).

October 18: The Day of Russia in Cuba opened in Havana with performances by awarded artists of the International Arts Festival of that country and the screening of films, documentaries and cartoons. According to reports in *Granma* newspaper, the choir from the Sretenskiy Monastery of Moscow will give a concert at the Minor Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi, in Old Havana, as part of the celebration. Also on the list is a dedication to the Russian Orthodox Cathedral erected at the city's historical quarter, and a business people forum to tune direct communication strategies between managerial sectors and show trade and industrial potential from both parties, the daily stated. Russian ambassador to Havana Mikhail L. Kamynin stressed that his country will enhance economic, cultural and spiritual ties with Cuba and other Latin American countries. "We will actively foster collaboration with Cuba in branches like biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, communications and information technology," the diplomat stated (*Prensa Latina*, 18/10/08).

October 18: Chinese company Haier donated 150,000 dollars in equipment to hurricane-struck Cuba, to help in the recovery works in the most affected areas by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. This donation was part of a solidarity-with-Cuba ceremony presided over Wang Anxi, deputy director of Haier and Carlos Miguel Pereira, Cuban Ambassador to China, in Qingdao city, in Shandong province. Wang expressed the willingness by Haier and the Chinese people of helping the Cuban people in this recovery stage, and he

mentioned the most important cooperation projects with the Caribbean nation. He also highlighted his company's collaboration in the energy-saving projects Cuba is undertaking. The Cuban Ambassador thanked the Chinese government and people, and especially to Haier group, whose donation will help replace the lost equipment after the passing of the hurricanes (*ACN*, 18/10/08).

October 19: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said that Mexico has agreed to return Cuban migrants who arrive without documents, a move that may threaten the main exit route for Cubans seeking to leave the island. Migrant smugglers have increasingly stolen boats in Florida to carry migrants from Cuba to Mexico's Caribbean coast. Most evade Mexican officials and the few caught are rarely deported. In most cases, they are given transit permits that allow them to reach the US border. Over 90 percent of Cuban emigrants now reach the United States this way. "The measures we have agreed on will include a mechanism for the swift return of illegal migrants who try to use Mexico to get to the United States," Perez Roque told reporters on arrival at Mexico City's airport. He said the agreement would also "allow us to work together to prevent and confront illegal migration, people trafficking and all related crimes." Mexican officials said they could not immediately comment on Perez Roque's statements. "Mexico and Cuba are victims of this policy that promotes illegal immigration from Cuba," Perez Roque said, referring to the US Cuban Adjustment Act that allows most Cubans who reach American soil to remain in the country and apply for US residency after one year. Mexico-Cuba relations were strained under former President Vicente Fox, who left office in December 2006. But Perez Roque said ties have been mended, and said he would invite current President Felipe Calderon to visit Cuba (*AP*, 19/10/08).

October 19: The Russian Orthodox Church granted its highest decoration, the Order of Glory and Honour, to Fidel Castro. The decoration was presented to Cuban President Raul Castro by Metropolitan Kirill, a permanent member of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church and head of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations, during a ceremony at the venue of the Cuban Council of State. At the same time, His Eminence Kirill presented Raul with the Order Prince Daniel of Good Faith in its First Degree. "On behalf of the Commander in Chief and also on my behalf, I ask you to convey our gratitude to His Holiness, the Patriarch of Russia, Alexei II. We are very happy with the visit of this Russian religious delegation and we hope it will repeat," Raul said (*ACN*, 20/10/08).

October 20: Representatives from environmentalist organizations from around the world have approved the Initiative for the Caribbean, presented by Cuba at the World Congress on Nature, which ended in Barcelona, Spain. The project was welcomed by representatives of the Caribbean states as a great opportunity, according to information given to *ACN* by specialists from the Cuban Ministry for Science, Technology and the Environment (CTIMA) who participated in the event, attended by 7,800 delegates (*ACN*, 20/10/08).

October 20: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said his country will step up co-operation with Mexico to stem the flow of Cubans trying to get to reach the US

illegally through Mexico, an exodus fuelling an increasingly violent human trafficking industry. "It's an effort to prevent a phenomenon that neither the Mexican government nor the Cuban government are really responsible for because illegal migration from Cuba is artificially stimulated from the United States," Mr. Perez Roque said, hours before he was to sign an agreement with the Mexican government. Mexican officials have refused to comment on details of the accord. Mr. Perez Roque said that Mexico has expressed willingness to repatriate Cubans who arrive in this country without proper documents. Mr. Perez Roque said his visit to Mexico was a sign of improved relations between the two countries. "The situation has really radically changed from the way relations were a few years ago," Mr. Perez Roque said (*Globe and Mail*, 20/10/08).

October 20: Mexico agreed to deport Cubans who sneak illegally through Mexican territory to reach the US, a step toward cutting off an increasingly violent and heavily used human trafficking route. The agreement, signed by Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and Mexican Foreign Secretary Patricia Espinosa, takes effect in one month. It also criticizes US policy that generally allows Cubans who reach U.S. territory to stay, while turning back most caught at sea. "We believe now there will be fewer attempts to use Mexico as an illegal corridor for Cuban immigrants trying to get to the United States," said Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque at a news conference with Mexican officials. A joint declaration by the two governments said the preferential treatment given by the United States to Cuban migrants encourages their illegal entry into Mexico. "The U.S. immigration policy toward Cuba (...) complicates efforts to effectively combat criminal organizations that profit from the illegal trafficking of Cubans," the declaration said (*AP, Reuters*, 21/10/08).

October 20: Fidel Castro received Metropolitan Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and had a conversation with him. During the meeting, which was held at the end of the "Russia Days in Cuba", a three-day festival in Havana, the interlocutors discussed a wide range of matters concerning "a moral evaluation of the current events in the world in the sphere of the economy and politics and of what is going on between East and West," His Eminence told the Russian press after the meeting. He pointed out that the conversation continued for one hour and a half and that during it Castro looked very spry. "We exchanged opinions about the development of Latin America and other 'third-world' countries," Metropolitan Kirill said. The conversation also dealt with the role of the ROC and, in general, of the importance of inter-religious relationships in international contacts, including Cuban-Russian ones, he pointed out. "Fidel attentively follows everything that is happening in the world, and brilliantly comments on developments. I did not detect in him any signs of deterioration of intellect," Metropolitan Kirill said. He pointed out that Fidel Castro had attentively followed the TV coverage of the Russia Days festival in Havana and "was moved very much by the fact that a temple of the ROC had opened in the Cuban capital" (*TASS*, 21/10/08).

October 20: Spain's secretary of state for international cooperation delivered 24.5 million euros (\$32.6 million) in additional aid to hurricane-wracked Cuba. "Cuba is a priority in our policy of aid for development, not only because of what we're doing in Cuba, but also because for us it is a priority partner in the strategy we want to carry out in

Latin America in terms of cooperation South-South," Soraya Rodriguez Ramos said in Havana. The secretary, who ends a three-day official visit, signed a letter of intent to formalize the aid together with Cuban vice minister for cooperation and foreign investment, Ricardo Guerrero, in the presence of Vice President José Ramon Fernandez. This aid is added to the 1.1 million euros (\$1.5 million) in emergency materials delivered to the island's government as an "emergency" response shortly after the hurricanes passed through, and to some 14 million euros (\$18.7 million) of scheduled aid that Spain provided to the island in the last 12 months. Rodriguez said that the new funds will go towards "aspects of education, to seriously damaged infrastructure such as the water supply, and to the restoration of the country's homes," since Cuba lost almost 500,000 dwellings. "A large part also goes to the recovery and improvement of the productive agricultural sector," she said. The secretary said that Spain is interested in collaborating with Cuba in a "triangular cooperation" to coordinate projects in Latin American countries (*EFE*, 20/10/08).

October 20: Spain's secretary of state for international cooperation said that there will not be "complete normalcy" in relations with Cuba until the island's communist government allows the Spanish Cultural Centre in Havana to re-open. "We maintain our demand for the restoration of the centre (...) and hope we can soon begin working to arrive at a situation of normalcy, which cannot fully exist until the centre is open," Soraya Rodriguez Ramos told Spanish reporters in the Cuban capital. The closure of the Spanish Cultural Centre was the first measure Cuba took against a country of the European Union after the 2003 crisis, when that bloc applied diplomatic sanctions on the island for the jailing of 75 peaceful dissidents and the execution of three would-be boat hijackers. The secretary, who ended an official three-day visit to the island, said that "the restoration of the cultural centre is a subject that is brought up in every meeting" with the Cuban government. She said that the Cuban government alleges "a series of reasons, from its point of view, that made closing the centre legitimate, which was its deviation from the goals for which cultural centres are opened." "We, of course, do not agree," she said, and repeated that the Cuban government has been told of the need to re-open the centre. At the same time, she said that today Cuba and Spain are "in a better situation" to be able to talk about re-opening the centre that they were "a week ago" (*EFE*, 21/10/08).

October 21: Responding to an invitation from the Cuban government, Nguyen Thi Doan, vice president of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, began an official visit to the island. The distinguished visitor is accompanied by a large delegation comprising Nguyen Kim Ngan, Minister of Labour, Invalid and Social Affairs, who also presides over the Vietnam-Cuba Friendship Association; Nguyen Thi Tan Hoa, President of the Union of Vietnamese Women; and other officials from the Vietnamese government and Foreign Ministry. During her stay in Cuba, the Vietnamese vice president will have official talks with Carlos Lage Davila, Vice President of the Council of State, and with other Cuban government and party officials (*Granma Internacional*, 21/10/08).

