

**Chronicle on Cuba**  
**SUMMARY OF NEWS ITEMS REPORTED ON**  
**CUBA**  
**January-December, 2003**

*This web resource highlights the most significant news items on Cuba listed in FOCAL's monthly Chronicle on Cuba throughout 2003, and groups these according to a wide range of key topics. Web links to important documents and statements are also included.*

**DOMESTIC AFFAIRS**

**CATHOLIC CHURCH**

Cuban Cardinal Jaime Ortega said government continued to ignore the Roman Catholic Church, and always tense relations had not changed five years after Pope John Paul II visited the island. "Relations with the Cuban government remain essentially the same. There is no substantial change (...) The social-political space is always very limited and it appears often the church is ignored," Ortega said, in declarations to the press after opening a Havana art exhibit. Christmas Day holiday was banned in 1969 by Fidel Castro's government and only restored in 1997 on the eve of the pope's visit. Church officials complain that while the government now recognizes Christmas as a holiday, it does nothing to encourage the religious nature of the day. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Cardinal Jaime Ortega, Archbishop of Havana and main figure of the Catholic Church in Cuba, clarified that Pope John Paul II received in the Vatican Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas as a courtesy not to be interpreted as an offer of support. "The church does not support any political projects", said Ortega in reference to Payá's activities. (January, Domestic Affairs)

The diocese in the province of Holguín has organized gatherings of families in response to the Fourth World Meeting of the Families that will take place in Manila, the Philippines. The meeting in Holguin intends to act in response to the difficult times that the "basic cell" of Cuban society is going through. The meeting will also mark the fifth anniversary of the Pope's visit to Cuba and his words: "¡Cuba: take care of your families so that your heart stays wholesome!" (January, Domestic Affairs)

During an interview in the Vatican, Havana Cardinal, Jaime Ortega, said that after the Pope's visit to the island there is a highly politicized climate in Cuba: "As if it were a reaction to the new winds brought by

the Holy father, there has been a fall back to ideology which has become more and more persistent. There has been a return to the old propaganda which seemed left behind"(...) "The church is not being attacked. Not directly. But there is a comeback of the idea that in the name of the revolution you have to surrender your soul and sacrifice everything." (February, Domestic Affairs)

In a pastoral letter Cardinal Jaime Ortega Alamino, Archbishop of Havana, advocated for urgent economic and social changes that give Cubans "the hope to attain calmly a better future in their own homeland." In the document titled "No hay Patria sin virtud", Ortega makes a comprehensive analysis of the most pressing issues in Cuban society. Among them he includes the crisis in the Cuban family by pointing out that "the family is more important than the State and its well-being can never be renounced at the state's demands." (February, Domestic Affairs)

Monsignor Agustín Román, auxiliary bishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Miami, urged Cuban exiles to promote the pastoral letter on social and economic reform issued by Cardinal Jaime Ortega Alamino, archbishop of Havana. Román also asked exiles to refrain from insulting or making personal attacks against the Cuban prelate. Exile leaders and analysts called comments by Ortega, the highest Catholic Church official in Cuba, the latest sign of frustration with the regime's resistance to economic and social reforms. (March, Exile Community)

Fidel Castro made what he called a gesture of "peace and justice" to the Catholic Church, attending the opening of a convent of Brigittine nuns in Havana. Cuba's communist government donated the colonial palace of a Spanish count to house the convent in Old Havana. Castro said the convent's opening marked the fifth anniversary of the 1998 visit to Cuba by Pope John Paul II, who he praised for his efforts to prevent war in the Gulf. The event was attended by two cardinals, the Pope's envoy, Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe, the Archbishop of Guadalajara, Cardinal Juan Sandoval Iñiguez, and Italy's deputy foreign minister, Mario Baccinni. But the Archbishop of Havana, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, was notably absent, pointing to tensions between the church's leader in Cuba and the Castro government, which the prelate publicly criticized in a recent pastoral letter. (March, Domestic Affairs)

Warming up to the Roman Catholic Church while maintaining a distance from local church officials, Fidel Castro exchanged medals with the worldwide leader of an order of nuns that opened a convent in Havana. During a ceremony at the Palace of Revolution where he keeps his offices, Castro bestowed the medal of the Order of Felix Varela, First Grade, to Mother Telka Famiglietti, general abbess of the Order of the Most Holy Savior of St. Brigid. The abbess then bestowed on Castro one of her religious order's honor, the Ecumenical Cross with the Star of the Commander of St. Brigid. (March, Domestic Affairs)

The Cuban Catholic Church urged the governments of Cuba and the United States "to embark once and for all on the path to harmony" for the sake of the citizens of both countries in an article printed in "Palabra Nueva," a magazine published by the Archdiocese of Havana. The article also added that citizens from both countries are trapped between "the anvil and the hammer" and harmony would improve bilateral relations. The article -- signed by the Church spokesman Orlando Márquez -- pointed out that the hostile statements from both sides as well as the laws affecting relations between their citizens "are ethically reprehensible." (April, US-Cuba Relations)

Cuba's Roman Catholic cardinal defended the church's role on the communist-run island, rejecting criticism that it was not doing enough to support the political opposition. Cardinal Jaime Ortega has called for political freedom in communist-run Cuba but said the church will not join forces with opponents of Fidel Castro. "The church's mission is not to be the opposition party that unfortunately does not exist in Cuba," Cardinal Ortega said in a talk on the future of Cuba. "I wish there were one, two or three different parties, but there are not," he said. Cardinal Jaime Ortega also called for reconciliation among Cuban Catholics during the conference attended by hundreds of people. The audience included US Interests Section Chief James Cason and other foreign diplomats, opposition members and well-known cultural figures with ties to Fidel Castro's government. "The church's mission is not to be on the side of the opposition," said Ortega, the Archbishop of Havana and the island's only Roman Catholic cardinal. "In the same way, you cannot ask the church to support the government." (May, Domestic Affairs)

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

In an interview for an Italian magazine, Cuban Cardinal Jaime Ortega said that freedom of worship without religious freedom is the reality the Cuban Catholic Church must struggle against everyday. This means an enormous hurdle for charity endeavours in a society that barely tolerates religion. Religious freedom entails the "possibility to disseminate the Christian perspective on the larger social and ethical issues, and therefore, have access to the media, which are all State-owned in this country," explained the Archbishop of Havana, in the interview for Famiglia Cristiana. (July, Domestic Affairs)

The feast of Our Lady of Charity, the patroness of Cuba, is marked by the Roman Catholic faithful with 50 processions in various parts of the island. The Catholic Bishops Conference said the government had denied permission for 14 other processions to honor the patroness: three of them in the province of Camagüey, three in Ciego de Avila, six in Santa Clara and two in Cienfuegos. Public processions are scheduled at Our Lady of Charity Parish in Havana, where Cardinal Archbishop Jaime Ortega will say Mass, and in 8 city parishes. Processions will also be held in 9 dioceses. The government authorized the broadcast on local radio of sermons by two bishops. (September, Domestic Affairs)

The Cuban Roman Catholic Church called on Fidel Castro's government to allow more religious, political and economic freedom, and begin a dialogue toward national reconciliation. The Cuban Conference of Bishops expressed its concern over the government's "return to language and methods used during the first years of the revolution," asking it to release 75 dissidents sentenced to average 19-year prison terms earlier this year in the most severe repression in decades. "We once again ask the country's authorities for a gesture of clemency for these people in prison, above all taking humanitarian considerations for their age, state of health, and gender," said the document by the Cuban Bishops Conference. "It is preoccupying that currently all thoughts and actions which do not coincide with official ideology are considered lacking in legality, disqualified and combated without taking into account the truth and goodness they might possess," said the Cuban Conference of Bishops in the statement, which marked the feast day of Cuba's patron saint, the Virgin of Charity. The bishops also criticized the summary firing-squad execution of three Cubans who hijacked a Havana Bay ferry in April to try to reach Florida. [[The Social Presence of the Church](#)] (September, Domestic Affairs)

Havana's Archbishop, Jaime Ortega, said that the dialogue between Pope John Paul II and Fidel Castro continues. "Speaking in Havana John Paul II said that, even if difficult, it is through dialogue that differences can be overcome," said Ortega in an interview published by the Italian daily La Nazione. "This was recently reiterated by Cardinal (Angelo) Sodano (Secretary of State), in reply to a question from a journalist that the Pope does not regret carrying on the dialogue", he added. (September, Domestic Affairs)

Spanish priest Pablo Fuentes, of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary, left for Argentina after the official from the Cuban Central Committee of the Communist party in charge of religious affairs informed him that his permit to stay on the island would not be extended. In May, authorities had banned a procession organized by Fuentes because according to them he was not trustworthy. (September, Domestic Affairs)

The Catholic Church is still facing obstacles in Cuba, says the archbishop of Havana. Cardinal Jaime Ortega, who visited Italy recently, spoke to Catholics in Milan about the situation of the Church in Cuba. In an interview Ortega said that little or nothing has changed on the island. "Criticisms and arguments with some foreign governments have inflamed political life. However (...) daily life has neither improved nor worsened". Referring to limitations imposed on the Church activities, Cardinal Ortega said that the Church's presence continues to be very limited at the level of education and the media. "The Office of Religious Affairs of the Central Committee of the Communist Party is always hovering over us. It is an organ of control which limits the evangelizing action of the Church. For the Cuban state, the Church is either an ally or an enemy -- an ideological view that does not take into account the Church's authentic nature and mission in the world", he added. (October, Domestic Affairs)

Thousands of Cubans gathered outside the church in El Rincón, near Havana, to venerate San Lazaro, known as "the miracle worker," in one of the communist island's most popular religious traditions, a seamless amalgamation of Christian beliefs and African practices. Believers from all around Cuba began to congregate outside the church and packed into the building, ready to spend the pre-dawn hours together awaiting the morning Mass celebrated by Cardinal Jaime Ortega, Havana's Catholic archbishop. Although the Roman Catholic Church does not recognize San Lazaro - the crippled Lazarus mentioned in one of Jesus' New Testament parables - he is Cuba's unofficial patron saint of beggars and among the island's most venerated. In his homily, Cardinal Ortega warned believers against superstitions and spells, alluding to Santería, whose practices are similar to Voodoo. "Nobody knows the future but God (...) our hope is in God," said Ortega, blasting those who try "to distort" religion with feelings of vengeance or violence and those who expect to gain favor from it. . (EFE, 17/12/03, Domestic Affairs)

The Cuban Catholic Church has proclaimed 2004 the "Year of the Family," Cardinal Jaime Ortega Alamino said in a pastoral letter. "How much families want to enjoy a full and happy life over Christmas!" the archbishop of Havana said. "But it turns out, we're always missing something: health, better economic prospects, that our wishes come true." "Something is almost always missing," he said. "Loved ones who have left to meet the Lord; loved ones far away, living outside Cuba, and Cuban families feel this absence." Ortega Alamino called on parishioners to endure their hardships with faith. (December, Domestic Affairs)

## **CULTURE**

### **150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of José Martí's Birth**

Countless activities to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Cuba's National Hero José Martí are taking place across the island. Fidel Castro attended the opening of a sample of wax sculptures, paying tribute to the Cuban national hero. More than 20,000 students marched through the streets of downtown Havana in the traditional Torchlight March. Beginning at the University of Havana, the march ended with a huge rally attended by Raúl Castro, Second Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba. The annual march was first held on this date 50 years ago, in 1953, when Fidel Castro and other university students and activists organized the event to commemorate the 100th anniversary of José Martí's birth and, at the same time, protest the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. (January, Domestic Affairs)

More than 24,000 grade school students gathered at Havana's Plaza de la Revolución for a gigantic parade and cultural activity, complete with poetry readings, music and dancing. Schools and work centers across the island all held special activities to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Cuba's National Hero, José Martí, on January 28, 1853. (January, Domestic Affairs)

The International Conference for World Equilibrium is taking place in Havana, with the participation of over 500 experts from more than 30 countries. Delegates to the meeting, underway at Havana's International Convention Center, are focussing on an analysis of culture and its present day challenges. Organized to coincide with the 150th anniversary of José Martí's birth, conference participants are also looking at the influence of Martí's thoughts and writings on culture and education. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Representatives of Masonic lodges from over 10 countries of Latin America and Europe are meeting in Havana to pay homage to José Martí, who was one of its most prominent members. This year marks the 150th anniversary of Martí's birth. (January, Domestic Affairs)

### **Book Fairs**

The 12th International Book Fair opened at the San Carlos de la Cabaña Fortress, Havana, in a ceremony attended by Fidel Castro, Latin American political and cultural personalities and diplomats accredited in Cuba. This year's forum is dedicated to the Andean community countries, represented by a comprehensive selection of its rich culture. The Fair also includes a strong literary and academic program plus a special tribute to Cuban poet, narrator and essayist Pablo Armando Fernández. (February, Domestic Affairs)

Patricia Gutiérrez, daughter of moderate Cuban exile Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, launched her "Cuban Culture Collection" at the Havana Book Fair. The collection includes some controversial titles by authors living on the island and abroad. She admitted that the spreading of the literary works is limited to the Fair only, because there is always the possibility of opposition by the Cuban Government to distribute the work of a particular author throughout the island. (February, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban cultural authorities prevented writer Félix Luis Viera from launching his novel "Un ciervo herido" at the XII International Book Fair of Havana, said (undisclosed) sources to the press. The Puerto Rican publishing house "Plaza Mayor" said that the Viera didn't attend the Havana Book Fair due to alleged health reasons; but other sources from the island said that "there were pressures from high levels" to suspend the launching of Viera's novel. (February, Domestic Affairs)

The 12th Havana International Book Fair will travel to 29 Cuban cities after attracting 440,000 visitors and registering almost 1 million book sales in the course of its 10 days in Havana. The president of the fair's organizing committee, as well as of the Cuban Book Institute (ICL), Iroel Sanchez, said that every aspect of the fair exceeded expectations, thanks to the response of the reading public. (February, Domestic Affairs)

The Frankfurt Book Fair will have to do without Cuba this October. The communist country cancelled its participation after Germany withdrew from the 2004 Book Fair in Havana. In a letter, the Cuban Book Institute told the Frankfurt Book Fair management that Cuba would not take part in the industry's biggest trade event, book fair spokesman Holger Ehling said. (September, Foreign Affairs)

A handful of German publishers plan to ignore a foreign ministry decision to boycott an international book fair in Cuba over human rights abuses, Berlin daily Junge Welt reported. A spokesman for the Berlin-based "Havana Book Fair 2004 Office," Reinhard Thiele, told the newspaper that the group was acting to "motivate publishers, authors and artists to participate" and that at least five publishing houses had already signed on. Thiele sharply criticized Germany's boycott. (September, Foreign Affairs)

## **General**

Two Cuban émigrés, novelist Edmundo Desnoes, and storyteller and journalist Mayra Montero, are part of the jury for the Casa de las Américas literary award in Havana. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Nine undiscovered indigenous sites, probably more than 5,000 years old, were found in Mayari in the eastern region of Cuba, Granma newspaper reported. According to researcher Elena Guarch, from the Cuban Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (CITMA), this and other previous discoveries in the zone are particularly relevant since they give clues of the time and characteristics of the earliest presence of humans in Cuba. Guarch believes estimates can be made as to the origin of these groups from the weather conditions of the period, the emergence of land that brought Cuba closer to the Bahamas and the latter to Florida, facilitating the crossing of the great fauna existing and later the native peoples. (March, Domestic Affairs)

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

The 3rd Congress for Culture and Development, on the relationship of art, heritage, identity and economy, is meeting in Havana with participation of over 800 delegates from 37 countries. This is the largest meeting of its kind, and was summoned by the Cuban Culture Ministry to debate ties between development and

culture, in forums, plenary sessions and conferences. The nations with the greatest number of delegates are Venezuela, Mexico, Colombia, Italy, France, Brazil and Guatemala. Ministers of Culture from Guatemala, Mozambique, Mali, Haiti and Ecuador; vice ministers from Venezuela, Virgin Islands and Angola, as well as representatives from the UN, UNESCO, SELA (The Latin American Economic System), and the Andres Bello Covenant are attending. (June, Foreign Affairs)

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

Fidel Castro attended the gala celebration of the Vocational Workshop of the National School of Ballet. Thousands of young students of ballet enjoyed a cultural presentation at Havana's Karl Marx Theater. Following the gala, the Cuban leader went backstage and personally spoke with the children and their professors, praising them for the performance. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/7/03, Domestic Affairs)

Compay Segundo, who catapulted to world stardom in his 90s with the Grammy-winning record Buena Vista Social Club, has died. He was 95. Born Máximo Francisco Repilado Muñoz, the wiry, cigar-smoking musician carried traditional Cuban music to the world and was honoured with a Grammy in 1997, when he was 90. He set audiences dancing from Havana to Paris with Buena Vista Social Club hits including Chan Chan, which brought modern appeal to a musical genre that had largely been forgotten. He died two days after attending a tribute concert hosted by his sons, Salvador and Basilio, at Havana's Hotel Nacional, where a concert room is dedicated to him. (July, Domestic Affairs)