October 21: Cuba's foreign minister invited Mexico's president to Cuba in a thawing of relations, a day after Mexico agreed to deport Cubans illegally on its territory. The visit, for which a date has not yet been set, would be the first by a Mexican president to the

communist Caribbean island in seven years. Cuba-Mexico ties suffered under the 2000-2006 presidency of Vicente Fox, when Mexico voted at the UN in favor of monitoring human rights in Cuba. They reached a low in 2004, when both countries called home their ambassadors. Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque passed on the invitation to Cuba from President Raul Castro to Felipe Calderon at his Mexico City residence, a government statement said. The Mexican Senate meanwhile approved a measure calling on the government to vote in the UN General Assembly at the end of the month against the full US economic embargo of Cuba that has been in place since 1962. The announcement was made by Perez Roque, during a visit to the Senate. Perez Roque said that his four-day visit to Mexico was a sign of improved relations between the two countries. The Cuban foreign minister was due to be made an honorary citizen of Mexico City by leftist mayor Marcelo Ebrard (*AFP*, 22/10/08).

October 21: Fidel Castro said he had an "agreeable and edifying" meeting with a top Russian Orthodox leader and that the churchman "is no enemy of socialism." The ailing former president said the meeting with Metropolitan Kirill, the church's top foreign relations official, occurred on October 19, after the consecration of a new Russian Orthodox cathedral in Havana. He offered no details. Cuba's state-controlled media had not previously reported on the meeting, which Castro mentioned in an article published in the official web site Cubadebate. Castro said he proposed the cathedral as a monument to Cuban-Russian friendship when he met with Kirill during a 2004 visit, and that he decided to meet with the churchman again on Sunday after it had been consecrated ([The Russian Orthodox Church](#); *The Miami Herald*, 22/10/08).

October 21: Vietnamese Vice-president Nguyen Thi Doan, arrived in Havana on an official visit, which she said would contribute to strengthen the fraternal ties existing between the two nations. Cuba's Minister of Labor and Social Security, Alfredo Morales Cartaya, welcomed the senior Vietnamese official at Havana's José Martí International Airport. Upon her arrival, Thi Doan said, "We are two sister nations of the same kind, which have always shared what we've had." For his part, Morales Cartaya expressed the satisfaction of Cuban authorities for having such a distinguished representative of the Vietnamese people on the island. "We have always had one another," pointed out the visitor from the Asian nation. Thi Dian is accompanied by Nguyen Kim Ngan, who is the minister of Labor and Social Security and president of the Vietnam-Cuba Friendship Association; Nguyen Thi Tan Hoa, president of the Association of Women from the homeland of Ho Chi Minh; as well as other officials from the Vietnamese government and its foreign minister (*ACN*, 21/10/08).

October 22: Relations between Cuba and Viet Nam keep strengthening as years go by and under all circumstances, said Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage after meeting in Havana with his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Thi Doan. During the talks, held at the building hosting the Cuban Council of Ministers, Thi Doan and Carlos Lage addressed the course of bilateral relations between the two nations. Carlos Lage said that Cuba appreciates an ongoing campaign in Viet Nam in support of the current recovery efforts by the Cuban people after the passing of hurricanes Gustav and Ike. The Cuban VP highlighted the visit to Cuba by the high-level Vietnamese delegation. Meanwhile, Thi

Doan said she was happy to have made her first visit to the Caribbean nation. The talks were also attended by acting Foreign Minister, Bruno Rodriguez, Social Security and Labour Minister, Alfredo Morales Cartaya, and by Deputy Foreign Minister, Marcos Rodriguez. The Vietnamese top government official also met with leaders of the Cuban Young Communist League, including its First Secretary, Julio Martinez (ACN, 22/10/08).

October 22: The Alicia Alonso Institute of Mexico was inaugurated in Tecamachalco, in the Mexican state of Puebla, by its director general, Professor Ernestina Sodi, and by the commercial manager Joel Montero, both members of Proculita Latino, a cultural promotion entity. Also participating in the activity were Miriam Vila, director of the Cuban Ballet Company's Department of Dance; Vivian Martinez, cultural attaché of the Cuban embassy in Mexico, and Jose Luis Duran, president of the municipality of Naucalpan (ACN, 22/10/08).

October 22: Nearly 30 Chinese businesspeople participated in a fundraising solidarity banquet to support the ongoing recovery efforts in Cuba after the devastation caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. The event, which took place at the renowned Roosevelt Club of Shanghai, was sponsored by the Cigar Friends Club of Hong Kong and by businessman Hamilton Lee, also of Hong Kong. Businesspeople from Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Australia also participated. The evening included the auction of humidors and boxes of Cuban cigars which left the equivalent to \$39,700 (ACN, 24/10/08).

October 22: Cuba's First Vice-president, José Ramón Machado Ventura, met in Havana with the president of the Revolutionary Front of Independent East Timor (FRETILIN), Francisco Guterrez. Guterrez, known in Timor by his war name "Lu Olo", was a guerilla at 24 years of age, and after his country's independence was the first president of the Constituent Assembly, and then of the National Parliament, Granma newspaper highlighted. During the meeting, Lu Olo expressed his gratitude for the presence and solidarity of the Cuban medical brigade in his country, which has provided health care services even in the most isolated areas of the Asian country. Machado Ventura, on his part, reaffirmed Cuba's solidarity with the people of East Timor, and recalled that, after its independence, the first vote that nation cast at the UN General Assembly was in support of the Cuban resolution on the necessity of lifting the US embargo against the island (ACN, 22/10/08).

October 23: European commissioner Louis Michel has arrived in Havana for meetings aimed at a formal resumption of co-operation between the EU and Cuba. The two-day visit is the result of the EU agreeing to remove all sanctions against communist Cuba in June. Mr Michel will meet Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. The European commissioner for development and humanitarian aid will also tour hurricane-damaged areas, Cuba's Granma newspaper reported. So far Cuba has refused to accept offers of hurricane assistance or any other forms of development aid from the European Union. That could be coming to an end. How to deal with Cuba is one area where Europe and the United States have substantial differences. Since Raul Castro took over the presidency,

following his brother Fidel's retirement due to ill health, EU policy has been to try and develop a dialogue with Cuba in the hope of influencing change. If this week's talks are successful the two sides are expected to sign a formal accord, reinstating co-operation (*BBC*, 23/10/08).

October 23: The European Union and Cuba re-established cooperation that was broken off five years ago in a dispute over Cuban political prisoners. Cuba Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel signed a declaration pledging new cooperation in what Michel called "a turning point for EU-Cuban relations." The agreement calls for the two sides to look for ways to work together in areas such as trade, the environment, science and technology. The European Commission, executive body of the 27-nation EU, said in a statement it may invest 20 million to 25 million euros in joint projects. It also said it would give Cuba 2 million euros to aid recovery from recent hurricanes Gustav and Ike. The EU imposed diplomatic sanctions in 2003 after Cuba imprisoned 75 presumed opponents of the communist-led government. About 55 are believed to still be in jail. The EU voted in June to lift the sanctions in hopes of encouraging reform in Cuba after Raul Castro earlier replaced ailing brother Fidel Castro as president, but said it would also annually review human rights on the Caribbean island. Cuba has said it will not allow EU interference in domestic issues, but has agreed to reinstate official political dialogue that was one of the casualties of the EU sanctions. The Cuban government considers political prisoners to be mercenaries working at the behest of the United States, which openly supports the dissidents. Perez Roque said there has been "an important advance" in EU-Cuba relations but that "there remain things to do and rectify." "What appears most important to us is that this dialogue can approach all these issues, including the issues most difficult, but always over a base of mutual respect," Michel said to Perez Roque in their signing ceremony in Havana ([Declaración sobre la reanudación de la cooperación](#); *Reuters*, 23/10/08).

October 23: Ricardo Cabrisas, vice president of the Cuban Council of Ministers, met with the European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel, who is on a visit to Havana. Cabrisas said the exchange with the high-level European official is part of a new stage of bilateral relations. Earlier, Louis Michel and Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque signed a statement officially resuming cooperation between the European Union and Cuba (*ACN*, 24/10/08).

October 23: Cuban Ambassador to Canada, Teresa Vicente Sotolongo, denounced the nearly-50-year US economic, financial and commercial blockade of Cuba, which she described as the main obstacle for the development of the Caribbean nation. During a press conference held in the newsroom of the Canadian Parliament, the Cuban diplomat gave details of the negative impact by the US anti-Cuba unilateral policy, which has caused the Caribbean nation losses amounting to 93 billion dollars. The Cuban ambassador said that despite the damaged inflicted by two recent hurricanes on the country's economic infrastructure, the Bush administration maintains the already stiffened economic measures (*ACN*, 23/10/08).

October 23: Cuba's First Vice-president José Ramón Machado Ventura met with the Vice-president of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam Nguyen Thi Doan, who is paying an official visit to Cuba. Both leaders agreed to keep boosting bilateral economic and commercial relations between their countries. Machado Ventura and Thi Doan also addressed issues of regional and international interest. The Cuban VP thanked Viet Nam for its aid to palliate the damage inflicted on Cuba by recent storms that hit the island. In the end of the talks, which were also attended by several Cuban government officials and the visiting Vietnamese delegation, Nguyen Thi Doan made a 300, 000-dollar and 300-ton-rice donation to assist the Cuban people and help them in the recovery process (*ACN*, 24/10/08).