Celia Cruz, the Cuban singer who began performing in 1949 with La Sonora Matancera in Cuba and later became an internationally known salsa star and symbol of Cuban culture, died at her home in New Jersey. Her husband Pedro Knight, and family and friends were at her side. Celia died of complications resulting from surgery in December to remove a brain tumor. She was the latest in a series of legendary Latin performers to succumb in recent years, following master percussionist Tito Puente, bandleader and composer Chico O'Farrill and percussionist Ramón "Mongo" Santamaría. With them and others, she helped define Latin music for decades and influenced countless performers of various genres from around the world. Celia, who left Cuba in 1961, was also known for her staunch opposition to Fidel Castro's government. In Miami, the singer's death was met with shock and dismay. Though she abhorred the island's communist government, she was proud of Cuba's longstanding ability to produce world-class musicians. (July, Exile Community)

It is reported that over 400,000 persons have visited the Beaux Arts Museum, in Havana. The building underwent remodelling in 1996 to create the technical and environmental control infrastructure required for the utmost preservation of its valuable assets. (July, Domestic Affairs)

Thousands of young Cubans who took part in the Havana Rap Festival heard rhyming local musicians touch on subjects including prostitution, racism, social exclusion and escape to freedom with a degree of critical irreverence uncommon on this island. The weeklong festival, which brought together more than 70 Cuban and foreign hip-hop groups in Havana for a series of discussions and concerts, was marked by protest songs. The annual event, which is sponsored by the government's Institute of Music and a communist youth organization, has become the main showcase for Cuban rap groups and a unique window on the grievances and aspirations of Cuba's young people. (August, Domestic Affairs)

The 11th Havana International Theater Festival was a great success with an avalanche of young people who defied the rain to crowd theaters, halls, museums, squares and parks. Avidly, 55,000 people attended the performances of 180 foreign artists from 15 countries and the best of Cuban theater, in a 10-day exchange. Two of the most applauded groups were Teatro Tierra (Earth Theatre) from Colombia, and Batida Teatro, from Denmark. (September, Domestic Affairs)

Every two years a theater festival takes place in Havana featuring many of the nation's best groups, plus some from abroad. Julián González, president of the National Theater Council and the International Theater Festival organizing committee, said that performers from Argentina, Austria, Benin, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Ecuador, Guadeloupe, Italy, Korea, Mexico, Panama, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and the United States are expected to attend. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Fernando Perez's film, *Suite Habana*, opened the 51st San Sebastian Film Festival. "That's how they are. They live like that," said the director, talking about the 10 Cubans featured in the documentary-style film about a day in the life of the island's capital. All were strangers to him, apart from the rail way worker who plays the saxophone at night and is a neighbor of Perez. Two of the main characters are a 10-year-old boy with Down's Syndrome and his father. Another is a disillusioned and solitary old lady, who sells peanuts for a living. *Suite Habana* shows all their stories, without dialogue or narration, with the action unfolding through the images, streets sounds and music of the city. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Professors and students at the Higher Institute of Arts highlighted the vital contribution of the "trova" and its essential presence in times of revolutionary change at the inauguration of the academic year 2003-4. In the presence of Fidel Castro, founder artists and others who have contributed to the Nueva Trova movement received the institution's Diploma of Artistic Merit. (October, Domestic Affairs)

The Cuban film industry, one of the sectors most affected by the economic depression that has hit the country over the past ten years, will produce eight new films in 2003, said Omar González, president of the Cuban Institute of Arts and Film Industries (ICAIC). In statements to reporters, González pointed out that the recovery of Cuba's film industry has been slow. "It is expensive to make films," said González, adding that many steps have been taken to revitalize the industry. "Roble de Olor" by Rigoberto López; "Entre Ciclonés" by Enrique Colina; "Suite Habana" by Fernando Pérez; "Más Vampiros en La Habana" by Juan Padrón, and "Bailando Cha Cha Cha" by Manuel Herrera, are some of the new films. The list also includes "Perfecto Amor Equivocado" by Gerardo Chijona, "Aunque Estes Lejos" by Juan Carlos Tabío, and "Tres Historias de Amor" by three young producers. (October, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power (Cuban Parliament) agreed to acknowledge the work of the country's cultural workers, due to their crucial contribution to the Revolution. "Let this homage reach the humblest worker for his undertaking", stressed Ricardo Alarcon, President of the legislative body whose first ordinary session of its sixth legislature was held at Havana's Convention Palace, and which was presided over by Fidel and Raúl Castro. (October, Domestic Affairs)

Education and culture are passionate issues," affirmed Fidel Castro, speaking during the discussion of the Ministry of Culture report, presented by its head, Abel Prieto at the 1st Ordinary Session of the 6th Legislature of the National Assembly. "Both are intimately connected," he commented, "because without the national education system set in motion by the Revolution in 1959 arts education would not have developed." (October, Domestic Affairs)

Fidel Castro reiterated the need to give the Cuban people a general integral culture that would help them to better understand the international situation. "I am convinced that talent is massive and any person has the talent to do several things," said the president in a parliamentary session that analyzed a report by the Culture Minister. In a speech motivated by the information given by Culture Minister Abel Prieto to deputies, the Cuban leader made it clear that the concept of general integral culture covers artistic culture. Fidel Castro explained to delegates participating in the 1st Ordinary Period of Sessions of the 6th Legislature of the Unicameral Parliament that political culture is essential to understand today's world. That is why the Cuban government is promoting several educational, cultural and social programs. (October, Domestic Affairs)

A concert attended by Fidel Castro was offered at Lennon Park as the eighth Havana Arts Biennial continues in the Cuban capital. Castro watched artists cover a Sherman tank with white sheets to protest wars. The peace concert in Havana's Lennon Park drew at least 2,000 people. Yoko's sister Setsuko Ono, a sculptor and former World Bank loans official, took to the stage to praise communist-run Cuba for

contributing to peace by building an egalitarian society with free access to education and health care for all. "The words peace, democracy and human rights are being manipulated by politicians around the world," Ono, 62, said. Castro, 77, looked tired as he listened to musicians play songs by the Beatles, whose music his government banned in the '60s and '70s. Cuba's National Choir closed singing Imagine in English. (November, Domestic Affairs)

Strains of conga music will be in the air along Havana's "Malecon" seaside drive as the Havana carnivals opened with a spirited children's parade. Some one hundred popular musical groups will play for street dances throughout the city. The parades will feature twelve ornate floats complete with musical groups and dancers aloft. There will be a special float carrying extravagantly costumed dancers from the famous Tropicana nightclub and there will be numerous groups of competing street dancing ensembles. The eight-day music and dance extravaganza is being held for the first time in November, coinciding with the 484th anniversary of the city of Havana. (November, Domestic Affairs)

Dance Cuba, a company of women, does more than blend the Cuban dance traditions. It turns aspects of folk dance, flamenco, ballet and Afro-Cuban dance into a theatrical kaleidoscope. Liza Alfonso, the troupe's director, has developed a style that emphasizes constantly shifting geometrical formations. As a performance at Broadway's New Victory Theater revealed, her marvelously drilled dancers move with split-second precision and unflagging energy. There were moments when the pace and patterning became somewhat relentless, but monotony never became a problem because the program lasted only about 80 minutes. Instead, Dance Cuba's vigor set the audience cheering. Most of the choreography was by Ms. Alfonso, with additional contributions by Yanet Rodriguez and Liliet Rivera. (November, Domestic Affairs)

The 15th Wemilere African Roots Festival, is dedicated to the culture of Cape Verde, according to the Organizing Committee. The reflection on African legacy will be featured with an artistic contest and creation workshops, video tape projections, galas, concerts, a literary forum and tours of Havana's historical villa of Guanabacoa, seat of the event. (November, Domestic Affairs)

The disquieting Cuban film "Suite Habana" swept the awards at Havana's New Latin American Film Festival, an important regional film showcase. "Suite Habana" documents a day in the life of a dozen Cubans who struggle with the harsher side of life in revolutionary Cuba. The characters do not smile or speak a word. The film by Fernando Perez -- an 80-minute rapid sequence of images, sounds and music -- won best picture, director, music and soundtrack. "It is the most important prize I could receive and it belongs to the public which viewed the film with such emotion," Perez told the press. (December, Domestic Affairs)

The International Fair of Craftsmanship FIART 2003, taking place at Havana's PABEXPO Fairgrounds, includes participants from 37 countries, including some coming for the first time, such as Costa Rica, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Serbia. The contribution of Mexico, Peru, Colombia and Argentina to the 9th edition consolidates these nations as permanent fixtures of the event held this year under the slogan Craftwork, Design and Everyday Life. The Cuban exhibition included 93 artists and 37 state companies that represent Cuban craftwork and semi-industrial production. (December, Domestic Affairs)

The children songs festival "Singing to the Sun" came to a close at the Karl Marx theatre in Havana. The festival, organized by the Children and Young Programs division of Cuba's television, paid tribute to all teachers on their day. (December, Domestic Affairs)

## **Havana's Art Biennial**

As a result of the arrest of 75 Cuban cultural and social activists in recent months and their being sentenced to harsh terms of imprisonment of up to 28 years, the Prince Claus Fund has decided not to provide financial support to the 8th Havana Biennial, which will be held in November 2003. All those sentenced were engaged in critical Cuban cultural and social arenas. The convictions signal a significant deterioration of the situation for intellectuals and artists. The body responsible for organising the 8th Havana Biennial,

which is an internationally acclaimed platform for non-western art, is associated with the government and has not distanced itself from the policy of prosecution. As a result, the Prince Claus Fund is forced to withdraw its collaboration. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba's internationally renowned art festival, the Biennial of Havana, has become the latest victim of soured relations between Europe and the communist island. While the event will be held as planned later this year, it will have to make do with about \$200,000 less than expected, now that three European foundations have withdrawn their support. "It's a heavy blow," Rafael Acosta de Arriba, president of Cuba's National Council of Plastic Arts, acknowledged Friday. The event, featuring about 300 exhibitions around Havana, will now have a budget of about \$156,000, he said. Acosta de Arriba told reporters that the groups withdrawing funds this year include the Prince Claus Foundation, named for the late husband of Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands. Two other foundations, one Dutch and the other French, also withdrew their aid proposals, he said. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Miami-based artists Roberto Behar and Rosario Marquardt, whose work was shown this summer at the Miami Art Museum, said in a phone interview that they were sending a letter to Havana Biennial organizers explaining their decision not to attend. "Everyone punished by the government in Cuba lately has been fighting peacefully for basic cultural freedoms," Behar said in a phone conversation. "It's very difficult to participate in anything the government sponsored." (September, US-Cuba Relations)

In spite of the financial cutbacks by European government entities, the opening ceremony of the Eighth Havana Biennial was held at the Plaza Vieja. The Centro Wifredo Lam, the event's principal organizer, opened with works by Panamanian artist Humberto Veléz, titled *Because Love Exists*, and in the tenement building La California -where famous Cuban musician Chano Pozo was born--, famous Cuban artists Manuel Mendive, Choco, and Roberto Diago exhibited their works. The Museum of Fine Arts, where several sidebar exhibits are hosted, will be the center of debates on subjects such as *Art for Life* -organized by Canada's "Le Lieu"--, in which well known curators will participate. Havana's San Carlos de la Cabaña Fortress has also become a huge exhibition area for 100 artists participating in the Biennial, as well as the Cuba Pavilion, where the works of 27 artists are on display. The Havana-based Casa de las Américas cultural institution opened a space in its Ernesto Guevara Hall as part of the Havana Biennial, which included the auction "Each Child Saved is a Work of Art" ("*Cada niño salvado es una obra maestro*"). Fifty Cuban artists joined the effort. The proceeds will be donated to the Pediatric Hospital's Oncology and Hematology Ward in the central Cuban province of Villa Clara. (November, Domestic Affairs)

The pluralistic nature of the Havana Arts Biennial, which emerged in 1984, is being called into question in its eighth edition as a space for artists of the developing South. The withdrawal of two artists and the subsequent debate about artistic freedoms on the socialist-governed island have cast a shadow over this year's exhibition. A cloud hovers over the programme by the intense debate about artistic freedom in Cuba, triggered by the decision of artists Alexander Apóstol of Venezuela and Priscila Moge of Costa Rica to pull out of the biennial. The result of what Cuban cultural officials referred to as a "media campaign" against the island was the retraction of funds for the biennial pledged by institutions from the Netherlands and France. To confront the crisis, the organisers turned to the Cuban government, which at the last minute agreed to provide a low budget of 156,000 dollars, less than initially planned, but enough to go forward with the exhibition. (November, Domestic Affairs)

A not-so-positive view of current times lurks behind most of the major works of art on show at the 8th Biennial of Arts, in La Cabaña and in the more than 100 parallel expositions at other venues throughout the city. A reflection of society, with a multiplicity of readings, can be found among the works by Cuban artists, with Cuban themes. "Autobiografía", a parallel show by Tania Brugueras at the National Museum of Fine Arts, includes a gallery painted completely white, with a rostrum, a microphone and sound equipment that emits revolutionary slogans with the sound distorted. A double line of television sets in which the screens have been replaced by black bars is what artist Yoan Capote has on show. Meanwhile, Adrián Rumbaut encloses typical scenes of Cuban everyday life in cages made of iron, some in the shape of houses. Only one cage is open. It holds a photo of a boy wearing the uniform of the "pioneers", a government-run organisation of school-age children. The boy is saluting the Cuban flag. It is a strong and well-produced piece of art, "as one can feel the sensation of being enclosed just by entering a room that is

only half-lit," said Gustavo Ramírez, an expert in art history. According to Ramírez, the Cuban presence in the biennial confirms a return to one of the predominant art trends of the late 1980s and early 1990s. "An art that is very open to social criticism, to debate," he said. (November, Domestic Affairs)

## DISSIDENTS

### Activities and Statements

Cuban dissident leader Oswaldo José Payá Sardiñas denied that the Cuban people are gambling on the death of Fidel Castro to gain their rights and freedom. The Cuban people are not basing their struggle or their hopes on the death of Castro, because this is a civic struggle and [not] thinking about the other "we call it biological fatalism: waiting for a person to die so that people can obtain freedom and rights," he said. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Cubans themselves can influence the time when Fidel Castro's totalitarian regime will fall, Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá told journalists when laying flowers to the memorial to the victims of the communist regime at the Wenceslas Square in Prague's Center. He said that Cubans' basic rights should be respected. Payá said that the parliamentary elections which ended with another victory of the ruling Communists in Cuba were undemocratic. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Member groups of the Pinar del Rio Coordinadora Democrática, which includes about 20 banned organizations in Cuba, met at the headquarters of the Partido Democrático 30 de Noviembre "Frank País" to debate the [Propuesta de Medidas Para Salir de la Crisis en Cuba](#) (Proposed Measures to Come out of the Crisis in Cuba), prepared by the All United Movement (Movimiento Todos Unidos), whose spokesman is Vladimiro Roca. (February, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban moderate opposition groups announced that they will submit before the UN Human Rights Commission (HRC) a letter endorsed by over 30 thousand citizens, denouncing human rights violations in Cuba. (March, Domestic Affairs)

More than 35,000 Cubans, ranging from dissidents to militant supporters of the governing Communist Party, took part in a survey on a "[Charter of Fundamental Rights and Duties](#)," opposition groups said. A coalition of 67 Cuban organizations from across the political and social spectrum - including groups on the island and some in exile - promoted the initiative. The promoters of the "Citizen Charter," the final draft of which is scheduled to be ready in April, hope this "will be an instrument for supporting the rule of law in Cuba, for initiating a national dialogue on human rights and for forming a popular culture of citizenship." "We are very satisfied with this national survey, a democratic, participative process," Manuel Cuesta, a member of the illegal opposition alliance that sponsored the survey, said at a press conference. (March, Domestic Affairs)

Six prominent Cuban dissidents began a hunger strike of indefinite duration to demand the release of the island regime's political prisoners. They put particular emphasis on the release of opposition activist Oscar Elias Biscet. Marta Beatriz Roque, Felix Bonne, Rene Gomez Manzano, Nelson Aguiar, Orlando Zapata and Nelson Molinet began a fast in an apartment in Havana's Vedado neighborhood. The effort is backed by the Assembly to Promote a Civil Society, an "alternative" Congress organized by Roque and others that comprises some 300 Cuban opposition groups. (March, Domestic Affairs)

The island's leading opposition groups asked the European Union not to include Cuba in an agreement offering trade advantages and help to developing nations until the nation improves its civil rights record. The government opponents made their request in a declaration delivered to visiting EU Development Commissioner Poul Nielson, in Havana to open a new EU mission. "In the opinion of those signing this declaration, it is evident that the current Cuban government has not satisfied a minimum of the proposals," said the document. Those who signed it included veteran human rights activist Elizardo Sanchez; Vladimiro Roca, a former military pilot-turned-dissident and son of a late revered Communist Party leader, and Marta Beatriz Roque, a dissident economist who heads an umbrella group of opposition organizations.

(March, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba dissident, Oswaldo Payá, leader of the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL), has sent an appeal to tourists visiting the island to show solidarity with the dissident movement and to take part in demonstrations. "We call on all foreigners visiting our country: declare solidarity, take part in demonstrations. Declare yourselves to be in favour of a (democratic) opening in Cuba", said Payá. "We do not want pressure from the United States, much less an intervention", he replied to a question on whether recent US statements help the dissident movement. "We neither believe in the effectiveness of the embargo nor have we asked for it", he added. (April, Domestic Affairs)

Miriam Leiva, wife of Oscar Espinosa Chepe, one of the Cuban dissidents in jail, sent a letter to US President George Bush asking him not to reinforce measures against Cuba: "It would be used as pretext to enhance the repression on those who have overcome fear, and express their ideas, continue informing as independent journalists, are human rights activists or pacific opponents", the letter says. "It would augment the hardship of the Cuban people, if the remittances were curtailed." "Hundreds of thousands of American visiting Cuba could contribute to the flow of ideas, and the progress of democracy". "The possible sale of medications and food could demonstrate if in fact the Cuban government is capable of buying, or if the lack of them is due to its economic and productive inefficiency". (May, US-Cuba Relations)

Cuba's leading dissident accused the Communist government on the island of manipulating fears of an American invasion to justify its harsh line on opposition. Oswaldo Paya, the leader of the Varela Project petition drive seeking personal and political freedoms, emphasized that any resolution to Cuba's political situation must be peaceful and home-grown. He added that Cuban officials have seized upon President George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq to alarm the Cuban public over a possible American invasion, even though Bush administration officials have rejected that possibility. "The proposition is that we continue with this order without rights or face a supposed invasion from the United States," Paya said in a telephone interview from his Havana home. (May, US-Cuba Relations)

The Cuban left-wing dissident organization Arco Progresista (Progressive Coalition) chastised Fidel Castro's government for withdrawing Cuba's request for accession to the Cotonou Agreement with the European Union (EU) and demanded "political rationality" to avoid isolation within the international community. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Five of Cuba's top dissidents issued a "declaration of principles" that called for unity among opponents of Fidel Castro but acknowledged rifts in the dissident movement and denounced individualism in the ranks. Signed by Elizardo Sánchez, Gustavo Arcos Bergnes, Vladimiro Roca, René Gómez Manzano and Félix Bonne Carcasés, the declaration endorses the right of Castro opponents to "launch projects, initiatives and diverse working ideas" but rejects "any assumption that dissident organizations in general are under the obligation or duty to support them. "No person is entitled to speak on behalf of the whole of the dissidence," the document cautions. "Any pronouncements made by anyone must be formulated only in the name of the organization or group itself." (July, Domestic Affairs)

The US Center for International Policy (CIP) released a statement by Cuban dissident Rene Gomez Manzano, speaking on behalf of two of Cuba's largest coalitions of political dissidents, his own organization, "Asamblea para Promover la Sociedad Civil" (Assembly for the Promotion of Civil Society), and "Todos Unidos" (All United), led most notably by Vladimiro Roca and Elizardo Sanchez. In his statement, recorded on camera for an upcoming conference in Washington by representatives of CIP visiting Havana, Dr. Gomez Manzano urges international support for those arrested in the 100 days since the Cuban government's crackdown against political dissent began - especially for prisoners in need of medical assistance. Informed that human rights organizations, business groups, public policy groups, congressional leaders and other representatives of US public opinion have launched a campaign to lift the ban on the travel of American citizens to Cuba, Dr. Gomez Manzano said: "My colleagues, and the internal dissidents and I are sure that this question will be solved in accordance with the secular traditions of the United States: traditions of freedom, tradition of democracy, and tradition, traditions of respect for human rights and traditions of international solidarity. (July, US-Cuba Relations)

Members of the Cuban internal opposition hailed a statement from the European Union blasting the island's communist regime for human rights abuses as an important element of support for Cuba's people. Elizardo Sánchez, head of an outlawed commission on human rights, said the EU statement "is fully justified by the abysmal state of civil, political and economic rights in Cuba." Vladimiro Roca, representing the opposition coalition Todos Unidos (All United), was also pleased with what he described as a "very measured" declaration from the European Union. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban dissidents criticized Fidel Castro's decision to cut off political dialogue with the European Union and reject any assistance from the 15-member bloc. They said such intransigence will only harm the island's people, already hard pressed by a faltering economy. Vladimiro Roca, speaking for the opposition Todos Unidos (All United) movement, said the situation created by Castro's decision borders on the "absurd." "It can be explained by the fact that the government, and specifically Fidel Castro, does not suffer the problems the Cuban people face regarding food, work, transportation and housing," he told the press. "Clearly he can reject (the aid), and that means he is totally selfish and has no regard whatsoever for the Cuban people," said Roca. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Two Cuban organizations participating in the "Assembly To Promote Civil Society," composed of more than 350 Cuban opposition groups and directed by Marta Beatriz Roque, have been incorporated into the "Cuban National Congress" (in Miami), an entity of a representative parliamentary nature. Both organizations, "The Cuban Human Rights Foundation," founded by Juan Carlos González Leyva, the blind lawyer who is now a political prisoner in Cuba, and the "Cuban Democratic Coalition," are presided over by Reinaldo Cosano Alén. The inclusion of these two organizations as commissions of the "Cuban National Congress" took effect August 7, 2003. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Manuel Cuesta Morúa, main promoter of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Duties of the Cuban People, denied that his coalition's proposal was an alternative to the Varela Project democracy effort, which Fidel Castro's government has rejected as unconstitutional. Like the document released, the Varela Project seeks wide human and economic rights, but it began as a signature gathering drive to seek a voters initiative on laws that would guarantee those liberties. While those signing the Varela Project were required to list their names, addresses and government identity numbers, participants in the newest survey were anonymous. The groups said respondents to the survey were from all of Cuba's 14 provinces and ranged politically from anti-government activists to Communist Party members. "This project is about human rights, not politics like Varela," Cuesta Morua said. He said project organizers received no reports of government repression against survey takers. (September, Domestic Affairs)

The Cuban independent journalist movement has published a new issue of its bimonthly magazine "De Cuba," despite the fact that many of its members are serving long prison sentences. The 62-page publication, published by the Manuel Márquez Sterling Journalists' Association, is dedicated to the dissidents sent to jail after the latest crackdown on the island. (September, Domestic Affairs)

Nobel Prize nominee and last year's winner of the Sakharov prize, Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas, explains in an interview why he is not able to travel to Europe to discuss the political situation in Cuba. "My government has its own mechanisms to stop me from going - even though I have a passport and a visa to get to the EU", he said. Payá Sardiñas was supposed to go to a session of the European Parliament at the beginning of September to present the situation of political prisoners arrested in Cuba about half a year ago, but was prevented from doing so. (September, Domestic Affairs)

One of Cuba's best-known former political prisoners welcomed President Bush's support for the island's opposition, but didn't see much new in the initiatives. Vladimiro Roca spoke after President Bush directed administration officials to recommend ways to achieve a transition to democracy in Cuba after 44 years under Fidel Castro. "Bush's words are moral support for us," Roca said. Still, he said, Bush's message contained "very little new." Roca said he agreed with Bush's plan to crack down, saying "American tourism won't bring democracy to Cuba." "US Treasury Department regulations effectively bar most Americans from traveling here, by making it illegal to spend money on the island". But Roca said Bush's formation of a commission to develop a post-Castro transition plan for Cuba "won't work very well." What will happen

in Cuba after Castro leaves is impossible to know or plan for, said Roca. Castro, now 77, has been in power for 44 years. (October, US-Cuba Relations)

Members of the internal Cuban dissident movement released a declaration demanding an "immediate" amnesty for all political prisoners and the beginning of democratic changes in Cuba. The signatories of the document are Félix Bonné and René Gómez Manzano, both members of the banned "Assembly to Promote Civil Society", and Elsa Morejón, wife of dissident Oscar Elías Biscet, who was sent to jail at the end of last year. Among its twelve points, the declaration calls for the revocation of the current constitution. (November, Domestic Affairs)

## **Elizardo Sánchez Santacruz**

The Cuban Government has published a book alleging that the leading Cuban dissident, Elizardo Sanchez, is a government spy. It claims he was decorated in the 1990s by Cuba's Ministry of the Interior for uncovering CIA agents working against Fidel Castro. The book, *El Camaján* (The Freeloader), written by two Cuban Government journalists, alleges he has been leading a double life and that five years ago he was recruited by the Cuban authorities as a spy. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Elizardo Sánchez, president of the Cuban Human Rights Commission, vehemently denied he is spy for Castro's government. The allegations, he says, are an effort to discredit his opposition to Castro. "It's a colossal lie," the 59-year-old activist told reporters at his home. "It is part of a campaign, like those in the former Soviet Union, to disqualify and silence dissidents," he said. Sánchez said he had met with Ministry of Interior security officials for many years, but only to press for the release of political prisoners and seek a dialogue to improve Cuba's rights situation. "I'm prepared to meet with anyone, even with Satan, if it could help improve the situation of my country," he added. "I was never decorated. This is total infamy." (August, Domestic Affairs)

The book "*El Camaján*" denouncing dissident Elizardo Sánchez as a Cuban government spy, has sown further disarray and suspicion among Cuba's small dissident movement already shaken by mass arrests in March and the surfacing of a dozen infiltrators as witnesses during the trials of 75 members. The slander against our brother Elizardo Sanchez is not worth comment," said Oswaldo Paya, winner of the European Parliament's Andrei Sakharov prize for freedom of expression. "If he ever was a state security agent, they are doing this now because he is no longer any use to them, so he is as much a member of the opposition as any of us," said Vladimiro Roca. (August, Domestic Affairs)

The United States dismissed published allegations that a leading Cuban dissident is actually an informant for the communist government, calling them an attempt to divide opponents of Fidel Castro's regime. The State Department implied that the allegations against Elizardo Sanchez could not be trusted, noting that they had been made in a book authored by "Cuban government journalists." "To us, it's another example that the regime is seeking to create divisions in the opposition by pitting those dedicated to real reform one against the other," spokesman Richard Boucher said. "In so doing, it's trying to distract people from the real problem, which is the Cuban government itself," he told reporters. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Opposition groups in Cuba closed ranks around human rights activist Elizardo Sánchez, dismissing as "slander" allegations that the well-known dissident was a government spy. "In my view this is a merciless attack aimed at destroying a person," social democratic dissident Manuel Cuesta Morúa told the press. Oswaldo Payá, with the Christian Liberation Movement, described the allegations as "slander against our brother." (August, Domestic Affairs)

Promoter of the Varela Project, Oswaldo Payá, told the press he knows a third book discrediting internal dissidents in Cuba is on its way. "I know it ("*El Camaján*") will not be the last one, and that a third edition of the lies is coming out soon, perhaps this time against me," Payá told foreign correspondents. According to Elizardo Sánchez, the title of the third book, which he said is already at the printer's, will be "Who is Payá". (IPS, 19/8/03)

The prominent human rights activist Elizardo Sánchez, a member of the coalition Todos Unidos (Everyone United), admitted to "contacts" with police officials since 1988. The "contacts," in which "the situation of political prisoners" was discussed, began in 1988. After that, "I was in prison from 1989 to 1991. The contacts resumed in 1997. Sometimes they visited me at home or formally summoned me. On other occasions they would arrest me, although they always clarified that it was just to chat," said the activist, who was accompanied by Vladimiro Roca, another member of Todos Unidos. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Former revolutionary and moderate exile leader Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo said it could well be that Elizardo Sánchez was a double agent. Gutiérrez Menoyo, who returned to the island after 20 years in exile, said the book "El Camaján" could be the result "of a disagreement (between state security and) Elizardo, because he wasn't doing things exactly as they wanted." Diplomatic officials said that regardless of the veracity of the book's contents, the accusations could foment doubt and deal a blow to the Cuban opposition. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba presented a video of human rights activist Elizardo Sánchez receiving a medal from state security agents, in the latest government attempt to paint one of the island's best-known dissidents as a spy. Sánchez, who spent 8-1/2 years in prison in the 1980s, said in a telephone interview the video was part of the government's "dirty war" against dissent, and insisted he had no memory of the event, implying he may have been drugged. "There is one day when I lost my sense of reality and time. I have no idea what happened, only a very cloudy memory," he said, acknowledging that he had no proof of having been drugged. In the video presented to the press, Sánchez appears singing the national anthem with a group of state security agents, after which a statement is read congratulating him for "distinguished service." The video clearly shows the colonel pinning an Interior Ministry medal on Sánchez's chest. Then the two embrace and toast the award. "It is all part of the same gross manipulation. People can believe the government or believe me," Sánchez told the press. "They give medals to everybody (...) In my conversations with them I never harmed anyone." (September, Domestic Affairs)

Although a video tape presented by Cuban authorities has raised doubt among some about Elizardo Sánchez's relationship with government agents, other opposition leaders in Cuba remain supportive and raise their own questions about the credibility of the tape. "In the worst of cases, Elizardo is a government agent; but in that case he obviously didn't do the work the government wanted him to," Vladimiro Roca, another prominent dissident, told the press in a telephone interview from Havana. "Otherwise, they wouldn't have done what they did." "Instead of paying attention to Elizardo, we should be paying more attention to the Government's policy towards oppositionists." (September, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban human rights activist Elizardo Sánchez admitted that he received a medal from the secret police but insisted that the ceremony caught on tape and made public was part of a government campaign to smear opposition leaders and silence reform-minded thinkers within its ranks. "I fell in a trap and for that I assume full responsibility," Sánchez told the press. (September, Domestic Affairs)

## **Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo**

Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo -- a former revolutionary fighter with Fidel Castro in the 1950s who later opposed the Cuban ruler's regime -- told reporters at Havana's Jose Marti International Airport that he would stay in the Communist nation to "rebuild the Cuban revolution." "I come here to claim a legal space for the opposition, and I know that it will not be easy," Gutierrez Menoyo said. "It's my right as a Cuban to be here. The Cuban government is not making any concession. I don't have to ask anyone a permission to live in my own country. Gutierrez Menoyo, 68, is a controversial figure among many Cuban exiles in the United States. He opposes the US embargo of Cuba and any other American tactics to oust Castro. He also has given up calls for an armed resistance in favor of working for movement toward democracy, even if Castro remains leader. Menoyo is the leader of the Miami based organisation Cambio Cubano and this is his seventh visit to his country. Castro's government has permitted him to go back to the island for visits because he gave up his revolutionary stance and follows a more moderate approach, calling for peaceful steps toward free and fair elections and other civil changes. He also supports dialogue with the Cuban government. "We have to build peaceful solutions. There has to be dialogue. It has to be understood. And

this has to be done despite the ambitions and personal interests of one man," Menoyo said. (August, Exile Community)

Within the exile community, reactions toward Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo's decision to stay in Cuba have been diverse. Andres Nazario Sargen, who founded Alpha 66 with Gutiérrez-Menoyo but did not follow his call for dialogue with Cuba's leadership, called the decision "a grave mistake." "We have been friends since the hills of the Escambray when we fought against Batista," he said. "I don't think he will accomplish anything." "I think what this shows, more than anything else, is the nature of the regime. A man who helped bring the revolution to power and was jailed for more than 20 years, has now to beg to live under that dictatorship," said the executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation, Joe García. Menoyo "has been working closely with Castro's government for a long time" and "has been trying to reach an arrangement with the government to create a space for himself within the system," said José Basulto, founder of Brothers to the Rescue (August, Exile Community)

A Cuban exile in Miami condemned a dissident politician for his surprise decision to move to Havana and attempt to lead peaceful opposition to Fidel Castro's regime. "I'm very disappointed with Menoyo," Huber Matos, another fellow rebel leader told the press. "He is not the man he used to be. To me, he is allowing himself to be used by Fidel to make it look to the world that the opposition is allowed to exist in Cuba, while we know that those who oppose the government are punished." Some Cuban moderates were more supportive. Alfredo Durán, the secretary of the Cuban Committee for Democracy, which opposes US sanctions on Cuba, said: "He is a Cuban patriot, as he always has been". "You have to take your hat off to his courage. He is there non-violently and simply wants to exercise his civil rights and to live in his country." (August, Exile Community)