October 23: Cuba denounced the increase and use of new methods by the United States in its policy of radio and television aggressions against the Caribbean nation. The Cuban ambassador before the UN, Rodrigo Malmierca, condemned the aggressions that violate International Law and the laws and regulations of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Speaking at the 4th UN Commission on Matters Related to Information, the Cuban diplomat recalled that, every week, 1 920 hours of subversive programming are broadcast from the United States to Cuba using 32 different radio and television frequencies (*ACN*, 23/10/08).

October 24: Cuba and Congo will expand their cooperation in the fields of public health and training of human resources with the signing of a series of agreements as part of the 13th Session of the Commission for Bilateral Cooperation that began on October 21 in Havana. During the opening session of the meeting, Cuban Deputy Minister for Economic Cooperation and Foreign Investment Orlando Requeijo said that Cuba will continue to support the development of Third World countries. He added that, in spite of the devastation caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike, which left economic losses to the tune of five billion dollars, Cuba will honour its agreements with Africa (*ACN*, 24/10/08).

October 24: A document condemning the almost 50-year-old US embargo against Cuba circulates among the 192 members of the UN General Assembly. The text, entitled 'Necessity to End the Economic, Trade and Financial Blockade Imposed by the United States against Cuba', will be put to the vote during a plenary session of the UN General Assembly on October 29. Prior to the vote on this document, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon handed to all UN member states a 120-page report on the US embargo that includes the opinion of 117 governments and 22 bodies of the UN system that reject this coercive policy (*ACN*, 24/10/08).

October 25: Vice President Nguyen Thi Doan confirmed Vietnam's solidarity with Cuba and its support with the island's struggle against the US embargo. The Vice President made the statement during a meeting with Cuban President Raul Castro before ending her visit to Cuba. The Cuban president took the occasion to thank the government and people of Vietnam for their valuable support and assistance, particularly at times when Cuba has had to cope with various difficulties caused by recent hurricanes Gustav and Ike (*VNA*, 25/10/08).

October 25: Zhang Rui, Foreign Affairs Director of China's Culture Ministry, announced in Beijing that her country and Cuba will further expand cultural exchange, which will strengthen friendship relations between the two nations. During a gala in the Chinese capital, Zhang Rui said that Culture Minister Cai Wu will head a delegation that is scheduled to visit Cuba in November with the objective of expanding bilateral cultural relations. Friends of Cuba and representatives of the Chinese cultural sector attended the gala at the Cuban embassy, as part of the activities of the Cuban culture season in Beijing (ACN, 25/10/08).

October 25: The General Director of Panama's National Sports Institute, Ramon Cardoze Quintero arrived in Cuba to ratify cooperation relations between both countries. Upon his arrival at Havana's Jose Marti International Airport, Cardoze Quintero said that bilateral cooperation in the field of sports has increased over the past four years and he noted that 94 Cuban experts implemented a sports project in his country during the first half of 2008. The Panamanian official said that on this occasion, he will request the services of another hundred of Cuban sports specialists, who would implement a community project of physical and recreational activities (ACN, 25/10/08).

October 25: Bolivia's President Evo Morales proposed that leftist Latin leaders descend on Havana January 1 to stand strong and celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution with ailing icon Fidel Castro. "It is my greatest desire to go there with the social movements, and with the anti-imperialist presidents, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution" which falls January 1, 2009, Morales declared on a visit to the eastern city of Santa Cruz. The first indigenous president of Bolivia, which has an indigenous majority, told a gathering of indigenous people from across the Americas that no one should "wait until Cuba organizes the event, but rather get organized ourselves. "The presidents, and the social movements, should offer humanity an alternative to capitalism," Morales said. "Capitalism is no solution for humanity, and never is going to solve the economic and social problems of most of the world." And "the struggle of Comrade Fidel and the Cuban people has not been in vain," Morales said. "Now, they are not alone. We are here to defend the Cuban Revolution" (AFP, 25/10/08).

October 26: Fidel Castro said that after people have left illiteracy behind; when they have learned how to read and write and they have an indispensable minimum knowledge, allowing them to live and produce honestly, they still need to overcome the worst form of ignorance in our times: economic illiteracy. In an article entitled "Economic Illiteracy," published in the official web site Cubadebate, Fidel Castro said, "it's the only way to know what is happening in the world." He said that, "a large number of Third World countries, which are exporters of goods and raw materials with little added value, are importers of Chinese consumer goods. These usually have reasonable prices, unlike Japanese and German goods which tend to be increasingly expensive." "Even when China has tried to prevent the overvaluation of the yuan, as the Yankees have constantly demanded to protect their industries from Chinese competition, the value of the yuan increases and the purchasing power of our exports decreases," Castro stressed ([Economic Illiteracy](#); *Prensa Latina*, 27/10/08).

October 27: The Cari Med Canada Trading Inc. of Canada has filed a complaint with the US government for interfering with its trade with Cuba and called the blockade an act of genocide, reported Juventud Rebelde daily. The company made the announcement during the closing session of the 8th Central American and Caribbean Conference on Anesthesiology, Resuscitation and Pain, which concluded in Havana on October 24 with the participation of delegations from 33 countries. Alberto Rodríguez, Cari Med sales and marketing manager, spoke about the criminal reach of the US blockade: "[US authorities] increasingly ask for more things. Licenses granted by the US Departments of Commerce and Treasury to sell products to Cuba are extremely restricted and exhaustive. They ask us for completely absurd details." "Among the recent problems we have faced due to the tightening of the US blockade is the semi-collapse of the non-invasive surgery program at the Cardiovascular Center at the William Soler Children's Hospital. We want people to know that pressure from the blockade has been so hard that we have had to stop negotiations with this hospital. In other words, children with cardiovascular disorders suffer much more in some open-heart surgeries directly due to the actions of the US government," said Rodríguez. Outraged by the interference, Cari Med filed a letter of complaint with the head of the US Interests Section in Havana. "Incredibly, [the head of the US Interest Section] said that orders come from Washington and that he wasn't even asked his opinion on the matter" (*Prensa Latina*, 27/10/08).

October 27: Turkish Ambassador to Cuba, Sanivar Kizildeli, and Elio Gamez, Vice-President of the Cuban Friendship Institute, laid a wreath at the bust of Mustafá Kemal Attaturk, Turkey's Independence Father. The ceremony, which took place in Havana city, salutes the 85th anniversary of the foundation of Turkey, October 29. Gamez told the Cuban News Agency that Solidarity-with-Cuba activities are taking place in Ankara and Istanbul, which stressed the tight friendship bonds between the European country and the Caribbean nation (*ACN*, 27/10/08).

October 27: The European Commission and the Czech Republic have decided to organise an international conference on the situation in Cuba during the Czech EU presidency in the first half of 2009, Louis Michel, EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, said. The conference is to focus on the state of human rights in Cuba, especially the situation in Cuban prisons, but also on various issues dealing with support and cooperation. The date of the conference has not yet been set, Michel said after meeting Czech Deputy Foreign Minister Jan Kohout (*CTK*, 27/10/087).

October 27: Prime Minister of St Kitts and Nevis Federation, Denzil Douglas, gave a 100,000 dollars check to the Cuban Ambassador, Ana Maria Gonzalez, on behalf of his government and people. This contribution is to be used in the recovery and reconstruction work in Cuba after the passage of two devastating hurricanes last September, reports the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs website. The Cuban Ambassador thanked the Prime Minister and his people for this gesture of solidarity on behalf of the Cuban government and people, something she labelled as encouraging and important in the wake of these terrible disasters (*ACN*, 27/10/08).

October 28: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque is in New York to present a resolution at the UN General Assembly on Washington's almost fifty-year-old embargo against the Caribbean nation. According to Granma news daily, Perez Roque will be presenting, for the 17th time, a resolution entitled 'Necessity to End the Economic, Trade and Financial Blockade Imposed by the United States against Cuba' that has been circulating at the UN General Assembly and which is scheduled to be voted on during a plenary session of the international body on October 29. "The blockade is the main obstacle for the economic and social development of the country and it is a flagrant violation of the human rights of the Cuban people," reads the Granma article (*ACN*, 28/10/08).

October 28: The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) is gearing up to assist 1.78 million Cubans affected by hurricanes Gustav and Ike, which pummelled the island in late August and early September. The newly approved emergency operation will support the Cuban government as it responds to communities needing food assistance in areas that bore the brunt of hurricane damage. "WFP is playing an important role helping people who suffered great losses in the storms," said Sonsoles Ruedas, WFP Representative in Cuba, adding that these were two of the worst hurricanes to strike Cuba in the past fifty years. Over the next six months, WFP will provide food rations - comprised of rice, beans, vegetable oil, canned fish and CSB (a blended food compound of maize and soy fortified with vitamins and minerals) - at a cost of US\$5.7 million. As well as providing rations to communities that have been affected by the hurricanes, WFP will supply temporary food storage warehouses and liquid gas stoves to people who lost cooking facilities in the storms. "As on previous occasions, we trust in the generosity of donors to carry out this operation which will allow us to provide assistance to affected populations," added Ruedas (*UN World Food Programme*, 28/10/08).