Cuban oppositionists have had a cautious reaction to Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo's decision to stay in Cuba. Longtime Cuban opposition leader Elizardo Sánchez was in Santiago's Boniato prison with Gutiérrez-Menoyo in the 1980's. By choosing to stay in Cuba, Gutiérrez-Menoyo was exercising his civil right to determine his country of residence, Sánchez said, "a right that is denied to millions of Cubans on the island and in exile." However, Sánchez stopped short of welcoming the former rebel commander to the opposition movement and pointed to Gutiérrez-Menoyo's past statements that many dissidents are either undercover Cuban agents or pawns of the U.S. Interests Section. "Personally, I can't hide my reservations of Menoyo's political position," Sánchez said. "For years, in public declarations, he has tried to disqualify [the opposition]. If he stays, he could either do civic work or create a fifth column, creating opposition to the opposition. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Vladimiro Roca, leader of the illegal Social-Democratic Party considered that Gutiérrez Menoyo's conditioning of his support to oppositionist groups on the island on an independent stance vis à vis Washington is "not transparent". "I do not put any condition to work with any oppositionist, Roca said." "Whoever calls himself oppositionist, I do not care what he may be as long as he opposes the government and favours changes". "Menoyo never contacted me during his visits to Cuba", added Roca. "His decision to return to the country marks the start of a new stage, because the continuous flow of emigration has done great damage to the internal opposition movement," Dimas Castillo, with the dissident Democratic Socialist Current, told the press. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Revolutionary "comandante" turned dissident Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo, says the democratization of Cuba "is inevitable" and that his 22 years in the Castro regime's jails fostered in him the patience to wait for it while working on behalf of a new democratic revolution. Menoyo moved into his former flat in the El Vedado neighborhood of Havana, calling it the "base of operations" for his fight to promote democracy in Cuba after 17 years of exile. Though he is aware that he is returning to the country "at the time of the harshest repression in recent years," Gutierrez Menoyo told the press that "the democratization of Cuba in the medium term is inevitable." "Change originates from the top in this country. It has to come from power, because they have to come to the conclusion that they will lose all or part of that power," the dissident said, adding that he is convinced the government harbors a "reformist" faction. Menoyo denied any agreement with Cuban authorities prior to his decision to stay in the island. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, former rebel commander turned opposition leader who returned from exile to live permanently in Cuba said he has been contacted by officials in Havana, but declined to provide details of the discussions. "Logically there would have been some contact," Gutiérrez-Menoyo told the press. "I understand that initially my attitude created irritation in the highest ranks." Gutiérrez-Menoyo said that being able to talk with Cuban officials about his intentions was "an acceptable starting point." (August, Domestic Affairs)

A Cuban opposition group lauded as "courageous and unprecedented" a decision by former revolutionary commander Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo to return to the island after 20 years of exile. The social-democratic Arco Progresista movement said the former rebel commander's decision "shows his strong commitment to Cuba's future and personal courage." The movement noted in a statement issued on the island that Cuban exiles who value dialogue and have a "constructive" vision for Cuba's future should have the opportunity to exercise their "right to live and share the necessary changes with their compatriots on the island." The illegal Arco Progresista includes, among others, the Cuban Democratic Socialist Current, the Cuban Movement for Democracy and the Social-Democratic Coordinating Committee. (August, Domestic Affairs)

## **Repression**

### **Crackdown on dissidents and execution of hijackers**

Underscoring an increasingly prickly relationship with the US government, Cuba dedicated an entire television show to America's top diplomat in Havana, calling his contacts with dissidents "provocative" and "offensive." US Interests Section chief James Cason has drawn criticism from Cuban officials in recent months over his public relationship with anti-government supporters in Cuba. "He has traveled the island, meeting with dissidents and repeatedly showing rude behavior," government intelligence analyst Manuel Hevia Frasqueria said of the American diplomat. "His actions are provocative (...) and his language offensive." Hevia and other analysts and journalists on the nightly "Mesa Redonda" -- the Round Table -- said Cason's actions seemed part of a campaign to strengthen Fidel Castro's opponents. The program reflects the government's positions. "This is not improvised and is hardly casual," said Rogelio Polanco, director of the Communist youth daily Juventud Rebelde. (March, US-Cuba Relations)

Cuba's communist-run government announced it had rounded up several dozen opponents and slapped new restrictions on the movements of American diplomats in Havana as already bad relations between the two countries further deteriorated. An official statement read on state television's evening news program said that Cuba's actions were the result of "the shameful and repeated attitude by the chief of Washington's diplomatic mission in Havana, James Cason, to foment the internal counterrevolution." (March, US-Cuba Relations)

Cuba's communist government announced that it had rounded up several dozen opponents. An official statement accused the chief of Washington's diplomatic mission in Havana, James Cason, of trying "to foment the internal counterrevolution." The announcement said several dozen government opponents had been detained but did not elaborate or say if any charges were pending. Veteran human-rights activist Elizardo Sanchez said by telephone that he had confirmed the detentions of at least 10 dissidents and was checking on reports of another 20 or so picked up by state security agents. [\[Official Statement\]](#) (March, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban police arrested dissident economist Martha Beatriz Roque on the third day of a crackdown against opponents of Cuba's communist government. The Cuban Human Rights Commission said between 55 and 70 people had been arrested in their homes across the island since Fidel Castro's government began a roundup saying it was detaining Cubans with ties to US diplomats. Writer and independent journalist, Raúl Rivero, was also arrested, while police agents surrounded the homes of dissident leaders Héctor Palacios and Gisela Delgado. Opposition activists in Havana fear that those arrested will be tried under the much-criticized, but never-yet-applied "Law Against National Independence," which carries sentences of up to 10 years. (March, Domestic Affairs)

Miami-based Cuban exile groups denounced the wave of arrests of political opposition members on the Island. Orlando Gutiérrez, National Secretary of the Directorio Democrático Cubano (Cuban Democratic Directory), told the press that "international denunciation is required to put an end to the methods Fidel Castro has used for four decades to remain in power." Also, Tomás Rodríguez, of Agenda Cubana, called for intensified pressure against a government that is "scared by the level of organization of the opposition movement and its growing popularity with the Cuban population." More than twenty Cuban exile organizations, including the Fundación Nacional Cubano Americana (Cuban American National Foundation), the Cuban Liberty Council and the Spiritual Guides, an association of Cuban priests, have joined forces to obtain the release of those arrested. (March, Exile Community)

Reporters without Borders, a free press watchdog, voiced its outrage at the arrest of more than 20 independent journalists in Cuba. "The arrest of Raúl Rivero, one of the leading figures of Cuba's independent press, has taken the current wave of repression beyond another threshold," secretary-general Robert Ménard said. In a letter to European commissioner for development Poul Nielson, Ménard called on the European Union to suspend consideration of Cuba's application to join the Cotonou trade accords. "It is essential that the European Union should send a clear signal that it will not tolerate the current wave of repression. The European Union must above all be consistent. It is official policy that the expansion of relations with Cuba depends on Cuba's respect for human rights", the letter said. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Human rights groups criticized the crackdown on Cuban dissidents. "This is the most serious setback in years," said José Miguel Vivanco, the Americas director for Human Rights Watch. Also, Amnesty International and the Inter-American Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States condemned the arrests. (March, Foreign Affairs)

The crackdown on the dissidents "could be used to close all the political spaces that the opposition has opened," said Manuel Cuesta Morúa, of the illegal opposition party Socialist Democratic Current. Almost half of those arrested had helped gather signatures for the Varela Project, said Ernesto Martini, a project coordinator. Oswaldo Paya, the leader of Varela Project, said the crackdown will only accelerate the end of the regime. "Cuba needs change urgently. Cubans want change urgently," he said. The sweep also netted dozens of independent journalists. About 20 small, independent lending libraries with books donated by foreign embassies and international non-governmental organizations were dismantled, said Ramon Colas, who founded the library movement several years ago and moved to Miami in 2001. "The government has wanted to stamp out the peaceful pro-democracy movement for years. It is worried about the space the dissidents have gained at home and abroad," veteran rights activist Elizardo Sanchez said. (March, Domestic Affairs)

Former President Jimmy Carter urged the Cuban government to release the 70 plus dissidents arrested this week, as well as the government of George W. Bush to work towards easing the tensions between Washington and Havana. "I am profoundly concerned about reports of arrests of Cuban citizens known to support the Varela Project, promote human rights and practice independent journalism," said Carter. (March, US-Cuba Relations)

The French Foreign Affairs Ministry's spokesperson released a statement by the French government concerning the arrests of dissidents in Cuba. "Apparently," says the communiqué, "this operation is targeting many independent journalists, opposition members, intellectuals, (who are being) arrested because of their personal opinions. France demands details from the Cuban authorities regarding this matter. That wave of arrests would be at odds with the freedoms and democratic pluralism, (and) principles that France and the European Union wish to promote in their relations with the rest of the countries." (March, Foreign Affairs)

The Dutch Ministry of the Economy has decided against sending a trade mission to Cuba on account of the Cuban regime's increased repressive actions. (March, Economy)

Canadian authorities expressed concern on the crackdown on Cuban dissidents. "Canada will be raising our concerns with the Cuban government regarding the crackdown on dissidents," said foreign ministry spokeswoman Nadia Scipio. (March, Foreign Affairs)

The American Society of Newspaper Editors sent a letter to Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque urging the release of the Cuban independent journalists detained. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba's Roman Catholic Church condemned the recent arrests of scores of government critics and urged authorities to accept differing political opinions. "We lament the inappropriate methods being used to arrest people for thinking and acting differently from the official ideology," a statement from the Conference of Cuban Catholic Bishops said. The church's one-page statement urged the government not to treat government critics as "people who have committed a crime." It called on Cuban authorities to "encourage the public debate of ideas and dialogue." (March, Domestic Affairs)

Oswaldo Payá vowed that his civic movement to bring reforms to Cuba would not be crushed. Mr. Payá, the organizer of the Varela Project, a petition drive signed by more than 11,000 people seeking a referendum on personal, political and economic rights, is among a handful of dissidents who remain free after a crackdown by the Cuban authorities. He said about 80 people comprised of independent librarians, journalists and many of his group's regional leaders were in jail on charges that could bring lengthy prison sentences. "They are trying to close the door on peaceful change," he said in a telephone interview from Havana. "In no way will the project be stopped," he said. "There had been a flowering in Cuba of a peaceful movement for rights and reconciliation, to defeat this culture of fear. Cuba's spring is the Varela Project, which has been sustained by thousands and which will grow." Cuban officials have compared their roundup of dissidents to the United States' mass arrests after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Mr. Payá said such accusations were part of the government's relentless defamation campaign against him. "That mocks people's intelligence," he said. "We are claiming our rights." (March, Domestic Affairs)

Dissidents on the island expressed fear that the level of repression will continue to intensify. "There were no arrests over the weekend, but we have to be prepared for more waves of repression," said human-rights activist Elizardo Sánchez, who was reached by phone. "Until this moment, all of the detainees are in police custody and out of communication." "Despite the fact that this has been the most intense and threatening crackdown in recent years, nondissidents have approached the families of dissidents offering their help to keep things in their houses or warning them when they were under surveillance," Sánchez said. "This is an awakening of the Cuban people." (March, Domestic Affairs)

The Inter American Press Association (IAPA) wound up its Midyear Meeting in El Salvador adopting a strongly-worded resolution calling on the Cuban government to cease its campaign against freedom of the press on the island and to immediately release jailed journalists - among them IAPA vice chairman for Cuba Raúl Rivero. It urged democratic governments, human rights organizations and the international community to join it in the call for an end to the hostility towards free speech and press freedom. (March Foreign Affairs)

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Senator Bill Nelson (Democrat-Florida), filed a resolution condemning the arrests of Cuban dissidents in the island, and urging the Bush administration "to take all appropriate steps to secure their immediate release." (March, US-Cuba Relations)

The European Union condemned a crackdown against political dissidents in Cuba, joining calls from international human rights groups for their immediate release. "The European Union is deeply concerned at

the arrests of dozens of independent journalists and opposition members by the Cuban authorities," a statement said. The statement was issued in Greece, which holds the current presidency of the EU. "The European Union condemns those arrests and demands that those persons, whom it considers prisoners of conscience, be released without delay," it said. "Violations of fundamental civil and political rights will be monitored very closely by the European Union and they will continue to influence the Union's relations with Cuba." (March, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban authorities arrested Marcelo López, spokesperson for the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCHRNR), presided over by veteran activist Elizardo Sánchez Santacruz. From the beginning, the CCHRNR has kept a count of the arrests, handing the lists of names over to the international press. (March, Domestic Affairs)

Charges against the 75 arrested dissidents have not yet been laid by Cuban authorities nor have they been allowed access to legal counsel, Elizardo Sánchez Santacruz, president of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCHRNR), told the press. According to Sánchez Santacruz, some of their relatives have said that some dissidents are sharing cells with common criminals, many of which have been arrested during the government's crackdown on the drug traffic and related crimes. (March, Domestic Affairs)

The director of the Independent Libraries of Cuba, 22 of whose centres have been affected by the recent arrests of dissidents on the island, asked ex-US President and Nobel Prize recipient Jimmy Carter to intercede for their release. The petition was made by Gisela Delgado Sablón who requested his mediation "before the Cuban authorities and governments of the world so that the detainees be released," in the letter addressed to Mr. Carter. (March, US-Cuba Relations)

Cuba has enough evidence to prosecute dozens of dissidents arrested on accusations of working with US diplomats to undermine the government, the head of the island's parliament said. "Cuba is going to do everything necessary to ensure that its enemies don't do as they like," National Assembly speaker Ricardo Alarcón said. Alarcón offered no details about the evidence gathered for the trials. The dissidents are in jail awaiting charges. They include independent journalists, directors of non-governmental libraries, members of opposition political parties and activists seeking laws to ensure civil rights such as freedom of speech. (March, Domestic Affairs)

Trial will begin for some of the Cuban dissidents arrested last month after being accused of helping US diplomats undermine the socialist government, the wives of defendants said. Government prosecutors are seeking sentences ranging from 15 years to life, said the wives. They said they had received court papers about their husbands' cases. They also said government defense attorneys told them the trials would be held from April 3rd to April 6th. (April, Domestic Affairs)

A leading Cuban exile group denounced a crackdown by the Cuban government on dissidents in the communist nation, and said it would help organize a campaign of public protest to press for the release of all political prisoners on the island. "They have tried to take advantage that world opinion and the press are concentrated on the war in Iraq," said Omar Lopez Montenegro, who monitors human rights issues in Cuba for the Cuban American National Foundation. Foundation members at a news conference said they had been in contact with relatives of those jailed. Montenegro said some of the relatives have asked the Miami-based group to help drum up international support to free their loved ones. Joe Garcia, executive director of the foundation, said dissidents were peaceful and did nothing wrong. "These are abusive acts of power," Garcia said. "There are 83 people in jail for doing nothing that would be considered illegal in any country in Latin America." (April, Exile Community)

In an unusual move, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office summoned Cuba's Ambassador to that country to express the UK's dismay at the recent arrests of 78 dissidents on the island. This is the first time in at least two and half years that Ambassador José Fernández de Cossio has been called to the visit the British foreign affairs headquarters. "The recent wave of arrests in Cuba is deplorable," said Bill Rammell, minister for Human Rights after the meeting. "These arrests are extremely bad for the image of Cuba, which

has done much to build a society with good social indicators. We will be following the cases closely and are pressing for access to trials." (April, Foreign Affairs)

Possession of "subversive" books, computers and receipts of remittances are part of the evidence supporting accusations against Cuban dissidents, according to the preliminary conclusions of public prosecutors. They are accused of "raising their living standards in spite of performing no socially productive activities" and of receiving "high and frequent" sums of money from the United States. They are charged with "distorting Cuban reality" in their reporting to the press. Osvaldo Alfonso Valdés is accused of receiving "moral and material support" from the U.S. and of contacting U.S. "agents" Frank Calzón and Carlos Alberto Montaner. (April, Domestic Affairs)

Relatives of dissident economist Marta Beatriz Roque said that during her trial, her secretary, Aleida Godínez, revealed that she was an agent who had infiltrated opposition ranks. "She was the witness who did the most damage to my aunt," said Roque's nephew, Joel Alfonso Roque. (April, Domestic Affairs)

A small ferry boat hijacked in Havana Bay and forced to sail toward Florida had returned to Cuba after Cuban authorities chased it some 30 miles into international waters. The boat left international waters under Cuban government escort, a US Coast Guard official in Miami said. (April, Domestic Affairs)

The World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC) urged Fidel Castro to release all the journalists arrested in the last few days and to withdraw the charges under which they will be summarily tried. A similar petition was issued by the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH). (April, Domestic Affairs)

In letters to the Government of Cuba and to Secretary of State Colin Powell, the Washington Office on Latin America criticized the arrests of more than 70 dissidents in Cuba that have taken place in the last several weeks, and expressed concern that actions by US officials in Cuba were counter-productive on human rights while damaging US-Cuban relations. In the letter to Cuban authorities, WOLA Executive Director Bill Spencer wrote that WOLA "expresses our profound concern about the wave of arrests of independent journalists, dissidents and human rights activists that has taken place in Cuba over the past several weeks, and our disappointment at the announcement that the government is proceeding with criminal prosecutions of those arrested, rather than releasing them". (April, US-Cuba Relations)

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) condemned the trials of 28 independent Cuban journalists who have been detained since a crackdown began on March 18. We are appalled and outraged by the arrests of our colleagues," said CPJ acting director Joel Simon. "Given Cuba's repressive legislation and compliant judiciary, we are extremely concerned that they could receive lengthy prison sentences, including life terms." (April, Foreign Affairs)

The Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) launched a strong plea to the international community to mobilize against the indiscriminate persecution of independent journalists in Cuba after indictments in Havana against 28 of them. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Canada said it had protested to Havana over a crackdown on leading dissidents. Cuban authorities are seeking life sentences for 12 of the 78 dissidents, rights activists and journalists arrested and charged with collaborating with the United States. "Canada has raised serious concerns with the Cuban authorities regarding the recent crackdown on several dissidents," said foreign ministry spokesman Patrick Riel. "Many of those arrested are well-known as defenders of freedom of expression and, of course, we are closely monitoring the situation." (April, Foreign Affairs)