October 28: Oswaldo Paya, founder of the Christian Liberation Movement and promoter of the Varela Project—which seeks peaceful democratic change in Cuba—criticized the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Venezuela and Spain for offending Cubans by their lack of support for the re-launching of the Varela Project. At a press conference held by the Venezuelan Minister of Foreign Affairs Nicolas Maduro and his Spanish counterpart Miguel Angel Moratinos in Madrid, Maduro said that the Varela Project had "little credibility," and Moratinos decline to comment. Oswaldo Paya responded to the comments in a letter to reporters saying, Maduro "offended Cuban citizens who have promoted the 'Varela Project' and the Spanish minister supported Maduro by his silence, thus avoiding having to speak the truth." "These officials have offended thousands of Cuban citizens who have signed this petition for a referendum, which is also a demand for fundamental rights and which the Cuban government is denying its citizens," Paya said. "Lord willing, the people of Venezuela will learn of this," he continued, "and whatever is left of the free press there will report this so that the Venezuelans will see the rights they will totally lose" if they live under a regime like the one in Cuba (*CNA*, 28/10/08).

October 28: The government of Equatorial Guinea donated 2 million euros to Cuba to help with the recovery after Hurricanes Gustav and Ike that caused huge losses to the

island's economy. A statement from the Central African country's Council of Ministers published on the government's official website, calls the donation an initiative of solidarity with Cuba, which it notes suffered enormous material damage, reported Prensa Latina news agency (ACN, 28/10/08).

October 28: Cuba foresees stronger relations with the Kingdom following the recent opening of its embassy in Riyadh, said Laureano Rodriguez Castro, the Cuban ambassador to Saudi Arabia, in a press briefing held at the embassy. "We have been maintaining good relations with the Kingdom, but the establishment of the mission in Riyadh will step up cooperation between the two countries. The Cuban mission in the Kingdom is our third station in the Gulf after Kuwait and Qatar," he said. Rodriguez Castro, who was previously the Cuban ambassador to Kuwait from 2004 to 2007, said Saudi Arabia is an important Gulf state, which his country would like to cooperate with in matters of mutual interest. "Even before the mission was established, Cuba supported the Kingdom on all international issues and we have severed our diplomatic relations with Israel in support of the Palestinians," he added. Thanking Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah and senior government officials for facilitating the establishment of the embassy in Riyadh, Rodriguez Castro said he hopes this gesture would be reciprocated with a mission in Cuba. The Saudi mission in neighbouring Mexico currently looks after Cuban interests (*Arab News*, 29/10/08).

October 29: The Cuban Ambassador to Algeria, Mr. Eumelio Caballero Rodriguez, praised the aid of \$2 million dollars offered by the African country after two hurricanes hit the island. Speaking at the first press conference held in Algiers, since he took office, Caballero indicated that partnership between Algeria and Cuba is focusing on programs of genealogy and paediatrics, which have reached satisfactory results. He further unveiled a project aiming at constructing 7 high technology ophthalmology hospitals, of which the first one has been launched last April in Djelfa interior province. Before visiting the camps of the Sahrawi refugees in Tindouf southwest province, and meeting with the Sahraoui President Mr. Mohamed Abdelaziz, the Cuban diplomat announced that Cuba is willing to receive more Sahraoui students, noting that 5 hundred are now studying in Cuba (*El Khabar*, 29/10/08).

October 30: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva arrives in Cuba for an official visit with the purpose of expressing Brazil's solidarity with the Cuban people and government after the damages caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. According to Granma news daily, during his stay in Cuba, Lula da Silva will hold official talks with his Cuban counterpart Raul Castro. During his visit, an agreement for the production of hydrocarbons between Cuba's CUPET and Brazil's PETROBRAS will be signed. In addition, the Havana venue of the Agency for the Promotion of Exports and Investments of Brazil (APEX) will be inaugurated (ACN, 30/10/08).

October 30: Cuba's Ambassador to Brazil, Pedro Nunez Mosquera, heads the delegation of the Caribbean country at the 18th Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government that begins in San Salvador, El Salvador. According to Granma news daily, these meetings began in Guadalajara, Mexico, in 1991, and their main goal is to analyze

topics of interest for Ibero-American countries. On this occasion, the main theme of the meeting is "Youth and Development" (ACN, 30/10/08).

October 30: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva arrived in Cuba for a visit aimed at expressing Brazil's solidarity with the people and government of Cuba, following the damage inflicted on the Caribbean nation by the recent passage of hurricanes Gustav and Ike. On behalf of Cuban authorities, the vice-president of Cuba's Council of Ministers Ricardo Cabrisas welcomed the Brazilian President at Havana's Jose Marti International Airport (ACN, 30/10/08).

October 30: Cuban President Raul Castro met at Havana's Convention Centre with his Brazilian counterpart Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who arrived in the Cuban capital for a visit aimed at expressing Brazil's solidarity with the people and government of the Caribbean nation, following the damage inflicted on Cuba by the recent passage of hurricanes Gustav and Ike. During their meeting, Lula da Silva was accompanied by Franklin de Souza Martins, Head of the Secretariat for Social Communication; Sports Minister Orlando Silva; Marco Aurelio de Almeida Garcia, Head Advisor of the President's Special Advisory Team; and the Brazilian Ambassador to Cuba, Bernardo Pericas Neto; among others. For his part, Raul Castro was accompanied by First Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura; Vice President and Executive Secretary of the Council of Ministers Carlos Lage; Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque; Ricardo Cabrisas, Vice President of the Council of Ministers; and Yadira Garcia, Minister of the Basic Industry (ACN, 31/10/08).

October 30: Cuban ambassador to Guatemala Omar Morales Bazo held a meeting in Guatemala City with officials from the Guatemalan Foreign Ministry and representatives from several ministries that have cooperation links with Cuba. The Cuban diplomat gave details about the successful development of bilateral relations and other plans of cooperation in the fields of health, sports and education, among others. Morales recalled that next November 5th will mark the tenth anniversary of the arrival in Guatemala of the first contingent of Cuban medical personnel after the devastation caused by hurricane Mitch (ACN, 31/10/08).

October 31: The Russian state news agency RIA Novosti has opened a bureau in Cuba as part of the agency's major media strategy in the Latin American region, the editor-in-chief said. "Today we are opening a bureau in Cuba, and tomorrow we are planning a broader and wider information presence in the Latin American states," Svetlana Mironyuk said at a RIA Novosti presentation in Havana. "We are sincerely glad that Cuba is set to become an important and significant center for us," the head of RIA Novosti said adding that the Latin American region "is one of the biggest priorities" in the agency's work. The RIA Novosti presentation in Havana was attended by Russian Communications Minister Igor Schegolev, his Cuban counterpart Ramiro Valdes, Russia's Ambassador to Cuba Mikhail Kamynin, as well as Russian and Cuban officials. Speaking at the presentation, Schegolev said: "This event confirms that old friendships exist between our people, despite the fact that thousands of kilometres and eight time zones divide us." "It is logical, that the bureau will provide Russia with the latest

information about what is happening in Cuba. On the other side, the bureau will provide Cubans with information on what is going on in Russia," the minister added (*RIA-Novosti*, 31/10/08).

October 31: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said that he agreed "100 percent" with former Cuban leader Fidel Castro on the responsibility of rich countries for the world economic crisis after a two-hour meeting with him in Havana. "I spoke with Fidel about the crisis and there is 100 percent agreement on the major responsibility of rich countries," Lula said at the airport before leaving Cuba after a brief visit. "President Lula said that Fidel was very lucid and active," added a spokesman traveling with the Brazilian leader. The meeting took place in an undisclosed location. The ailing 82-year-old Communist revolutionary leader has not been seen in public since a health crisis in July 2006. Lula said earlier that Cuban President Raul Castro will attend a summit in Brazil in December, marking the Cuban leader's first international trip since taking over from his brother Fidel two years ago. "We are pleased to learn that finally his Excellency will travel to Brazil to participate in the first meeting of Latin American and Caribbean nations, without interference from any other power," Lula said during an inauguration ceremony for a Brazilian business venture in Havana. If Havana confirms the visit, it would mark the first foray outside the island nation by Castro, 77, since taking the reins of power from Fidel Castro in July 2006 when the elder leader underwent intestinal surgery. Lula da Silva concluded his visit to Cuba, and was seen off at Havana's Jose Marti International Airport by Cuban President Raul Castro. Also present at the airport for the farewell were the vice-president of the Cuban Council of Ministers, Ricardo Cabrisas, and Cuban ambassador to Brazil Bernardo Pericas, among other officials (*AFP, ACN*, 1/11/08).

October 31: Fidel Castro said he met Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who asked to see him in spite of his tight program, and he talked for almost two hours with him. In the article titled "Meeting Lula", published by digital website Cubadebate, Fidel Castro said, "the conversation was, as always, kind and respectful. He explained in detail the work carried on by his country." "I thanked him for the political and economic support given by Brazil to Cuba in its struggle and I stressed the decisive role played by Venezuela, a developing Latin American nation, and by its President, in the most critical days of the special period and today, when the imperialist blockade has been reinforced and our country has suffered the destructive effect of two hurricanes," he added ([Meeting Lula](#); *Prensa Latina*, 1/11/08).

October 31: Latin American leaders are urging the US to repeal its 47-year-old trade embargo against Cuba. The leaders said the "unilateral" embargo is unacceptable and harms the Cuban people. The leaders made the statement on the final day of the Ibero-American Summit in El Salvador. It came a day after the UN General Assembly asked the US for the 17th year in a row to lift the embargo. Cuba sent its Ambassador to Brazil, Pedro Nuñez Mosquera, as head of the island's official delegation to the Summit. This is the first time Cuba is not represented by its President or Vice President (*ACN*, 1/11/08).

October 31: Cuba and the UN World Food Program (WFP) signed in Havana a document to implement a new UN aid action for 1,780,000 Cubans after the devastating hurricanes Gustav and Ike. The document was signed by Cuba's Minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation Marta Lomas and by WFP representative in Havana Sonsoles Ruedas. The food aid to be provided by the WFP is estimated at a cost of 5,7 million dollars for a period of six months (*ACN*, 1/11/08).

Security

October 5: The Venezuelan government is operating a secret paramilitary training camp with the help of Cuban military advisers and leftist Colombian guerrillas. The camp near San Cristobal offers six-week courses for 400 to 1,000 participants, *El Nuevo Herald* reported. The first phase of training at the camp reportedly is political indoctrination through texts printed in Cuba. The second phase includes training in the use of light and heavy weaponry and explosives. The government of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has not responded to allegations about the training camp, but local officials have acknowledged its existence and the presence of Cubans. *Desarrollo Urbanite* Caparo, a private tourism company that organizes trips to the area, says its services have been suspended for the time being because "the government has taken the installations" until January. The trainees are intended to support Chavez in the type of guerrilla war the president has repeatedly vowed to wage in the event he's ousted from power, either by a military coup or the US invasion he has alleged has been planned (*UPI*, 5/10/08).

October 8: Cuba will create special military units in civilian workplaces to fulfill defensive missions in case of war and to support the Civil Defence in the wake of natural disasters, according to an official announcement. "The special units are intended to carry out combat, logistical and technical missions as well as civil defence operations," points out a resolution of the Minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), Julio Casas, published in the *Official Gazette*. According to the resolution, the idea has existed since 1997, but "it is necessary to adapt it to the reality and demands of today." The Civil Defence, created in 1962, is a body of the FAR, whose disaster prevention and massive evacuation operations are conducted under a structure created for times of war, such as a large army (*AFP*, 8/10/08).

October 10: Fidel Castro recalled Angolans and Cubans' heroism in the 1983 battle in Cangamba, where they fought restlessly with no food or water and suffered 78 casualties and 204 wounded. In the first part of an article published in *Cubadebate*, Fidel Castro stressed that, "those who fell in Cangamba did not die in vain!" "The same purpose had inspired my message of August 12, 1983, addressed to the Chief of the Cuban Military Mission in Angola," he stated. "At dawn, the enemy had pulled out of the battle field. Its troops there exceeded the figure of 3,000 men armed and equipped by the South African racists. From August 2, they had been attacking day and night the trenches occupied by 600 Angolans of the 32nd FAPLA Brigade and 84 Cuban internationalists, plus a reinforcement of 102 men sent from the military region of Luena," Castro noted. "Cubans and Angolans fought restlessly there with no food or water and having sustained 78 deadly casualties and 204 injured; of these 18 dead and 27 wounded were Cubans. When

the attackers started to pull out they lost practically every weapon and ammunition and sustained a great number of casualties. The two best UNITA Brigades had been crushed," Castro wrote ([The Battle of the Truth and Martin Blandino's Book, First Part](#); *Prensa Latina*, 10/10/08).

October 12: In the second part of an article entitled "The Battle of the Truth and Martin Blandino's Book", Fidel Castro recalled Angolans and Cubans' heroism in the 1983 battle in Cangamba. Fidel Castro explained details of that battle having sustained 78 deadly casualties and 204 injured. "As the combats unfolded, a basic logic enabled us to perceive from Cuba the enemy's intentions, thus we adopted the corresponding measures in response," he stated. The first of them, as we got news that the 32nd brigade and its advisors were under siege, was to decide the immediate return to Angola of the Chief of the Military Mission, Division General Leopoldo Cintra Frias, a veteran of the Sierra Maestra and a devoted supporter of FAPLA, who was in Cuba at the time. The order issued to him was: "Those forces must be rescued at all costs," Fidel Castro wrote ([The Battle Of The Truth And Martin Blandino's Book. Part II](#); *Prensa Latina*, 14/10/08).

October 13: It is a unique experience that life in the provinces hit by the two hurricanes that struck the country remains organized in defence councils and defence zones, even in Pinar del Río, while hurricane watch season ended a month ago. Never before has such a structure, put in place during emergency situations or war, been active for so long, not even during the last eight years when 16 weather events hit the territory. District delegates in the neighbourhoods, who often alternate their duties with their regular jobs, have been released from their regular jobs to attend full-time to the needs and concerns of the population, and to supervise the allocation of resources. "It is important that the people feel supported," said Olga Lidia Tapia, president of the Provincial Defence Council in Pinar del Rio. The offices of the Provincial Defence Council, originally located in the province's capital, conduct its daily operations in one of the hit municipalities (*Granma*, 13/10/08).

October 14: Fidel Castro said that Mikhail Gorbachev, top Soviet leader in 1983, responded "positively" to an urgent request of his for planes during the war in Angola, which turned out to be vital for the defeat of South Africa afterwards. "Gorbachev had become the top leader of the Party and the State. I sent him a personal message urgently requesting 12 additional MiG-23 fighter planes. He responded "positively," says Castro in an article published in the Cubadebate website. The 82-year-old former leader indicated that during the war that Cuban troops fought in Angola from 1976 until 1988, in support of the government of the Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the Soviet Union "was the country that supported Cuba the most" ([The Battle Of The Truth And Martin Blandino's Book. Part III and final](#); *AFP, Prensa Latina*, 14/10/08).

October 27: Russia will offer to share its air defence expertise with Cuba when a military delegation visits the Caribbean island this week, Interfax news agency reported. "The Russian and Cuban military will exchange experience in organising tactical air defence and in training officers," Interfax quoted Russian Land Forces spokesman Igor Konashenkov as saying. The two sides will "discuss the prospect of training Cuban

servicemen at the tactical air defence academies and training centres in Russia, using upgraded Russian-made military hardware," Interfax quoted him as saying. The delegation, led by the chief of Russia's tactical air defence headquarters, Lieutenant General Alexander Maslov, will also look at "ways to strengthen relations between the Russian armed forces and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba," Konashenkov was quoted as saying. The delegation will be in Cuba from October 27 until November 3 and will meet with Chief of the General Staff of Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces Army General Alvaro Lopez Miera and Chief of the Anti-Aircraft Defense and Revolutionary Air Force General Pedro Mendiondo Gomez, Konashenkov told Interfax (*Reuters, Kommersant, 27/10/08*).

October 27: A delegation led by Lieutenant-General Aleksandr Maslov, chief of staff of Tactical Air Defence of the Russian Armed Forces, flew to Cuba. As a *Gazeta* correspondent was told in the Ground Troops' press service, Russian officers will be on the island until November 3 and will meet with General Alvaro Lopez Miera, chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces Main Staff, and General Pedro Mendiondo Gomez, commander of Air and Air Defence. "It is planned to discuss a consolidation of ties between the Armed Forces of Russia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba. There will also be an exchange of experience in the organization of the air defence of the troops and the training of officer personnel," the spokesman for the Defence Department announced. The military officers will study the possibility of the instruction of Cuban officers in Russia in work with modern equipment. Representatives of the country's sole Armed Forces Tactical Air Defence Military Academy (Smolensk) were included in the delegation to this end. This is the first visit to Cuba of high-ranking Russian military officers since 2001, when the Lourdes base was closed. Russian military experts believe that things will hardly be confined to maintenance of the old anti-aircraft guns on Cuba. Anatoliy Tsyganok, director of the Military Forecasting Centre, tied General Maslov's trip to the United States' plans to deploy missile defences in Europe. He believes that a natural consequence of this visit will be the appearance on Cuba of Russian planes, ships, and submarines. "It is likely that joint exercises will be planned for starters, after which we could be talking about arms deliveries," Tsyganok said. Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov, vice president of the Academy of Geopolitical Problems, believes that it is as yet too soon to be forecasting the consequences of the Russian Air-Defence generals' visit. "Down the road, possibly, Russia will attempt to restore the ports at which naval vessels can call," Ivashov told the *Gazeta* correspondent. "But direct arms deliveries would appear to me to be impossible if only because of Cuba's insolvency" (*Gazeta, 28/10/08*).

October 30: The Cuban government may not want to discuss the current visit by Russian military experts to the island (the Cuban media haven't even mentioned it), but the Russians have been lavish in their coverage of it. Military analysts in Moscow keep commenting on what the Novosti news agency calls a "trend toward a dizzying improvement" of relations between Russia and Cuba. Anatoli Dmitrievich Tsiganok, head of the Military Forecast Centre, told Novosti that the arrival in Cuba of Russian planes, ships and submarines would be a logical result of the current visit by air-defence specialists. "To begin with, joint manoeuvres would be planned, after which armaments would be supplied," he said. Colonel General Leonid Ivashov, vice president of the

Academy of Geopolitical Affairs, agreed with Tsiganok that "possibly in the future Russia will try to get its warships back into Cuba ports," but downplayed the possibility of direct deliveries of weapons, citing "Cuba's insolvency." The comments come in a moment when Russian diplomat Vitali Churkin told the United Nations General Assembly that the US embargo against Cuba "does not respond to the spirit of the times and is a relic of the Cold War" (*The Miami Herald*, 30/10/08).

October 30: Russia has invited Cuba to join its satellite navigation system, Glonass, according to Russia's communications minister, who is currently on a working visit in Havana. Glonass - the Global Navigation Satellite System - is the Russian equivalent of the US Global Positioning System, or GPS, and is designed for both military and civilian use. Both systems allow users to determine their positions in terms of longitude, latitude and altitude to within a few meters. "We are inviting all countries to join the system," Igor Shchegolev said at a news conference. "And, of course, we have invited Cuba." Glonass is expected to begin providing worldwide services by the end of the next year. Shchegolev and his Cuban counterpart Ramiro Valdes also signed a memorandum on cooperation in information technology (*RIA-Novosti*, 30/10/08).