Around 30 member of Reporters Without Borders and Cuban and French intellectuals occupied the premises of the Cuban tourism bureau in Paris to condemn the recent wave of arrests of Cuban dissidents on the island. The demonstrators symbolically turned the office into a prison, hanging a banner saying "Cuba = prison" over the facade, and painting bars on the windows, behind which they put photos of recently detained Cuban journalists like Raúl Rivero, Mario Enrique Mayo and Jorge Olivera. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro's government pressed forward in its campaign to steamroll a growing opposition movement, rapidly trying the first of 80 dissidents in court hearings. International media and foreign diplomats were excluded from the hearings. The police presence around the three Havana courthouses where the trials were being held were stepped up. Local human rights activists said those scheduled to appear in court included the poet and well-known independent journalist Raúl Rivero. He was being tried alongside Ricardo González, who recently launched the first independent general interest magazine of its kind in communist Cuba. Prosecutors were seeking sentences of 20 years for Rivero and life for Gonzalez. (April, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban dissident Osvaldo Payá, main promoter of the Varela Project, said he has gone daily to the courtroom where the trials on dissidents are being held, but security forces have shouted obscenities at him and forced him to leave. Elizardo Sanchez, head of the dissident Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation said he has tried to send observers to the trials but that security police stopped them before they could get within 100 yards of the building. (April, Domestic Affairs)

Two reporters who spent years working alongside Raúl Rivero, Cuba's best-known independent journalist revealed at his trial that they were undercover agents as they testified against him, the dissident's wife, Blanca Reyes, said. Reyes was among family members allowed into the trials and characterized the prosecution of her husband as "a circus." She was particularly enraged when Manuel David Orrio, one of Cuba's better known independent reporters, revealed in court that he was really a state security agent and testified against her husband. Also testifying against Rivero was a man he had known as independent reporter Néstor Baguer, who also admitted being a government agent. (April, Domestic Affairs)

Center for International Policy's Wayne Smith, Anya Landau and Sarah Stephens joined a group of Washington-based policy analysts who urge changes in US policy towards Cuba is sending a letter to the chief of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington "to express our profound concern at the arrest of more than 70 Cuban citizens in recent days, and to urge their immediate release." "In the course of our work, many of us have met many of the Cubans who have been arrested for advocating ideas that do not coincide with those of your government," the signers wrote. "We fail to understand how these ideas can constitute a threat to Cuba's security. To the contrary we can only believe that a strong competition of ideas will help Cubans to chart their future." (April, US-Cuba Relations)

Fidel Castro defended the arrests of dissidents and summary trials against 80 of them alleging that "We do not have to agree to the impunity of those who take money from the United States to betray their country." Castro also added that the several dozens of "counterrevolutionaries" who have been arrested "are being tried in courts that deal with crimes against state security and this outrages their masters." (April, Domestic Affairs)

Fidel Castro's government dealt a crippling blow to Cuba's opposition movement, sentencing peaceful activists, journalists and an economist to up to 27 years in prison for allegedly collaborating with US diplomats to undermine the socialist state. Prosecutors sought life sentences for the dissidents, who were among 80 facing closed trials. Opposition political party leader Hector Palacios, among those originally recommended for a life sentence, received 25 years. The poet and writer Raúl Rivero was given a 20-year sentence, as was the economist Martha Beatriz Roque. Fourteen courts convicted the dissidents of "working with a foreign power to undermine the government" and gave them sentences that ranged from 12 to 27 years in jail. (April, Domestic Affairs)

The heavy sentences imposed against non-violent Cuban dissidents are unjustified and draconian, Human Rights Watch said. "These harsh prison sentences are totally unjustified," said José Miguel Vivanco, executive director of the Americas Division of Human Rights Watch. "Cuba is flouting fundamental human rights norms." "It's perverse that there's a massive crackdown occurring in Cuba just at the moment that the United Nations is examining Cuba's human rights record," said Vivanco. "The Commission must condemn these abuses, and do so strongly and unequivocally." (April, Foreign Affairs)

The Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) repudiated the sentences of up to 27 years in prison handed

down against nearly twenty independent journalists in Cuba and called upon hemispheric governments to urge the International Court of Justice in The Hague to intervene. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham summoned Cuba's ambassador to Canada to his office to express "extreme concern" over a dramatic crackdown on peaceful dissent by Fidel Castro's regime. Mr. Graham presented the ambassador with a protest letter addressed to Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque. "The Canadian government is extremely concerned about this potential curtailment of human rights and freedom of expression in Cuba, and is deeply disturbed by the severity of the sentences," said the letter. (April, Foreign Affairs)

UNESCO's Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura voiced concern over freedom of expression and press freedom in Cuba following the arrest of at least 24 Cuban journalists and dozens of human rights activists. "I am very concerned about the situation of freedom of expression and press freedom in Cuba," the Director-General declared. "Reports reaching us regarding the case of the 24 journalists and the human rights activists, said to total 78, are worrying." (April, Foreign Affairs)

Claudia Roth, the German government's human rights spokesman, harshly criticized the arrests of dissidents in Cuba. "The trial flagrantly breaches the most basic elements of the rule of law and human rights. The defense had neither the chance to meet the accused nor to read the charge sheet in advance." (April, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban courts have tried at least 75 government opponents in lightning-fast trials as the communist island presses ahead with a crackdown on dissent, human rights activists said. The known sentences for about half of them reportedly ranged from 15 to 27 years; the remaining sentences were expected by week's end. None of the trials has lasted more than one day, activists said. Another four of those arrested in the crackdown were prosecuted on lesser crimes and received much shorter sentences, measured in months rather than years, veteran activist Elizardo Sanchez said. (April, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban authorities have informed that a group of men who hijacked a ferry boat in Havana and diverted it to the U.S. are being prosecuted in "summary" trials. A brief statement was read on the main Cuban television newscast without mentioning further details, including the number of accused. (April, Domestic Affairs)

The Cuban Ministry of Justice has issued a short official statement on the recent arrest and summary proceedings against a group of Cuban dissidents. The text reads as follows: "Public and oral trials took place on April 3rd, 4th, 5th and 7th, in the criminal courts where a number of counterrevolutionaries, who were recently arrested for their known participation in mercenary activities and other actions against the independence and territorial integrity of the Cuban State, were tried for Crimes against State Security. The trials took place according to the summary proceedings of Article 479 of the State Law of Legal Proceedings with full respect for the guarantees and fundamental rights of the defendants. The sanctions imposed by the Tribunals range between six to 28 years imprisonment and all the defendants were properly instructed of their right to present appeals before the Supreme Court." (April, Domestic Affairs)

A delegation of Cuban exiles gathered across from the entrance of the United Nations Human Rights Commission headquarters to denounce the mass arrests and harsh sentences imposed on scores of pro-democracy leaders, human rights, activists and independent journalists during the most recent violent wave of repression unleashed by Castro's regime. "We call upon democratic governments gathered in Geneva for the 59th Session of the U.N. Human Rights Commission to condemn these blatant human Rights violations in Cuba and demand the immediate release of all political prisoners", said Sylvia G. Iriondo, President of Mothers and Women Against Repression. (April, Exile Community)

The US House of Representatives approved a resolution condemning the arrests of 79 Cuban dissidents and the harsh sentences handed down to dozens of them. The measure passed by a 414-0 vote, with just 10 abstentions. "The House of Representatives sent a clear message in support of the Cuban people's right to be free and in opposition to the brutal tyranny that oppresses Cuba," said Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Florida Republican and the measure's co-sponsor. He said that "today's vote honors the Cuban people as well as the American people." (April, US-Cuba Relations)

Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque defended the swift trials and lengthy sentences-ranging from six to 28 years-given to the dissidents. During the trials in Cuba, the dissidents were accused of being financed and advised by America's top diplomat in Havana, Interests Section Chief James Cason. "Our country has had to struggle against the obsession of the US government to fabricate an opposition in Cuba. We've seen more than 40 years of economic embargo, aggression and armed invasion (...) with the Bush administration, there has been a leap in hostility against Cuba," Perez Roque said. Perez Roque submitted payment lists at trials he said came from the US government. (April, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba sentenced the last of 75 dissidents convicted after one-day trials of collaborating with US diplomats to undermine the communist government. The four sentences announced included a 25-year term for dissident physician Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet. The defendants were accused of receiving money from US government and working with Washington to undermine the socialist regime. (April, Domestic Affairs)

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Cuba defended its speedy prosecution of 75 dissidents, saying it had to protect itself against US attempts to subvert the government. It also maintained that the cases' timing had nothing to do with war in Iraq. In a news conference of more than three hours in Havana, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque said the arrests, summary trials and harsh sentences against the dissidents were justified. "We have been patient, we have been tolerant," Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said. "But we have been obligated to apply our laws." "What has been presented as the emergence of internal opposition is no more than an attempt at opposition made in the USA," Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said. Pérez Roque also denied international criticism that the arrests and convictions over the course of three weeks were timed so that the world's attention would be focused on war. "This decision was taken before the war on Iraq," Pérez Roque said. (April, Domestic Affairs)

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien said he was disturbed by a Cuban crackdown on dissidents but insisted his policy of engaging in dialogue with Havana was producing positive results. "I know there is a problem of human rights in that country -- sometimes it's better, sometimes it's bad - and we're protesting. But it's better to be engaged because that's putting pressure (on Havana)," Chretien told a news conference, saying there was "not a great democracy" in Cuba. "I believe it's better to be engaged and talking than to ignore the problem (... ) I know that if you don't do anything it could be much worse", he added. "He (Castro) is trying to talk to other nations and when he has problems of that nature it makes life more difficult. If we ignore that, he will not mind at all. And I know he's preoccupied, he's not happy when we're talking to him about it (the crackdown)," said Chretien. (April, Foreign Affairs)

The American Society of Newspapers Editors has protested to Fidel Castro that Cuba's recent crackdown on independent journalists and dissidents is "a crushing setback" to the country's growing openness and tolerance of dissent. (April, US-Cuba Relations)

Fidel Castro remained defiant amid international criticism of Cuba's harsh measures to reign in dissent and halt hijackings, saying he would fight to the end to defend his nation against the United States. "We are now immersed in a battle against provocations that are trying to move us toward conflict and military aggression by the United States," Castro told a group of Venezuelans in a speech broadcast on state television. "We have been defending ourselves for 44 years and have always been willing to fight until the end," Castro added in the speech, which marked the coup attempt against his political ally Venezuelan

President Hugo Chavez a year ago. Castro made no direct reference to the execution of three hijackers by firing squad, nor the sentences of up to 28 years handed down for 75 government opponents charged with collaborating with US diplomats to undermine the socialist system. (April, US-Cuba Relations)

Cuba has executed three men convicted of hijacking a passenger ferry to sail to the US, Cuban state-run television reported. The firing squad sentences were carried out immediately after a Cuban court found the men guilty of terrorism. They were part of a gang of approximately 10 involved in the hijacking in which the ferry, carrying at least 30 men, women and children, was forced to sail into the Straits of Florida, but ran out of fuel 30 miles from Havana. [\[Official Statement\]](#) (April, Domestic Affairs)

Referring to the executions of three men who tried to hijack a ferry to get to the United States, dissident Elizardo Sanchez, who leads the Cuban Committee for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, said he was "absolutely troubled, because by no means was a death penalty justified." "It is a regrettable return" to capital punishment, Sánchez told the press. (April, Domestic Affairs)

The Permanent Committee of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Cuba released a statement condemning the execution of three hijackers of a ferry boat in Havana. "No one has the right to put in danger other peoples' lives, like the hijackers did, but no one should decide that death be inflicted on people for their criminal actions", added the statement. (April, Domestic Affairs)

More than 30 priests of the Bohemian Bretheran Protestant Church protested against the new wave of repression launched against Cuban dissidents by the communist regime there. "We are appalled by news that new persecution of human rights advocates and opponents of the current regime has recently been launched in your country," the priests wrote to the Cuban charge d'affaires in Prague. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Czech President Vaclav Klaus expressed his disturbance over the politically motivated trials in Cuba. He said that he believes that the Czech Republic should use all opportunities to express its disagreement with the violation of human rights in Cuba, Presidential Office press section director Petr Hajek said. Former president Vaclav Havel also protested against the new round of harsh repressions, as did Foreign Minister Cyril Svoboda. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Canadian organization Rights & Democracy is deeply concerned about the lack of transparency surrounding the recent arrests and trials of 78 Cuban dissidents. Rights & Democracy shares Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham's belief that the harshness of the sentences could have a serious effect on the future of human rights, freedom of expression and democracy in Cuba. "It is regrettable that such dramatic measures be taken at a time of increasing openness and good will between Cuba and the international community of states. It is of vital importance to the Cuban people that this positive engagement not be squandered," Rights & Democracy's President Jean-Louis Roy said. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Blanca Reyes, wife of dissident journalist Raúl Rivero, who has been sentenced to 20 years in prison after a summary trial, sought the mediation of Pope John Paul II and of Jose María Aznar, president of Spain, to intercede with the Cuban government to obtain the release of a group of dissidents sentenced to prison terms. (April, Foreign Affairs)

The European Union has condemned a crackdown by Cuba on dissidents that has strained relations with the bloc and could jeopardise EU aid. EU foreign ministers sounded their warning at the end of a meeting in Luxembourg. It followed the jailing of 75 dissidents and the execution of three men who hijacked a ferry in a bid to reach the United States. The EU Council of Foreign Ministers said it "condemned the recent actions of the Cuban authorities, notably the executions, the large-scale arrests of dissidents, the unfair trials and the arbitrary and excessive sentences imposed." "These latest developments which mark a further deterioration in the human rights situation in Cuba will affect the EU's relationship with Cuba and the prospects for increased cooperation. The Council will keep the situation under close review," it added. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Spain and Bolivia expressed concern over the executions in Cuba and the crackdown on dissidents there, saying they would study the events with other Latin American countries ahead of the next Ibero American summit. "Cuba is always in the background of any talks within the international community and the latest Cuban events worry all of us," Spanish Foreign Minister Ana Palacio told a joint press conference with her Bolivian counterpart, Carlos Saavedra. Saavedra said the executions and the recent crackdown on dissidents on the Caribbean island, would be analyzed by Latin American countries ahead of the Ibero American summit to be held in Bolivia in November. However, he added that no decision had been taken yet regarding Cuba and the summit. "We are all surprised, to say the least, with what has happened in Cuba," said Saavedra. (April, Foreign Affairs)

The execution of three men who orchestrated the hijacking of a passenger ferry in a frustrated attempt to defect to the United States has been widely criticized in Cuba. "The climate here is tense," said a resident of one of the poorest areas of Old Havana, where family members of two of the three executed hijackers live. In that neighborhood as well as the Havana district known as 10 de Octubre, which is home to the mother of the third man, there have been small demonstrations of support for the families of the three executed men, according to reports that were not confirmed by local authorities. The situation also became tense during a mass given in the Havana cemetery chapel, said witnesses. (April, Domestic Affairs)

More than 20 dissidents in the former Communist Czechoslovakia, signatories of the pro-democracy Charter 77 declaration, have signed a petition calling on Cuba to immediately halt repressions and unconditionally release all unjustly prosecuted Cuban opposition leaders. The signatories include former Czech president Vaclav Havel, current Senate chairman Petr Pithart, deputy Senate chairman Jan Ruml, deputy foreign minister Alexandr Vondra, deputy ombudsman Anna Sabatova and MP Svatopluk Karasek. The petition condemns Cuba's state power for repressive actions aimed at "detering the population, suppressing basic human rights and preventing a free dialogue on public affairs". (April, Foreign Affairs)

All the political forces in Italy and the Vatican have condemned the crackdown of dissidents by Fidel Castro's government. The small Communist Party was the only one that failed to join the criticisms against the Cuban wave of repression. According to media reports, Cuba took advantage of the fact that all eyes were set on the conflict in Iraq. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Chile's Foreign Minister, Soledad Alvear, described as "regrettable" the events that have recently taken place in Cuba: "Chile is a nation that is very sensitive to the issue of human rights after having itself endured 17 years of serious violations that I would not like to see repeated anywhere else in the world," said Alvear to a group of journalists. (April, Foreign Affairs)

US Governor Tom Vilsack says he won't travel to Cuba after a recent crackdown on Cuban dissidents. Vilsack and other state officials had discussed finding ways to market Iowa products in Cuba. The governor says he changed his mind about traveling to Cuba after several dissidents who expressed opposition to Fidel Castro's regime were jailed and three men, not dissidents, were executed. (April, US-Cuba Relations)

Upon the request of Minister Frattini, the General Secretary of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Giuseppe Baldocci, contacted the Ambassador of Cuba to Italy, María de los Angeles Flores, to express the "concern and disapproval of the Italian government over the wave of arrests and sentencing of Cuban dissidents". A memo reports that the General Secretary of Foreign Affairs "especially emphasized how the accusations against them, the great number of people involved, and the short period of time within which the trials occurred are a cause for serious concern for human rights in Cuba. We hope that these considerations, coming from a country such as Italy who has always had open and friendly relations with Cuba, will be carefully considered by the Cuban authorities." (April, Foreign Affairs)