Terrorism

October 21: Despite his stated desire to close the American prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, President Bush has decided not to do so, and never considered proposals drafted in the State Department and the Pentagon that outlined options for transferring the detainees elsewhere, according to senior administration officials. Mr. Bush's top advisers held a series of meetings at the White House this summer after a Supreme Court ruling in June cast doubt on the future of the American detention center. But Mr. Bush adopted the view of his most hawkish advisers that closing Guantanamo would involve too many legal and political risks to be acceptable, now or any time soon, the officials said. The administration is proceeding on the assumption that Guantanamo will remain open not only for the rest of Mr. Bush's presidency but also well beyond, the officials said, as the site for military tribunals of those facing terrorism-related charges and for the long prison sentences that could follow convictions (*The New York Times*, 21/10/08).

US-Cuba Relations

October 1: The United States has reversed itself and decided to allow two journalists for the Cuban news agency Prensa Latina to return to their posts at the United Nations, the State Department said. The department's original decision to deny re-entry to husband and wife team Tomas Granados Jimenez and Ilsa Rodriguez Santana had drawn condemnation from the press advocacy groups Reporters Without Borders, based in Paris, and the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists. "In accordance with our UN headquarters agreement, we have decided to issue visas to the two individuals in question," the department said in a footnote to the transcript of spokesman Sean McCormack's daily briefing. McCormack had said he had been told that visa matters were confidential but added: "I think that they have appealed the decision, and I think

that appeal is being considered right now." The couple have covered the United Nations for Prensa Latina since 2005 (AP, 1/10/08).

October 1: A Florida law that would make it more expensive for travel agents to book trips to Cuba is likely unconstitutional, a federal judge ruled. US District Judge Alan S. Gold issued a preliminary injunction that prevents Florida from enforcing the law, saying it likely violates the constitutional mandate that federal, rather than state, officials are responsible for foreign policy. The new law requires travel agencies to post a \$250,000 bond when registering with the state if they book direct trips to Cuba. Travel agencies that book trips to other places are also required to post bonds when they first register, but those are much lower. The injunction is in effect until a trial on the law's constitutionality, which has not been scheduled. Terence McElroy, a spokesman for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, said Gold's injunction essentially extends a temporary restraining order issued July 1. Agencies that book trips to Cuba argue that the law discriminates against them because it would drive up their costs, but Republican state Representative David Rivera of Miami, who sponsored the measure, said the state was within its rights (AP, 1/10/08).

October 2: A new Zogby-Inter-American Dialogue interactive survey showed that "American public opinion is far more open and flexible on issues of importance for US relations with Latin America than current policy would suggest," said Peter Hakim, president of the Inter-American Dialogue, a Washington think tank that collaborated with Zogby International on the poll. The survey results were released at the Miami Herald's 12th Annual Americas Conference, in Coral Gables. The Zogby Interactive survey of 4,752 likely voters nationwide was conducted on September 23-25, and carries a margin of error of plus or minus 1.5 percentage points. Now that Fidel Castro is no longer officially in power in Cuba, 60 percent of likely voters believe the US should revise its policies toward Cuba — even more believe all US citizens should be allowed to travel to Cuba (68 percent) and that US companies should be allowed to trade with Cuba (62 percent). In a Zogby Interactive survey conducted in July 2007, slightly more than half (56 percent) of Americans said the US should remove travel restrictions and end the embargo on trade to Cuba. More Barack Obama supporters favoured revising US policies toward Cuba (84 percent) than John McCain supporters (35 percent). Forty-seven percent of McCain supporters thought all US citizens should be allowed to travel to Cuba, and 40 percent thought US companies should be allowed to trade with Cuba (*Naples Daily News*, 2/10/08).

October 5: Journalists face barriers to doing their jobs across Latin American countries, especially Venezuela and Cuba, as governments seek to muzzle any criticism, a US-based press freedom group said. Independent journalists face "unprecedented violence, insecurity and impunity" since President Hugo Chavez came to power in Venezuela a decade ago, according to a report by the Inter American Press Association presented at its annual assembly. The report on Cuba said there have been no improvements in freedom of expression since Raul Castro took over as president from his brother Fidel in February. Humberto Castello, the director of the Nuevo Herald, the Spanish language version of the Miami Herald, said "harassment was a daily routine against 60 independent journalists"

in the communist Caribbean island. "Cuba is a tomb for information," he said, adding there were currently 26 journalists behind bars in Cuba (*AFP*, 5/10/08).

October 6: Cuba is always willing to share its health care expertise and to assist other nations of this region, said deputy health minister Joaquin Garcia Salabarría, at the 48th Session of the Executive Board of the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), held in Washington DC. Salabarría, who heads the Cuban delegation to the PAHO meeting, referred to the damage inflicted on his country by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. He stressed the efforts being made by the Cuban people to recover from the damage, and the work undertaken by the island's medical personnel in the current difficult times, says a report by the Cuban Interest Section in Washington. The Cuban deputy health minister reiterated his country's gratefulness for the solidarity gestures extended by institutions like PAHO and the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as by many governments in the region amidst the devastation caused in Cuba by the recent storms. He also reiterated Cuba's position of principles of not accepting assistance from the United States as it has maintained a stiffening economic and financial blockade of the country for decades (*ACN*, 6/10/08).

October 7: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said that Havana expects an overwhelming condemnation of the US blockade against Cuba next October 29th when the UN General Assembly will vote, once again, on a resolution entitled 'Necessity to End the Economic, Financial and Trade Blockade Imposed by the United States on Cuba.' The diplomat is heading the Cuban delegation that attends a meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Foreign Ministers that began in Brazil as a preparatory event for the First Latin American and Caribbean Summit on Integration and Development that will take place in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, on December 16-17. Perez Roque said that, "the blockade is the most serious violation of our rights and the biggest obstacle to our development" (*Prensa Latina*, 7/10/08).

October 2: The executive of a Boulder software company accused of violating the US trade embargo with Cuba has pleaded guilty in an unrelated case to a misdemeanor charge that he hacked into a competitor's computer server and took protected information. Jay E. Leonard, the 61-year-old president of Platte River Associates, could face up to a year in prison and a fine of \$100,000 for the breaking into competitor ZetaWare Inc.'s secure Web site and downloading proprietary software files to achieve economic gain, according to court documents from the hearing in US District Court in Denver, Colorado. Leonard's sentencing hearing is scheduled for December 18. His plea came a day prior to appearing before another federal court judge on behalf of his company for a "change of plea" hearing on charges of "trading with the enemy." The government claims Platte River dealt in property "in which Cuba and Cuban nationals held an interest" and provided software and computer training -- without a license from the Secretary of Treasury -- that were used in the exploration and development of oil and gas within Cuba's territorial waters. If convicted of the felony, the company, which provides seismic and geologic analyzing software to the oil and gas industry, could be fined \$1 million (*Daily Camera*, 7/10/08).

October 7: The Head of the Cuban Interest Section in Washington, Jorge Bolaños gave a lecture exposing the 50-year US economic, commercial and financial blockade of Cuba at the John Hopkins University, which opened the Fall Season Seminar on the West Hemisphere at that US higher education center. In his lecture titled "La otra verdad" (The Other Truth) ambassador Bolaños illustrated with specific examples the huge human and material loss inflicted by the US blockade on the Caribbean nation, since it was imposed early in 1959. Attending the lecture were students and professors that filled the auditorium of the Paul H. Nitze Advanced Studies School. Presiding over the seminar were Wayne Smith, former head of the US Interest Section in Havana, who acted as moderator, and Rioddan Roett, professor and head of Western hemisphere studies (*ACN*, 7/10/08).

October 8: The President of the Cuban National Assembly (Parliament), Ricardo Alarcon, highlighted the importance of youths' solidarity, and particularly of American youths, for the release of five Cubans who remain in prison in the United States. During the opening of an exhibition entitled 'A Bridge of Solidarity', the Cuban top legislator recalled that Gerardo Hernández, Fernando González, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero and René González – internationally known as the Cuban Five – were arrested in 1998 and given harsh and unjust sentences for infiltrating anti-Cuba terrorist groups in South Florida. Alarcon reiterated his rejection of a decision made by the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta earlier this year ratifying the sentences against Gerardo and Rene while the cases of Ramón, Antonio and Fernando were sent back to Miami where they will receive new sentences (*ACN*, 9/10/08).

October 8: The Cuban national soccer team left for Washington D.C., to play on October 11 against the US team for the second time in the CONCACAF world cup qualifying tournament. The US team played Cuba on September for the first time in Havana after 61 years. Veteran winger Jaine Colome, who was unable to play in the game when the US beat Cuba 1-0 in Havana, passed the physical test and is expected to be in the line up for the match at the RFK Stadium (*ACN*, 8/10/08).

October 9: With his popularity flagging, President Bush will bask on October 10 in the warm embrace of Cuban-American leaders in Miami. After eight years in office, Bush remains perennially popular among hard-line exiles for his steadfast refusal to blink when it comes to relaxing US policy toward Cuba -- and his championing of the island's dissidents. "The fact that today you have the most active, widespread civil society in Cuba in the last 50 years is a testament to his commitment to Cuba," said Mauricio Claver-Carone, a leading pro-embargo lobbyist referring to what he said was the flowering of dissident groups. "He has sought to make their plight known to the world." Yet Democrats suggest it was Bush's decision in 2004 to further tighten sanctions against the island that has given them what may be their best shot ever at unseating Miami's three Cuban-American members of Congress. For the first time, they say, there is an opportunity to compete for votes among an electorate once considered diehard Republican. "He opened the door," said Democratic strategist Jeff Garcia, who contends that the restrictions capping remittances and visits to the island have turned off Cuban Americans who want to visit family more frequently. "He completely misjudged and

misread the community that had been solidly behind him, and that support has eroded every day since." At a White House Hispanic Heritage event, Bush thanked "those who are working to hasten the day of freedom for the Cuban people." He's expected to avoid public politicking on what may mark his last visit to Miami as president (*The Miami Herald*, 9/10/08).