An undercover Cuban agent credited with giving some of the most damaging courtroom evidence against dissidents said the island's opposition movement has been shattered. "The opposition is finished, it has ended, it will never lift its head again," Aleida de las Mercedes Godinez said. "The opposition will never flourish again -- never!" The interview with Ms. Godinez was the first in a series of government-organized interviews the agents are giving to the international media. (April, Domestic Affairs)

Several European Union countries are preparing to cut back their diplomatic programmes in Cuba in protest at the political crackdown by Fidel Castro's regime. "We were dismayed watching the dissident trials. The executions put the lid on it," a European diplomatic source in Havana said. "There has been a real feeling of indignation and disappointment, a sense that we simply cannot let this pass." The diplomat also revealed that "a majority of EU capitals have requested a consultation with their Cuban ambassador to express their displeasure over the political round-up." (April, Foreign Affairs)

All dissidents convicted to long jail sentences will be transferred to prisons far away from their place of residence, state police authorities told relatives. The announcement was made after a visit, suggesting that the prisoners had no knowledge of this decision. Although most of the convicted dissidents live in the City of Havana, they will serve their sentences hundreds of kilometres away from their homes. (April, Domestic Affairs)

Nicaragua recalled its diplomatic representative in Cuba for consultations, after the Cuban government accused several Latin nations of acting as "lackeys" of the United States. In a press statement, Nicaragua's Foreign Ministry said it rejected "the improper language" used by Cuba, and said it had recalled its charges-de-affairs in Havana, Mercedes de De Sedas, for consultations in Managua "in order to evaluate the situation." Foreign Minister Norman Caldera also called in Cuba's representative in Managua, Manuel Guillot, to explain her government's position. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim reported that he contacted Cuban government officials and conveyed his assessment that Havana's attitudes are hindering assistance from friendly countries. According to Amorim, Cuba is living under siege as a result of the United States' unilateral embargo and would have become a democracy by now had this embargo been lifted. The minister believes that a more open political system in Cuba would be to that country's advantage. (April, Foreign Affairs)

The Chairman of the Board of Directors of the US-based Cuba Policy Foundation and its Board members, along with its Executive Director, resigned to protest the recent waive of repression and executions in Cuba. The resigning Board members and the Executive Director issued a Statement of Reasons for the mass resignation: "We organized, funded and supported the Foundation because we hoped, and had reason to believe, that its energetic efforts to modify the ban on Cuba trade, travel and investment might succeed over time. We can only conclude, however, that in spite of its claims to the contrary, Cuba does not share our enthusiasm for a more open relationship. For this reason we have tendered our resignations". (April, US-Cuba Relations)

Amnesty International is concerned for the health of 62-year-old Cuban prisoner Oscar Espinosa Chepe. He is currently being held at the State Security headquarters at Villa Marista in Havana and is believed to be suffering from a chronic kidney condition, a thoracic hernia, persistent hyper-tension and weight loss. Oscar Espinosa Chepe may be a prisoner of conscience (POC), and Amnesty International is reviewing the available information to determine his POC status. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Employees of the Cuban embassy in Paris have exchanged blows with a group of protesters. The group was demonstrating against a recent wave of prison sentences passed on political dissidents in Cuba. The staff used sledge-hammers to smash chains attached by the protesters to the embassy railings and scuffles broke out. A reporter of TV Española was injured together with secretary general of Reporters Without Borders, R. Ménard, and six other participants in the protest. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro gave his first full response to the extraordinary events in Cuba over the last five weeks. Castro said he was acting to prevent an attempt by US President George W Bush to provoke a war with Cuba. In a defiant three-and-a-half hour speech, everything was blamed on the United States. America, he said, was trying to destabilise Cuba, to provide an excuse for military intervention. The 75 dissidents that have recently been imprisoned he describes as "mercenaries in the pay of the enemy". Fidel Castro singled out America's top diplomat in Cuba as he blamed a supposed conspiracy between the US government and exiles in Miami for his recent dissident crackdown and the firing-squad executions of three hijackers. Castro accused US Interests Section Chief James Cason of fomenting subversive activities by opponents of his government. "The arrest of various dozens of mercenaries who betrayed their homeland for privileges

and money from the United States, and the death penalty for common criminals (...) were the result of conspiracy stirred up by the government of (the United States) and the terrorist mafia," he said. Castro typically uses such terms for Cuban exiles who actively oppose his rule. (April, US-Cuba Relations)

Cuba has refused to extend diplomatic visas to a group of Mexican legislators from President Vicente Fox's party who wanted to travel to the island to show their support for Cuban opposition movements. Two senators and two congressmen from the conservative National Action Party said the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City denied their requests for official visas, forcing them to cancel a three-day visit. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro defended the firing squad executions of three ferry hijackers as a deterrent to a mass exodus that he said the United States was seeking to provoke in Cuba. "The wave of hijackings had to be stopped radically," Castro said on Cuban television. The executions ended a three-year moratorium on capital punishment in Cuba and shocked human rights organizations. (April, Economy)

The Italian lower house approved a motion calling on the government to halt Italy's economic aid to Cuba if dissidents are not freed and executions are not stopped. The motion - sponsored by the centre-right ruling coalition but partially backed by the left as well - also urged the government to seek a EU-wide common position of pressure on Cuba. The move could be helped by Italy's forthcoming term of EU presidency, scheduled to start in July. (April, Foreign Affairs)

In Madrid, an overwhelming majority of Spanish members of parliament, including representatives from the ruling Partido Popular (PP) and the opposition Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), condemned "the wave of repression" in Cuba. The text urges the government to "promote bilateral actions, within the UN and multilateral organizations for promoting the respect of human rights and civil liberties in Cuba."

Hundreds of thousands of Cubans poured into the country's main plaza for a May Day celebration that aimed to defend the island's socialist system against criticism from abroad. Castro insisted the stepped up repression came that has overtaken the island came because Cuba was under threat from Washington. We would not want those who have, in our opinion, attacked Cuba unjustly (...) to have to suffer the infinite sorrow they will feel if one day our cities are destroyed and our children and mothers, women and men, young and old, are torn apart by the bombs of neo-fascism," said Castro. (May, Domestic Affairs)

A declaration condemning human rights violations in Cuba has been submitted before the 16th EU-Latin America Inter-parliamentary Conference by several European and Latin American political groups. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Members of Nicaraguan solidarity groups have frustrated a demonstration in front of the building of the Cuban embassy in Managua. According to reports from the Nicaraguan capital, the diplomatic mission was protected by local police while solidarity activists arrived to express their support for the Cuban government. The Cuban embassy's commercial attaché in Managua, Manuel Guillot, told reporters that two individuals attempted to chain themselves to the front of the embassy. For more than four hours, members of Cuba solidarity organizations confronted the individuals. (May, Foreign Affairs)

After expressing concern for human rights and "public freedoms" in Cuba, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), César Gaviria, announced that he is awaiting a pronouncement by the hemispheric body with regard to Fidel Castro's government. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Ambassador Alfonso Fraga visited the Chilean Foreign Ministry headquarters shortly after the Minister of Foreign Affairs acknowledged that the diplomat would be called in to be handed a formal protest. Ambassador Fraga just told the media that "it was a private meeting." (May, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba has placed in solitary confinement most of the 75 people imprisoned in a recent crackdown on dissent that drew international condemnation, a human rights organisation says. "The immense majority, 60 in all, are in solitary confinement in the punishment wards of the country's maximum security prisons," said

Elizardo Sanchez, president of the illegal, but tolerated, Cuban Human Rights Commission. Sanchez said the dissidents were being held in "inhuman conditions" in small cells where they received water and food "that does not meet minimum sanitary requirements". Sanchez, whose group has monitored Cuban prison conditions for years, said writer and poet Raúl Rivero and leading dissidents Hector Palacios and Oscar Elias Biscet were among those in solitary confinement. (May, Domestic Affairs)

Chilean author Isabel Allende accused the governments of Cuba and the U.S. of violating human rights. "Just as I cannot accept U.S. human rights violations in Iraq, I cannot approve of what is happening in Cuba," said the writer. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Dressed in black and white to express both mourning and peace, about 30 women gathered at a Roman Catholic church in Havana to pray for the release of their imprisoned dissident relatives. The women attended the Mother's Day Mass at the Church of St. Rita, the patron saint of lost causes, four weeks after their loved ones were sentenced to prison terms ranging from six to 28 years. The wives and mothers of those arrested in the recent wave said Cuban authorities prohibited them from marching in silence for two blocks near the church, as they've done on past Sundays. "They thought it would be a provocative act," Delgado said. "They were prepared to arrest us." Miriam Leiva, wife of independent journalist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, said state security agents had visited her and other relatives to warn them against marching. (May, Domestic Affairs)

Spanish President José María Aznar once again condemned Fidel Castro's regime that, he said, continues "to crush, imprison, and execute by firing squad" those who do not share his ideas. Aznar's statements were made during a Spanish municipal electoral campaign meeting. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Amnesty International (AI) accused Cuban officials of continuing to apply "drastic measures to stifle dissent," noting that more than 50 people were on death row at the end of 2002. In its annual report, AI said, likewise, that the embargo imposed by the United States on the island for more than 40 years contributed to a climate in which the exercise of basic human rights could be restricted. The organization noted that its last visit to Cuba was in 1988, because Havana had not responded to its requests for authorization to enter the country since that time. The report covers 2002, prior to the communist regime's crackdown last April, when 75 peaceful dissidents were rounded up and given jail terms averaging 20 years. Amnesty said that "more prisoners of conscience" were in Cuban jails at the end of 2002 "than at any other time last year." (May, Foreign Affairs)

The foreign ministers of the 15-nation Caribbean Community (CARICOM) want Cuba to grant clemency to the 75 dissidents who were recently convicted of attempting to undermine the socialist government and to improve its human rights performance, CARICOM said in a statement. While saying that governments have the right to respond to threats against the state or to the criminal act of hijacking, the ministers "expressed their concern at the conduct of the recent trials" and said they were "deeply disturbed at the severity of the sentences imposed" on the dissidents and upon three hijackers. "Ministers therefore strongly appealed to the Government of Cuba to show clemency towards those recently imprisoned," the ministers said at their meeting on the Caribbean island of St. Vincent. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba's communist government is using its media to publish and promote a book titled "The Dissidents" containing what it calls evidence that scores of jailed democracy advocates and independent journalists are "mercenaries" at the service of Washington. The book, which will be published in the coming days, presents testimonials and documents that "prove the mercenary nature of the relations of the so-called 'Cuban dissident movement'" with Washington, according to Granma, the communist government's official newspaper. (May, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban exile groups have issued a call for demonstrations in Latin American, European and U.S. cities to protest against the extreme crackdown launched by Fidel Castro's government. Most of the protests will take place in São Paulo, San José (Costa Rica), Berlin, Madrid, Stockholm, Washington, New York and Miami. (May, Exile Community)

Fidel Castro says his government's recent and speedy firing-squad execution of three ferry hijackers was "a matter of life or death" - not for the summarily convicted men but for the Cuban regime which he says was the target of a US plan aimed at sparking war. In an interview published in the Mexican daily Milenio, Castro attributed the plan to "Miami's terrorist Mafia working in conjunction with the US extreme right." "The pre-conceived plan was meant to spark a wave of hijackings, an immigration crisis to be used as a pretext for a naval blockade, which would inevitably lead to war," Castro said. (US-Cuba Relations)

In New York, pro and anti-Fidel Castro activists demonstrated across from the Cuban Mission to the United Nations. At the same time, a coalition of Cuban-American artists and writers condemned Cuba's latest crackdown on dissidents. The artists' coalition issued a statement asking governments to demand freedom for the imprisoned dissidents and to take steps to end the Castro government. Cuban-American actress Carmen Pelaez read the statement. (May, Exile Community)

The Cuba Libre Solidarity Committee organized in Paris a protest demonstration against political repression in Cuba, and requested that each member of the French Parliament sponsor a Cuban political prisoner. (May, Exile Community)

Dutch intellectuals called for the release of the dozens of Cuban writers and journalists imprisoned by Fidel Castro. The protest, organized by the Association of Dutch Journalists, involved placing 77 typewriters, each bearing the name and sentence of the Cuban writers or journalists, many of whom are human rights activists, in front of the Cuban Embassy in The Hague. On the typewriters one could read names such as that of poet and journalist Raul Rivero, beneath which appeared: 20 years in prison. (May, Foreign Affairs)

According to relatives, independent journalist and economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, currently serving a 20-year prison sentence, was urgently admitted to the Guantánamo provincial hospital, following deterioration of his health. "The triggering factor seems to have been his recent transfer to solitary confinement," said his sister Clara Espinosa Chepe. (May, Domestic Affairs)

Fidel Castro justified the recent executions of three hijackers who seized a ferry in an attempt to flee the island, saying they were players in an effort to spark war between the United States and Cuba. "It is the enemy's plan to bring about war between the United States and Cuba," the Cuban leader told reporters in Buenos Aires. He attended the inauguration of Argentine President Nestor Kirchner. "When it comes to defending the lives of 11 million Cubans, you cannot hesitate," he said. (May, US-Cuba Relations)

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

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

The European Union has decided to impose several diplomatic sanctions against Cuba, because of its violation of fundamental freedoms and breaking the moratorium on the death penalty. The measures are a last-minute initiative from Greece in the twilight period of its six-month period as the EU's Presidency holder. The Greek Presidency made a short but sharp statement, saying that the EU will re-examine its relations with Cuba and several sanctions, like limiting high-level visits to Cuba. "The EU, deeply concerned about the continuing flagrant violation of human rights and of fundamental freedoms of

members of the Cuban opposition and of independent journalists, being deprived of their freedom for having expressed freely their opinion, calls once again the Cuban authorities to release immediately all political prisoners", said the statement. [[European Union Official Statement](#)] (June, Foreign Affairs)

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

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

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

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

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

Many families of Cuban dissidents are speaking openly to the media in an attempt to draw attention to the plight of the political prisoners. The families aren't hopeful. The Cuban government hasn't bent to international pressure to release 75 dissidents, but instead has made life more difficult for them and their families. Most of the prisoners who lived in Havana are being sent hundreds of miles away -- as far in some cases as Guantánamo and Santiago de Cuba. The prisoners from Santiago are sent, in some cases, to Havana or Pinar del Río. The trip for families can easily take 12-15 hours by bus and longer by train, if they can even book a reservation. (June, Domestic Affairs)

European Union foreign ministers said recent anti-European demonstrations in Havana were "unacceptable" and reiterated their demand that Cuba end its brutal crackdown on democratic protesters. The 15 ministers said they had continuing "grave concerns about the serious deterioration of the human

rights situation" in Cuba, adding recent protests against the EU, led by Fidel Castro, did not help. "The behavior of the Cuban authorities toward the EU, its member states and acceding states (were) unacceptable," the ministers said in a statement. They added that they would "continue to monitor" the situation in Cuba, and especially how Cuban opposition leaders and supporters were being treated. Beyond saying that they had started a "review of relations" with Cuba, the foreign ministers did not discuss whether the EU should impose economic or further political sanctions against Castro. (June, Foreign Affairs)

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

The lower house of the Polish Parliament called upon the government of Fidel Castro to respect the human rights of its citizens. The resolution was passed 330 votes to 9, and 65 abstentions. (June, Foreign Affairs)

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

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

Human rights organizations and relatives of dissidents imprisoned in Cuba denounced the inhumane conditions in which they are being held, 90 days after the massive arrests. (June, Domestic Affairs)

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

Cuba's high court has upheld the 20-year sentence of independent journalist Raúl Rivero, who was among 75 Cubans sentenced to prison in a crackdown on the opposition this year, Rivero's wife said. Blanca Reyes said her husband's defense attorney told her that her husband's appeal had been rejected by the Supreme Tribunal, the island's court of last resort. Among other prominent opponents of the government whose convictions were upheld were economists Oscar Espinosa Chepe, Martha Beatriz Roque, Hector Palacios, journalist Osvaldo Alfonso Valdes, and journalist Ricardo Gonzalez, who was tried with Rivero. Fifty of the sentences have now been upheld, said Carlos Menendez of the non-governmental Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation. (June, Domestic Affairs)

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

Cuba stepped up its campaign against dissidents, launching a book about the activities of 12 agents who infiltrated their ranks and issuing a warning that many more were still working undercover. Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque said the book, "The Dissidents," based on interviews with the agents, "proved

that so-called dissident groups were a creation of the United States." Pérez Roque called the agents, whose testimony helped send 75 democracy activists, independent journalists and others to prison in April, "heroes and heroines," saying, "the enemy (the United States) should know that there are many more still at work." The book by Cuban journalists Luis Báez and Rosa Miriam Elizande was quickly put together after the dissidents' trials. (June, Domestic Affairs)

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

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

The Nicaraguan Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated its strongest condemnation of the upholding by the Supreme Court of Cuba of most of the prison sentences arbitrarily meted out to 75 Cuban dissidents last April. (July, Foreign Affairs)

The EU Council diplomatic representatives approved a document harshly condemning human rights violations in Cuba. The document that will be submitted to the Ministers, says that respect for human rights has deteriorated in Cuba since December and economic reforms remain conspicuous by their absence. But it says also that the EU intends to continue dialogue with Havana - because it is the most constructive way to achieve political, economic and civil rights reforms - and that it is willing to provide aid, where possible via non-governmental organisations, to promote democratisation and improve living standards for ordinary Cubans. (July, Foreign Affairs)

The foreign ministers of the European Union approved a document that denounces human rights violations in Cuba but at the same time calls for continued "constructive engagement" with the communist-ruled island. The document outlines detailed cases from this year that highlight the "serious" deterioration of basic human rights under the Fidel Castro regime. (July, Foreign Affairs)

The Italian Presidency protested on behalf of the EU against the treatment of sick dissidents imprisoned in Cuba. A press release issued by the Italian foreign ministry notes that Italy and the European Union are extremely concerned at the state of health of several dissidents currently imprisoned on the island, particularly the economists Oscar Espinosa Chepe and Martha Beatriz Roque. Cuba's ambassador to Rome, Hugo Ramos Milanés, was summoned to the Italian foreign affairs ministry. (August, Foreign Affairs)

The government of France expressed concern over the health of jailed Cuban dissident Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello. The French foreign ministry spokesperson, Hervé Ladsous, said that France's embassy in Havana has been instructed to pass France's concerns to Cuban authorities. (August, Foreign Affairs)

A spokesman for the German Foreign Affairs Ministry informed the press that Germany will not participate in Havana's 2004 International Book Fair. German authorities took the decision after "recent incarceration of 75 oppositionists and the reintroduction of the death penalty in Cuba. Havana's book fair is dedicated to a foreign country each year. This time Germany was going to be invited as the main country by Cuban authorities. (August, Foreign Affairs) Europa Press, 21/8/03)

Five months after the communist government's crackdown on the opposition, relatives of some imprisoned Cuban dissidents say their loved ones have become sick behind bars and are receiving poor treatment. The Cuban government has not responded to the family's specific complaints about poor hygiene and substandard medical treatment for their jailed loved ones, but authorities insist their human rights and

health are being respected. Writer and poet Raul Rivero, 57, has lost 50 pounds and "looks like a little old man," his wife, Blanca Reyes, told the press. Gisela Delgado, wife of jailed political activist Héctor Palacios, said her 62-year-old husband has an ear infection. "His daily life is hell," Delgado said of Palacios, who is serving 25 years in the western province of Pinar del Río. (August, Domestic Affairs)

The Government of Greece refused Fidel Castro's request to visit Athens during the 2004 Olympic Games, informed the daily "To Wima." "Fidel wants to come, Athens says no", reads the headline quoting a spokesperson from the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to the spokesperson, Athens cannot ignore the political decisions of the European Union, which reduced substantially the level of diplomatic relations with Havana in the wake of the arrest and sentencing of more than 70 Cuban dissidents last April. (August, Foreign Relations)DPA, 26/8/03)

Dissidents and international rights groups said that they stood by Cuba's best known rights activist despite accusations that he was a spy for President Fidel Castro's communist government. Foreign diplomats in Havana said they would still trust the information reported by Elizardo Sánchez Santacruz, head of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights. "Whether he is a state security agent or not, the figures are accurate and very useful, and we will continue using them," a European diplomat said. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Prison guards transferred four political prisoners who were staging a hunger strike in Boniato prison, Santiago de Cuba, to a place or places unknown. The four, independent journalists Manuel Vázquez Portal and Normando Hernández, and government opponents Nelson Aguiar and Próspero Gaínza, had started a hunger strike to protest prison conditions. Department of State Security officials in Havana told Vázquez Portal's sister, Xiomara, that they had been transferred to Aguadores prison, also in Santiago de Cuba. (September, Domestic Affairs)

A delegation of German lawmakers met in Havana with relatives of jailed Cuban dissidents and members of opposition groups, spokespersons for the internal opposition reported. A statement signed by the president of a leading dissident group, Rene Gomez Manzano, who attended the meeting, said that discussion "centered on the current political and economic situation in Cuba and bilateral relations with Germany." The communique also said that the talks "placed special emphasis on the very difficult situation faced by political prisoners in Cuban jails." The German delegation met with Miriam Leyva and Gisela Delgado, the wives of Oscar Espinosa and Héctor Palacios, respectively, two of the 75 dissidents sentenced in March and April to jail terms averaging 20 years. Also participating were the leader of the Christian Liberation Movement, Oswaldo Payá; a spokesman for Todos Unidos, Vladimiro Roca; Elizardo Sanchez, the president of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation; Felix Bonne of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society and Roberto Larramendi and Jose Avalos of the College of Independent Scholars. (September, Foreign Affairs)

The European Parliament condemned the "persistent and flagrant" violation of human rights in Cuba and called for the release of jailed opposition activists. EU legislators approved a 14-point resolution after a debate on relations between the European Union and Cuba, which have been severely strained following the latest wave of repression and arrests by Fidel Castro's regime. The parliament expressed regret for "the lack of economic and social reforms in Cuba." The resolution also called for "the immediate release" of all jailed Cuban opponents and independent journalists, and reminded authorities in the island nation that "no law can restrict the right to freedom of expression." The document established that, since the EU last evaluated its position toward Cuba in 2002, "not only have no positive steps been taken by the Cuban government, but the human rights situation has drastically deteriorated." The European Parliament expressed regret at Cuba's decision to turn down the EU's offer for humanitarian aid, and reiterated that "the European Union's commitment and willingness to lend assistance to the Cuban people remain unchanged." Parliament asked for last year's Sakharov Prize winner Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas and Cuban opposition leader to be invited as soon as possible for an official visit to the EU. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Philippe Richert, Senator from the South Rhine region in eastern France, asked the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Dominique de Villepin, "to do whatever is possible" to obtain from Cuban authorities the liberation of an independent journalist who is in jail on hunger strike. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro lumped Western Europe with his archenemy the United States vowing that "both of them together will not be able to defeat the Cuban revolution." In a speech launching the new school year, the aging autocrat declared: "The name of Cuba will go down in history because of what it has done and is doing for humanity in the fields of education, culture and health." He said these contributions continue even though the island is suffering from an embargo imposed "by the world's only superpower and is essentially being blockaded by Europe." "Both powers together can't defeat the Cuban revolution," Castro insisted. "Among other reasons, because together they don't have and never will have the human capital and moral values required to accomplish what socialist Cuba has," the world's longest-ruling leader insisted. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Three former political prisoners who became presidents are demanding a unified Western approach to Cuba. The heroes of Eastern Europe's anti-communist movement denounced Fidel Castro's "Stalinist" regime in Cuba and demanded action from the West to encourage its peaceful overthrow. Lech Walesa, the former Polish president, Vaclav Havel, the former Czechoslovak president, and Arpad Goncz, the former Hungarian president, made their call in a letter to The Daily Telegraph and other leading newspapers abroad. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Former Czech President Vaclav Havel is leading an international campaign to press for democracy in Cuba and mobilize opposition to Fidel Castro's regime. The International Committee for Democracy in Cuba, based in the Czech capital, Prague, will lend support to political prisoners in Cuba and to the opposition movement, Tomas Pojar, the president of the committee, told the press yesterday. Its members include former US secretary of state Madeleine Albright, former Polish dissident Adam Michnik, former Bulgarian Prime Minister Filip Dimitrov and Elena Bonner, the widow of Russian dissident Andrei Sakharov, Pojar said. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Authorities at the prison where independent journalist Julio César Gálvez is confined have ordered to rid his cell of rats and insects. Gálvez is part of the group of 75 peaceful dissidents and independent journalists sentenced to long prison terms last April. (October, Domestic Affairs)

The British Parliament approved a resolution in support of political prisoners in Cuba. "...the Cuban Government continues to hold several hundred political prisoners, whose offences include pro-democracy activism and speaking out against Government policies on issues such as abortion and treatment of the blind". The resolution further notes that among the most prominent cases are human rights activists Dr Oscar Biscet, Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva and Jorge Garcia Perez, all three of whom were arrested after peaceful protests. The note calls upon the Cuban Government to allow peaceful protest on human rights and pro-democracy issues, to release all those held for such activities, and to cease from applying pressure on them or their families; and "urges Her Majesty's Government to place these issues at the core of bilateral talks" (October, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban poet and journalist Raul Rivero, sentenced to 20 years in prison, is in poor health, suffering from vitamin deficiency and rapid weight loss, according to his wife, Blanca Reyes. Reyes said she was concerned about the health of her husband, who is serving time in a Ciego de Avila prison, some 480 kilometers (300 miles) southeast of the capital. Rivero, 57, is one of 75 Cuban dissidents sentenced in early April to up to 28 years in prison for threatening the independence and sovereignty of the state, collaborating with the United States and undermining the principles of the revolution. (October, Domestic Affairs)

Seven dissidents imprisoned at the Holguín Provincial Penitentiary - in the eastern part of the island - finished a sixteen-day hunger strike in protest against the treatment received from prison authorities. (November, Domestic Affairs)

Relatives of inmates at the Aguadores prison, in Santiago de Cuba, informed that 21 political and common prisoners began a hunger strike, including poet and journalist Manuel Vázquez Portal. (November, Domestic Affairs)

Oppositionist Oscar Elías Biscet has been transferred to a punishment cell in Kilo 8 Prison, Pinar del Río, after refusing to share a cell with a prisoner sanctioned for killing an old man. In a note sent to his wife, Elsa Morejón, Biscet says that he is well, "even though I don't see the sky, always in the dark with a murderous companion that has caused twelve lesions." (November, Domestic Affairs)

Oppositionist and prisoner of conscience Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello remains in the inmates' ward at the military hospital Carlos J. Finlay, in Havana, due to her frail health. (November, Domestic Affairs)

Political prisoners Miguel Galván Gutiérrez, Pablo Pacheco Avila, Alexis Rodríguez Fernández and Manuel Ubals Gonzáles all confined at the Prison Agüica, in Matanzas, wrote in jail a document titled "A Call From the Presidio", smuggled out of the prison thanks to the help of families of the common prisoners, informed dissident sources. "Today, while the civilized world unites against international terrorism and more nations enjoy full democracies, we watch with sadness and indignation how in our homeland, government authorities persecute, imprison and revile some of its citizens, for simply dissenting", indicated the document. (November, Domestic Affairs)

At least seven of the 75 dissidents sent to jail last March are on a hunger strike in a prison in the province of Pinar del Rio, in protest of the "inhumane" conditions of their incarceration, according to relatives and human rights activists in Havana. (December, Domestic Affairs)

At least 60 members of the French National Assembly, from different political tendencies, have sponsored an equal number of jailed Cuban dissidents following an initiative launched by the Paris based Colectivo Solidaridad Cuba Libre. The information was made known by President and Founder of the Asociación por la Tercera República Cubana (ATREC), the Cuban-born William Navarrete. (December, Foreign Affairs)

In a note released in Havana, Alida Viso, the wife of jailed dissident Ricardo González Alfonso, asked governments, important figures and non-governmental organizations to intercede for the well-being of her husband with Cuban authorities. González is on a hunger strike. (December, Domestic Affairs)

## **Division in the "left"**

The French Communist Party (PCF) issued a statement condemning the crackdown on dissidents in Cuba: "The Party strongly condemns repression against Cuban dissidents." "Political processes by which Cuban citizens become victims are unacceptable." The PCF demanded their immediate liberation. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Uruguayan leftist organizations organized a solidarity event with Cuba demanding the reestablishment of diplomatic relations with the island. (April, Foreign Affairs)

A delegation of Mexican parties arrives in Cuba to express solidarity with the Cuban people. The political forces integrating this representation are the same that from the Chamber of Deputies are calling on the Vicente Fox administration to abstain voting against the Caribbean nation at the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC). (April, Foreign Affairs)

Portuguese writer José Saramago, winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1998, and a friend of Cuba, repudiated the island's government for executing three men last week: "This is as far as I go. From now on, Cuba can follow its own path, and I will stay put. The right to dissent can always be found, written in invisible ink, in all the human rights declarations of the past, present and future. To dissent is an irrevocable right of conscience. It may lead to treason, but that must be demonstrated with irrefutable proof". "Cuba

has won no heroic victory by executing these three men, but it has lost my confidence, damaged my hopes, robbed me of illusions. This is as far as I go”, he added. [[José Saramago’s Statement](#)] (April, Foreign Affairs)

In Italy, the small Communist Party was the only political force that failed to join the criticisms against the Cuban wave of repression. According to media reports, Cuba took advantage of the fact that all eyes were set on the conflict in Iraq. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes called Cuba a "suffocating dictatorship." Fuentes, a Mexican novelist and longtime Cuba supporter, felt disillusioned at Cuba's recent crackdown on dissent. He lumped Bush and Castro together and declared himself against both. Castro, he said, needs "his American enemy to justify his own failings." "As a Mexican, I wish for my country neither the dictates of Washington on foreign policy, nor the Cuban example of a suffocating dictatorship," he wrote in a letter published in Mexico City's Reforma newspaper. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, still a supporter of the Cuban revolution, criticized the firing squad executions of three Cubans who attempted to hijack a boat to flee to the US, and the long prison sentences imposed recently on dozens of dissidents. In the Uruguayan weekly Brecha, Galeano says these sentences are “bad news, sad news that deeply hurt those who believe that (...) freedom and justice should exist together or they don’t exist at all.”[[Eduardo Galeano’s Statement](#)] (April, Foreign Affairs)

Brazil, which abstained from vote on the motion on Cuba at the UN commission on Human Rights, has expressed "strong concern" about the summary trials of the dissidents and the application of the death penalty, and will make its position "clearly known" to the Castro government. Within Brazil's leftist Workers Party (PT), of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the issue generated some divisions. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Fausto Bertinotti, secretary of the “Rofondazione Comunista” party publicly expressed the Italian communists' condemnation of the wave of repression in Cuba as well as expressed their disagreement with the recent executions and the long prison sentences handed down to dissidents in Havana. (April, Foreign Affairs)

A group of world-renowned Cuban intellectuals released a letter to their colleagues around the world, asking them to stop criticizing harsh measures recently employed in the island. Titled Message from Havana to our friends in faraway places, the letter was published in the Communist Party daily Granma. Signed by 27 of Cuba's best-known cultural figures, the letter describes the "surprise and pain" felt when liberal intellectuals around the world criticized Cuba for its crackdown on dissidents and the executions of three ferry hijackers. The Cuban letter blamed "the distance, the disinformation and the traumas of failed socialist experiences" on the recent criticism from people it has counted on for support. [[Cuban Intellectuals’ Statement](#)] (April, Domestic Affairs)

In a report issued in London, members of the democratic left condemned “the Cuban state's repression of independent thinkers and writers”. The group states that the Cuban dissidents were sentenced for "crimes" such as writing essays critical of the government and meeting with delegations of foreign political leaders”. “These are violations of the most elementary norms of due process of law”, the report says. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Brazilian Architect Oscar Niemeyer sent a message of support to Fidel Castro. Niemeyer sent a telegram expressing “solidarity with the fight” of the Cuban President the same day that the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva adopted a resolution urging Cuba to allow a UN Rapporteur to visit the island. (April, Foreign Affairs)

The Chamber of Deputies of Brazil introduced a declaration condemning the “repressive policies” applied by the Cuban government against dozens of dissidents, during a heated session in which the left-wing members left the room. The declaration was passed by a majority vote of 52 out of the 54 members present. (April, Foreign Affairs)

The 1982 Nobel Prize winning author, Gabriel García Márquez, refuses to join the likes of Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes and Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano in condemning the Cuban leader. The Colombian writer defended himself in the daily newspaper El Tiempo after US writer Susan Sontag told reporters that it was "unpardonable" for him not to have spoken out over the recent Cuban crackdown. "I don't answer unnecessary and provocative questions," said the author of modern classics such as "100 years of Solitude" and "Nobody writes to the Colonel." "I myself could not calculate the number of prisoners, dissidents and conspirators that I have helped, in absolute silence, to emigrate from Cuba over no less than 20 years," said Garcia Marquez. "As to the death penalty, I don't have anything to add to what I have said in private and publicly for as long as I can remember: I'm against it in any place, for any reason, in any circumstances." (April, Foreign Affairs)

A group of intellectuals including Noam Chomsky, Edward Said and Howard Zinn, criticized the policies of Washington and Havana and signed a document criticizing the recent events in Cuba. "We, the undersigned, firmly object the current wave of repression in Cuba. We condemn the arrests of dozens of members of the opposition to the Cuban government for carrying out political, non-violent activities, as well as the outrageously long sentences (of up to 28 years in prison) imposed on them in the wake of unfair trials." (April, Foreign Affairs)