October 10: President Bush went to Miami to meet with Cuban-American leaders and raise money for GOP congressional candidates across the country. Noticeably absent were Miami's three Cuban-American congressional members, all Republicans waging spirited reelection races with Democratic challengers who are trying to tie the incumbents to the Bush administration. Representatives Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Mario Diaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen all cited prior commitments. For the Diaz-Balarts, that included a Miami fundraiser hosted by House Republican John Boehner of Ohio. Bush, in what could be his last visit to Miami as president, held the line on the Cuban embargo and remittances to the island while visiting with the Cuban-American leaders. "Our government has been very clear about our strategy, and that is (...) that we will change the embargo strategy only when the government of Cuba lets the people of Cuba express themselves freely," said Bush, who did not take questions from reporters. Democrats have suggested that Bush's 2004 decision to further restrict travel and remittances to Cuba angered once-diehard Republican Cuban-American voters enough to put the three congressional seats into play ([Address by George W. Bush](#); *The Miami Herald*, 11/10/08).

October 10: The office of the US attorney for the Southern District of Florida accused 39 people of people trafficking, extortion and causing the death of one Cuban migrant. If found guilty of conspiring to commit human trafficking that caused the death of one of the immigrants, the main suspects could be sentenced to life imprisonment. The other suspects could face up to 10 years in jail. The Justice Department said in a communiqué that the 39 defendants are responsible for trying to smuggle more than 450 immigrants into the United States. All the defendants stand accused of "encouraging and convincing 32 Cubans to come to the United States last month and for conspiring to commit people trafficking that led to the death of one of the immigrants" (*EFE*, 10/10/08).

October 10: Two members of Cuba's national team have gone missing during the team's trip to Washington for a World Cup qualifying match, the team's coach said. "It is always a problem for the Cuba team," coach Reinhold Fanz told the Washington Post. "We have security, but you can't handcuff them to their rooms." The Post identified the players as midfielder Pedro Faife, 24, and forward Reynier Alcantara, 26 (*Chronicle News Services*, 11/10/08).

October 11: DaMarcus Beasley scored two goals and the United States clinched a berth in next year's six-team World Cup 2010 regional qualifying tournament with a 6-1 romp over political rival Cuba. The Americans improved to 4-0 in Group A to secure a spot in the final phase of North American qualifying, where three berths in South Africa will be decided. The Cubans fell to 0-4, all but ending their hopes to advance. Cuba lost two players to defections earlier in the week. Forward Luis Alcantara, 26, and midfielder

Pedro Faife, 24, were absent from the line-up. Faife had 46 caps, 10 more than Alcantara (*AFP*, 11/10/08).

October 11: Fidel Castro said a "profound racism" in the United States will stop millions from voting for Barack Obama in next month's presidential election. The ailing, 82-year-old former Cuban president says it is "a miracle that the Democratic candidate hasn't suffered the same luck as (assassinated leaders) Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and others who harbored dreams of equality and justice." Castro's comments were published in the official media. In them, he insists a "profound racism" exists in the US and that millions of whites "cannot reconcile themselves to the idea that a black person (...) could occupy the White House, which is called just that: white." Castro also described Republican presidential candidate John McCain as "bellicose" ([The Law of the Jungle](#); *AP*, 12/10/08).

October 13: Fidel Castro said US President George W. Bush's decision to attend a Republican fundraiser in Miami's Cuban-American community at the height of the financial crisis shows his anti-Cuban obsession. The former Cuban president criticized Bush for raising money for local candidates in Florida rather than attending a G-7 meeting of finance ministers to discuss measures to deal with the crisis. Castro said in an essay that this decision demonstrated Bush's "maniacal anti-Cuban obsession." Miami has a large community of anti-Castro Cuban-Americans who play a key role in US elections. Bush met with the finance ministers in Washington ([The White House Ghost](#); *AP*, 13/10/08).

October 13: Cuban lawmakers requested their counterparts across the world to demand from the US Congress and government the lifting of the economic sanctions imposed on Cuba almost 50 years ago. In a statement, the parliament of Cuba said that in the last 16 consecutive years, the United Nations has approved resolutions against the US sanctions, but Washington "with its usual arrogance, has disclaimed the express mandate of the international community". The parliament said that recently, hurricanes Gustav and Ike cost Cuba 5 billion US dollars in damage, but the White House reiterated that it would lift the ban under no circumstances. "That policy clearly typifies the international crime of genocide which soon will reach half century," the statement said ([Declaration](#); *Xinhua*, 13/10/08).

October 15: Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart and his Democratic challenger, Raul Martinez, heatedly clashed over who has the better temperament for serving in Congress during a debate that was likely to be the last televised exchange between the two. The pair diverged on US-Cuba policy, with Diaz-Balart cautioning against loosening any restrictions "until there is the liberation of all political prisoners and scheduling of free elections. "And by the way, that's the position I supported with regard to Iran, and the position that I supported with regard to South Africa," Diaz-Balart said. "I'm consistent and I think we have to fight for human rights not only in Cuba, but around the world." But Martinez said he hears complaints about Cuba travel restrictions from folks in factories and beauty parlours who want to visit family but are barred from going more than once every three years because of US policy. "That's not what America is all about,

and I'm saying lift those restrictions," Martinez said. ``Allow family-to-family travel. Allow the families to connect to each other and then we can work on all the other issues" (*The Miami Herald*, 16/10/08).

October 16: Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon stressed the need to prevent the closing by the US Supreme Court of the case of five Cubans held in US jails. "We will avoid the closing of the case with arguments, rallies, concerts and the mobilization of the people of Cuba and the United States and of many other places of the world," said Alarcon during the TVshow La Mesa Redonda , which analyzed the course of the appeal process of the case. The president of the Cuban Parliament explained about the arbitrary actions committed against the five antiterrorist fighters since they were arrested and later tried without proof. Alarcon insisted in the need to increase mobilizations around the world in favour of the release of Antonio Guerrero, Rene Gonzalez, Gerardo Hernandez, Fernando Gonzalez and Ramon Labañino. Those actions are very significant for the people of the United States, who do not know the truth of the case, due to the distortion or silence on the case by the US media, he said (*ACN*, 16/10/08).

October 16: First Lady Laura Bush has used her final year in the White House to try to influence two of the most doggedly difficult human rights and foreign policy issues to face the Bush administration and its recent predecessors. She brought a very public spotlight to the Ladies in White, the group of spouses and other relatives of jailed dissidents seeking to bring respect for human rights to Cuba. Just as her work on behalf of Burmese dissidents has had an "in-your-face" quality, so, too, has her direct challenge to the Castro regime in Cuba. With Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez, who was born in Havana, she spoke with members of the group by digital video conference. In a written statement issued after the long-distance meeting, she said: These women show a courage and determination that is deeply moving, and their stories are an important reminder that dictatorship cannot crush the spirit of freedom. The United States will continue to shine a light on the abuses of the Castro regime, which has imprisoned the husbands, sons and brothers of the Ladies in White, as well as other Cubans who attempt to exercise their fundamental human rights. The United States supports the efforts of the Ladies in White and other independent civil society activists to free all political prisoners and restore human rights in Cuba (*Los Angeles Times*, 16/10/08).

October 17: Republican presidential candidate John McCain promised at a Miami rally that if elected he would press the communist authorities of Cuba to free the island's people. Miami has a large and influential community of Cuban migrants who fled the island when Fidel Castro took power in 1959. Fidel's brother Raul currently leads the island. "If I'm elected president, I won't meet unconditionally with the Castro brothers, while they keep political prisoners in jail, stifle free media and block free elections in Cuba," said McCain. The comment was a swipe at his Democratic rival, Barack Obama, who has said he would meet with the leaders of countries that are enemies of the United States. "When I am president, we are going to pressure the Cuban government to free their people," McCain promised. The crowd welcomed the statement with a long ovation (*AFP*, 17/10/08).

October 18: On the night Lazaro Mendez got an alert that his boat had been stolen from the Florida Keys, he was swept up in a new chapter of the Cuban boat people drama. Grabbing a laptop computer that tracked the fishing boat's position by satellite, he watched as it stopped for refuelling at sea, then shot off toward Cuba -- the latest in a swarm of thefts of Florida boats prized by smugglers for their speed. Mendez, a Cuban-American and a popular Miami radio personality known as "DJ Laz," set out to get his boat back, succeeded, and even came face to face with the men who stole it. But it was just the tiniest of setbacks for a human-trafficking industry that is thriving off the Cuban exodus. Because it has become so hard to dodge the US Coast Guard and reach Florida to qualify for US residency, Cuban migrants in recent years have been heading for Mexico, then overland to Texas. Last year 11,126 used that route, compared to just 1,055 who landed in the Miami area, according to the Department of Homeland Security (*The Miami Herald*, 18/10/08).

October 22: Looking ahead to a new American administration, Cuba's top diplomat in Washington opened a campaign to generate world pressure to kill a half-century old US trade embargo that he likened to genocide. "It's equivalent to genocide; its intention is strangulation," Jorge Bolanos said in an Associated Press interview a week before Cuba plans to ask the UN General Assembly to condemn the US boycott of his country. Bolanos steered clear of presidential politics, but he said Cuba was ready for talks with the United States "if the US considers Cuba an equal partner in negotiations." Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama has said he would be willing to meet with Cuban leader Raul Castro without preconditions and would ease restrictions on family-related travel and on money Cuban-Americans want to send to their families in Cuba. Republican nominee John McCain, meanwhile, has called the offer to meet "the wrong signal," but also has said he favors easing restrictions on Cuba once the United States is "confident that the transition to a free and open democracy is being made." The trade embargo, imposed in 1962, has been tightened during President Bush's two terms. "The last eight years have seen the most ruthless and inhumane application of the blockade," Bolanos said. It "typifies the act of genocide" and from the start was designed to undermine the Cuban revolution of 1959 led by Fidel Castro, the diplomat said (*AP*, 22/10/08).

October 23: During a press conference at Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice responded to questions related to an agreement on migration recently signed by the governments of Mexico and Cuba. "We all have problems with migration. We, and Mexico, have discussed this issue (...) But as to the Cuban matter, I think that there, the problem with migration is Cuba. It's the problem of the way Cuba is ruled. It is the problem of people who have a real fear of political persecution. It is a place that deprivation and fear have been what Cuba gives to its people for now, decades and decades. And that's the problem. And I -- by all means, I think that Mexico and Cuba having a migration accord -- the United States has a migration accord with Cuba -- it's important. But let's be clear on what the real problem of migration is with Cuba, that's the problem" (*US Department of State*, 23/10/08).

October 24: Washington's trade embargo costs Cuba an estimated US\$232 million per year in lost foreign investment, and Havana is not hopeful that the nearly half-century-old sanctions will be lifted regardless of who becomes the next US president, a top official said. Racial Proenza, US and North America director for Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Investment, said authorities studied US investment in other Latin American countries in recent years to come up with the figure. "It's true we don't have real statistics with the United States, but we have estimates and can see that we would have achieved an average of US\$232 million if the embargo didn't exist," Proenza said at a news conference. Total foreign investment would top US\$300 million a year without the sanctions, he said. From 1999 through 2007, more than 3,500 American business representatives traveled to Cuba without US permission to investigate investing on the island if US policy changes, Proenza said. Last year, however, only nine visited. He blamed the decline on the Bush administration, which has tightened trade and travel restrictions since 2004. Proenza also said Havana does not expect either Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama or Republican John McCain to lift the sanctions once in the White House. "We don't think that either one who wins will break the embargo," he said. "This fight will continue" (*AP*, 24/10/08).

October 26: The US's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was responsible for an attack against a freighter carrying British buses bound for Cuba in 1964, *The Observer* newspaper revealed. In an article entitled 'CIA Accused of Sabotage in Thames', *The Observer* explains that the target of the attack was an East German freighter, the MV Magdeburg, which was carrying 42 Leyland buses bound for Cuba. Citing the article published by *The Observer*, *Granma* news daily adds that the study includes statements by people involved in the event, when a Japanese ship, the Yamashiro Maru, ploughed into the MV Magdeburg at more than 10 knots, holing her below the waterline and pushing her across the river. Although it was regarded as an accident, historian John McGarry, quoted by *The Observer*, says he has now found evidence given by Gordon Greenfield, the British pilot of the Magdeburg, stating that the Japanese ship broke international law by navigating the wrong way and giving misleading signals. According to the news daily, McGarry believes a crime was committed (*Caribbean Net News*, 27/10/08).

October 26: On Election Day in the United States, Dr. Elsa Gutierrez will tend to her young psychiatric patients as usual. But, like many Cubans, she will anxiously await news about the history-making presidential campaign. "I don't think many Cubans will be going to work on November 4," she said. "They'll be watching to see what happens. I won't miss it." The US presidential race has generated intense interest in Cuba. For many, Barack Obama has fuelled hope for better relations with Washington with his vow to lift restrictions on family visits and remittances from US exiles and his openness to dialogue with Raul Castro's government. "At least, there is hope that with Obama relations will improve," Gutierrez said. "That would be good for everyone." While the state-controlled media has focused on the US electoral process rather than the candidates, Cubans have managed to keep abreast of the 2008 campaign via word of mouth, illegal satellite hook-ups, limited Internet access and US-sponsored Radio Marti broadcasts. "There isn't much election information on the national news, but people are discussing the vote at the

university, at workplaces, on the street," said Elena Ortega Kostik, 21, an accounting student at the University of Havana. "People wonder whether there will finally be an American president who isn't against Cuba" (*Sun Sentinel*, 26/10/08).

October 28: Unrepentant terrorist former leading Weather Underground Organization (WUO) member William Ayers was aided by Fidel Castro's Cuba in the 1970s, according to a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) report. The 400-page report, a copy of which was obtained by the New York Times, revealed that Cuban intelligence officers in the General Directorate of Intelligence (known by its initials in Spanish as the DGI, Cuba's equivalent of the CIA) set up the Venceremos Brigades in which WUO members participated. "The ultimate objective of the DGI's participation in the setting up of the Venceremos Brigades was "the recruitment of individuals who are politically oriented and who someday may obtain a position, elective or appointive, somewhere in the US government, which would provide the Cuban government with access to political, economic and military intelligence." "After the Weathermen went "underground" in 1970 when many of them were being sought by the FBI on criminal charges, Cuban intelligence officers were in touch with them from both the Cuban Mission to the United Nations in New York and the Cuban Embassy in Canada." In fact according to the report, Ayers played a primary role in the Venceremos Brigades, a role revealed courtesy of Larry Grathwohl, a man publicly described as the "most effective informer the FBI ever placed among the Weathermen." It was Ayers who told "fellow underground WUO member Grathwohl that if communication could not be made through specially arranged Canadian numbers to flee American authorities, an individual should get in touch with the Cuban Embassy in Canada in order to establish contact with other members of the WUO (*Canada Free Press*, 28/10/08).

October 29: The UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly for the 17th year in a row to demand an end to the 46-year-old US trade embargo on communist-ruled Cuba, with only three countries saying no. Some 185 of the assembly's 192 members voted in favour of the text, which reiterated a "call upon all states to refrain from promulgating and applying laws and measures (such as those in the US embargo) in conformity with their obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and international law." The United States, Israel and Palau voted against the resolution while Micronesia and the Marshall Islands abstained. Ronald Godard, the US State Department's senior advisor for Latin American affairs, defended the embargo and blamed the communist regime in Havana for Cuba's woes. "The real reason the Cuban economy is in terrible condition and that so many Cubans remain mired in poverty is that Cuba's regime continues to deny its people their basic human and economic rights," he told the General Assembly. Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque welcomed the assembly vote but also looked ahead to future US-Cuban relations after next week's White House election between Democrat Barack Obama and Republican John McCain. Noting that the US embargo is "older than Barack Obama and my entire generation," Perez Roque said the new US president "will have to decide whether to concede that the embargo is a failed policy which each time creates greater isolation and discredits his country or whether he continues, with obstinacy and cruelty, to try to wear out the Cuban people with hunger and diseases" (*AFP*, 29/10/08).

October 29: Cuba's foreign minister said his government expects the next US president to respond to overwhelming international demand and lift the 47-year-old US trade embargo against Cuba. After the UN General Assembly supported repeal of the economic and commercial embargo by its highest margin ever — 185 to 3 with 2 abstentions —, Felipe Perez Roque said in an interview that the winner of the November 4 election should heed the message. "We expect that the new president will change the policy toward Cuba after nearly 50 years," he told the press. Perez Roque said the vote in the 192-member General Assembly was "a clear signal of the feeling of the international community in favour of the normalization of the relations between the United States and Cuba, and in favour of the lifting of the embargo." Following the US election, he said, "we hope for the full normalization in the relations between Cuba and the United States." He said Cuba proposed to the Bush administration acting together against drug trafficking, human smuggling and illegal immigration but this proved impossible "because the current government is opposed and its policy towards Cuba is a change of regime." He said Cuban President Raul Castro has said on several occasions "that we are ready to begin conversation between both parties, of course based on respect, sovereignty and the right of each country to follow its own way" (*AP*, 30/10/08).

October 29: The President of the UN General Assembly Miguel D'Escoto said the US economic, financial and commercial blockade against Cuba must end, "once and for all," after a Cuban resolution on the issue was overwhelmingly approved by the Assembly for the seventeenth consecutive year. In his concluding remarks after the vote on the resolution, which drew 185 in favour, D'Escoto pointed out that once again the international community had rejected the "illegal and criminal" blockade imposed on Cuba, calling the island nation a "heroic country of unfailing solidarity." D'Escoto called the embargo against Cuba an "act of cruelty", especially after the recent hurricane damage. He expressed his unwavering solidarity with all the Cuban people and to Fidel Castro, as a "hero of international solidarity". "Viva Cuba," he exclaimed (*Prensa Latina*, 30/10/08).

October 31: The president of the international Association of Educators for World Peace (IAEWP), Charles Mercieca, denounced that Washington recently fined two US pastors from the state of Alabama with 50,000 dollars for meeting in Cuba with members of local Baptist congregations. During the 18th Congress on World Peace that wound up in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Professor Charles Mercieca explained about US travel restrictions imposed on American citizens who want to visit Cuba. He said that US citizens are not free to travel wherever they wish (*Prensa Latina*, 1/11/08).