More than 160 foreign artists and intellectuals, including Nobel Prize winner Gabriel Garcia Marquez, have come out in defense of Cuba even as many of their peers condemn recent repression on the Communist-run island, one of the campaigners said. Latin American Nobel laureates Garcia Marquez, Rigoberta Menchu, Aldolfo Perez Esquivel and South African writer Nadine Gordimer, also a Nobel prize winner, have signed a declaration of support, Mexican sociologist Pablo González Casanova said. US singer Harry Belafonte and US actor Danny Glover are also among the personalities who have signed the two-paragraph declaration "To the Conscience of the World". The two-paragraph message of support appeared to condemn US foreign policy without referring to it by name. "A single power is inflicting grave damage to the norms of understanding, debate and mediation among countries," it said. "At this very moment, a strong campaign of destabilisation against a Latin American nation has been unleashed. The harassment of Cuba could serve as a pretext for an invasion." Whilst supporting national sovereignty, the message does not specifically express support for Castro's policies. [[To the Conscience of the World](#)] (May, Foreign Affairs)

Representatives from more than 120 trade union organizations from 47 countries gathered in Havana for a one-day solidarity meeting. Fidel Castro was on hand for the gathering, which was held at Havana's International Convention Center. (May, Domestic Affairs)

Nicaraguan poet-priest Ernesto Cardenal asked Cuba's critics to also condemn, just as forcefully, human rights violations committed by the U.S. in Iraq and elsewhere. (May, Economy)

During an interview with the Argentine daily newspaper Página 12, Fidel Castro reacted to the wave of criticism against his government, saying he shared the feelings of "abhorrence for the death penalty." However, he claimed that it had to be resorted to, as it was "a matter of life and death." With regard to Nobel Prize Laureate José Saramago's pronouncements against the arrests of dissidents, Castro added that, "He should have voiced his disagreement without uttering a single word that encourages U.S. aggressive positions against Cuba." (May, Domestic Affairs)

Award-winning Paraguayan author Augusto Roa Bastos said he joined in the call for support for Cuba despite worldwide condemnation of recent abuses to "bear witness to my permanent solidarity" with the island nation, the official Cuban press reported. "Cuba is one of the few symbols of resistance and defense of sovereignty," said the winner of the 1989 Cervantes Prize, according to Granma, the official Communist Party newspaper. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban singer-songwriter Silvio Rodríguez expressed his continuing support for Fidel Castro's regime. He added that, although he is against the death penalty, it is important to give the government a vote of confidence to stay guarded "against the enemy that comes upon us." (May, Domestic Affairs)

In Spain, Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti warned on Cuba's sovereign right to defend itself from terrorist aggressions. The author of "Gracias por el fuego" regretted the critics made to the Cuban Government after the execution of three kidnappers who tried to go to the US. (July, Foreign Affairs)

The Socialist International made harsh statements against Cuba, describing as "intolerable, the death sentences, the intimidation of journalists, the murders of civilians at the hands of the military." The secretary of Democrats of the Left (DS), Piero Fassino, voiced the condemnation of the IS and that of his own party, the most important one among the Italian left. (July, Foreign Affairs)

The wife of a Cuban political prisoner called on Paraguayan writer Augusto Roa Bastos "to take a closer look" at the reality on the island, where the novelist is currently staying as a guest of Fidel Castro. "I am merely the wife of a Cuban intellectual sentenced to 18 years in prison for exercising his right to freedom of thought and speech," Yolanda Huerga said in an open letter published in the Asuncion daily *Abc Color*. Huerga identifies herself in the letter as the wife of Manuel Vázquez Portal, "a poet and journalist arrested and sentenced during the wave of repression in March 2003, along with 74 other peaceful opposition members and independent journalists." "I was astonished to learn that Augusto Roa Bastos, who I have respected and admired since I first read his book "Yo, El Supremo", several years ago (...) had joined in signing the manifesto titled here (in Havana) Solidarity with Cuba, but it's not in any way solidarity with the Cuban people but rather with the regime." (August, Foreign Affairs)

Argentine folksinger Mercedes Sosa, an icon of Latin American music and longtime leftist, has broken with Fidel Castro over the firing-squad executions of three youths who tried to hijack a boat to Florida this spring. "My love stops here," said Sosa. "I believe one must assume noble positions in the face of things that are not right." (September, Foreign Affairs)

Film stars and intellectuals including Catherine Deneuve, Sophie Marceau, Pedro Almodóvar and Jorge Semprún attended a soiree in Paris supporting the Cuban people and striking out against repression by leader Fidel Castro. Actress Deneuve opened the event, organized by the association *Reporters sans Frontières* (Reporters Without Borders), at a theatre on the Champs-Élysées. Special homage was paid to poet and journalist Raúl Rivero, sentenced recently to 20 years in prison at a closed-doors trial for "attacking the sovereignty of the (Cuban) state." Actress Sophie Marceau read a poem by Raul Rivero and Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar, brandishing a fan bearing the words "Cuba sí, Castro no" expressed the hope that Castro would restore Cuba's freedom and get rid of dictatorship. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Nobel Prize winner in literature in 1998, Portuguese José Saramago, declared, "I have not broken with Cuba," in a interview with journalist Rosa Miriam Elizalde in Spain, published by *Juventud Rebelde* newspaper. Among a series of questions at the end of the interview, Elizalde asked about the IMF ("the owners of the money") and Cuba. "I have not broken with Cuba," Saramago declared. "I am still a friend of the Cuban people, but I reserve the right to say what I feel and to say it when I think I should do so." (October, Foreign Affairs)

The Socialist International's XXII Congress held in Sao Paulo, Brazil, asked for the liberation of political opponents in Cuba. The Congress made this appeal "within the framework of the national legislation in force and the international treaties on human rights, and dialogue among the sectors of the country to continue with the democratic process on the island without intervention from any foreign country". As well as criticizing Castro, the final declaration of the Sao Paulo socialist meeting said the US trade and travel embargo on Cuba was "a huge mistake for democratic interests." (October, Foreign Affairs) *International Socialist*, Reuters,

The famed Cuban singer-songwriter Pablo Milanés criticized the restrictions on freedom of expression imposed by the regime of Fidel Castro on the island. "There are mistakes we should be able to criticize and we have sound judgement; but when one does it one feels isolated; there is fear and tension and that's absurd because you cannot continue being a revolutionary and have Stalinist ideas of exerting pressure people's minds and freedom," he said. (October, Domestic Affairs)

Nicaraguan poet and priest Ernesto Cardenal rejected once again the application of the death penalty; however, he regretted that only Cuba is condemned for applying it against the three hijackers of a ferry and not other nations like the United States, which also apply such extreme punishment. Cardenal is in Havana attending the launching of his books at Casa de las Américas. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban singers Silvio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés, founders of the musical movement Nueva Trova, recently started a long-distance debate over the harsh suppression of dissent, which has resulted in dozens of arrests and the execution of three ferry hijackers in the spring of 2003. Milanés, author of the song "Yolanda", started the debate surprisingly criticising the lack of freedom of expression in Cuba saying in an interview with the Colombian Radio Caracol that the government of Fidel Castro was making a mistake in not allowing open debate. But in an interview with ANSA, Rodríguez said that the revolution had the right to defend itself. Rodríguez, author of "Unicornio Azul" (Blue Unicorn), concluded by saying that he was disappointed by the fact that Europe had distanced itself from Havana because of the sentencing of the opposition members and had preferred to ally itself to such a fascist and reactionary government as that of the United States. (November, Domestic Affairs)

Greek-French filmmaker Constantin Costa-Gavras expressed his satisfaction for the acknowledgment that Havana's Latin American Film Festival dedicated to his work. Costa Gavras arrived in Havana for the exhibition of his controversial film "Amen". Answering questions from the press about the crackdown on dissidents and the execution of three hijackers in late April, the filmmaker said that he expressed his "concerns about the death penalty" to his Cuban friends. "As a European, I am against the death penalty, and against any violation of human rights and freedom", he said. "That is not something easy to accept." "I tried to search for answers and received some". "Others were not acceptable," he added. (December, Foreign Affairs)

## **General**

A prominent member of an outlawed dissident group has said that the year just ended was a bleak one as far as human rights in Cuba are concerned, and that 2002 closed out its account books of advances and repression with a "negative balance". At least 34 people were being held as prisoners of conscience in Cuba, most of them awaiting trial for offenses as heinous as "attending church" said Marta Beatriz Roque of the Assembly for Promoting a Civil Society. (January, Domestic Affairs)

There were at least 223 political prisoners in Cuba at year's end, a Cuban human rights group said. The report listed seven prisoners fewer than at the middle of 2002, according to the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and Reconciliation. The commission reported 210 political prisoners in 2001. "This report constitutes a clear statistical expression of the Cuban government's legal and political immobility," the commission said. (January, Domestic Affairs)

The Cuban government is intensifying its harassment and isolation of dissidents affiliated with Proyecto Varela, the island's leading internal opposition movement. According to a statement released by Proyecto Varela's head Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas, "a force of some 200 individuals (...) directed and organized by Cuban state security personnel are besieging the house of Jesús Mustafá --a Proyecto Varela activist in the locality of Palma Soriano on the eastern end of the island--, terrorizing its occupants with shouts, painting graffiti on the walls, offending and threatening them." In recent days, "threats and acts of aggression and repudiation (directed at Proyecto Varela activists) have been orchestrated by state security and the Cuban Communist Party in Palma Soriano," reported Mr. Payá. In his communique addressed to "all (foreign) institutions and governments," Mr. Payá called for "urgent action to stop these acts of vandalism and to protect the life and integrity of these peaceful citizens working in Proyecto Varela." (February, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban dissident Leonardo Bruzón Avila who is in prison in the Havana Combinado del Este prison is in poor health conditions, indicated from Havana his mother Alcina Avila Fabrè. According to prison sources, Bruzón Avila refuses to eat or drink water in protest for his illegal detention by state security forces. After being arrested to prevent his civil movement "24 de Febrero" from conducting a remembrance ceremony of

the downing of two planes of Brothers to the Rescue, Bruzón Avila was taken to the Technical Department of Investigations (DTI) and from there, without trial, was taken to prison where he started a hunger strike in protest for his illegal arrest. (February, Domestic Affairs)

A Cuban court has sentenced two supporters of the pro-democracy Varela Project to 18 months in prison for contempt and resisting arrest, organizers of the reform movement said. Jesús Mustafá Felipe, and Roberto Montero, were sentenced by a provincial court in the eastern city of Palma Soriano, said a statement by the Christian Liberation Movement, whose founder is a top Varela Project organizer. The contempt and resisting arrest charges evidently were the result of a confrontation the pair had with police in their hometown in December, said Efrén Fernández of the Christian Liberation Movement, which informed journalists of the sentences. The men had visited a local police station to get information about a third man who had been detained and refused to leave when officers ordered them to, Fernandez said in a telephone interview. (February, Domestic Affairs)

Relatives of blind Cuban dissident Juan Carlos González Leyva, held without due process for almost a year owing to his political activities, have denounced to the press his precarious health and demanded that he be brought to trial. According to his relatives, the dissident was arrested last March 4, 2002 in Ciego de Ávila and charged with contempt, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest for which the prosecution is seeking a six-year prison sentence. (March, Domestic Affairs)

The Cuban government denied travel visas to dissident leaders invited to participate in a seminar organized in Turin by the Italian Leftist Democrats Party (DS) to discuss the current situation of the democratic opposition on the island. Those invited were Elizardo Sánchez Santacruz, Vladimiro Roca, Manuel Cuesta Morúa; and Oswaldo Payá, chief promoter of the Varela Project. (May, Domestic Affairs)

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

Cuban opposition leader Vladimiro Roca has reported that the Havana government has issued "state reasons" denying him a permit to travel to Mexico to witness federal elections. According to Roca, who is also president of the illegal Social-Democrat Party, "once more the Cuban government has imposed sanctions and vengeance against us" by preventing us to travel, which is a "flagrant violation" of our human rights. (July, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban authorities denied a temporary exit visa to dissident Gisela Delgado. Delgado had been invited to travel to Sweden to give a conference on independent libraries in Cuba. (September, Domestic Affairs)

Two months after being released from jail, the General Secretary of The Human Rights Party of Cuba, René Montes de Oca, is back in jail. According to information provided by his sister, Montes de Oca was arrested along with the coordinator of the Human Rights Party of Cuba, Dali Martínez Falcón. (Puente Informativo, 2/10/03)

Officers of the Capri Police Unit in Havana, released René Montes de Oca Martija, General Secretary of the Pro Human Rights Party of Cuba affiliated to the Andrei Sajarov Foundation from prison. Meanwhile, Fernando A. Martínez Falcón, National Coordinator of the above mentioned organization was released one day after his arrest. (October, Domestic Affairs)

Prisoners Iovany Aguilar Camejo, Carlos Oquendo Rodríguez and José Aguilar Hernández, arrested since an incident at the Mexican Embassy in Havana on February 28th 2002, were released from prison. On February 28th 2002, close to 21 people in a bus forced their way through the gates of the Mexican Embassy in Havana, requesting political asylum. More than 150 people were arrested in surrounding areas. Amongst the arrested were the oppositionists Iovany Aguilar Camejo, Carlos Oquendo Rodríguez and José Aguilar

Hernández all of whom were on their way to visit Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz. (October, Domestic Affairs)

The National Police detained two union leaders, collaborators of Lux-Info-Press in Havana, dissident sources reported. Police agents blocked the way to activists Giordis Enrique Mendoza Ruiz and Orlando Carlos García Pérez. Both were handcuffed and driven to the local police station under charges of distributing counter revolutionary pamphlets to workers. According to Giordis E. Mendoza Ruiz, police confiscated 50 pamphlets of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that he had in his possession and fined him for 60 pesos. They also issued him a warning for the crime of " social danger". Orlando C. García indicated that the military police confiscated 40 pamphlets of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and 2 Lux Info Press Magazines that he had in his possession. (October, Domestic Affairs)

For several days Carmen Delia Llano Ochoa, a Cuban mother resident in Canada has protested outside the Cuban Consulate in Montreal against Cuban officials' refusal to grant an exit permit to her son. According to Carmen Delia, the Canadian Embassy in Havana granted her son a resident visa to join her. The visa expires in February. Should Cuban authorities continue refusing, she has threatened to go on a hunger strike. Dozens of supporters sensitive to the case have joined Carmen Delia. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban authorities interrogated Claudia Marquez, wife of an imprisoned Cuban dissident and editorial board member of the opposition magazine De Cuba, Marquez reported after leaving the police station. Two State Security agents arrested her and drove her to a police precinct in Marianao, a working-class neighborhood of Havana, Marquez told the press. She said once she was at the police station, agents "said they weren't going to allow [the publication] of another edition of De Cuba magazine, that my statements had been very aggressive lately and that I was becoming increasingly outspoken." "They also told me that I was reorganizing the society of journalists and independent press and that they weren't going to allow it," she said. Agents repeatedly told Marquez the interrogation was "a warning" for violating the so-called "Gag Law," which imposes sentences of up to 20 years for those who divulge information that could endanger "the independence, sovereignty and integrity of the Cuban state," she said. (October, Domestic Affairs)

Independent journalist Abel Escobar Ramírez was arrested near Morón (350 km east of Havana). Police agents confiscated documents from the home of another journalist in the same region during a search carried out the same day. A correspondent for the independent news agency Cuba Press in the centre of Cuba, Escobar Ramírez was detained by members of the National Revolutionary Police (PNR) on the road between his village, Patria, and the town of Morón. He had been heading towards the home of Jesús Alvarez Castillo, another independent journalist working for Cuba Press. He was taken to the regional headquarters of the Department of State Security (DSE), the political police, in the town of Ciego de Avila (south of Morón). (October, Domestic Affairs)

The wives and mothers of seven political prisoners on a hunger strike in a Holguín prison sent a letter to Cuban authorities in which they hold Fidel Castro responsible for any harm to their relatives' health. The seven started the hunger strike on October 17 in protest against the treatment they've received and the "subhuman conditions" of their imprisonment, said relatives. (October, Domestic Affairs)

Abel Escobar Ramírez, an independent journalist for Cuba Press, was released after having been detained for three days. Reporters Without Borders also reported that over 300 books and journals were confiscated by State Security agents from Jesús Alvarez Castillo, delegate of the independent Manuel Márquez Sterling Journalists Society in Ciego de Ávila province. The search in Alvarez Castillo's house lasted for more than three hours. (November, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban journalist Bernardo Arevalo Padron has been released from prison after serving a six-year sentence for anti-revolutionary activities, his friends say. He is the founder of the independent press agency Linea Sur Pres - which was banned by the Cuban authorities. In 1997 he was given a six-year prison sentence for "insulting" Fidel Castro. The Paris-based group Reporters Without Borders has said Padron was beaten during his detention and that he has deteriorated physically and psychologically. (November, Domestic Affairs)

The Independent Journalist María Josefa (Marilyn) Díaz Fernández and her husband Lázaro González Ávila, a member of the Christian Liberation Movement in Camagüey, were beaten and then arrested by State Security agents in Sancti Spiritus. María Josefa denounced to correspondents of independent Lux Info Press the arbitrary actions that the political police committed against her and her husband at the Bus Terminal in Sancti Spiritus. Their trip back home, where María Josefa planned to recuperate from a recent illness, was interrupted. Police checked their luggage where the couple had copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to distribute in her province. (November, Domestic Affairs)

A leader of the Cuban dissident movement Oswaldo Payá has not yet received authorization from the Cuban government to attend a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament in Brussels. As what happened in 2002 when Payá visited Strasbourg to receive the Sakharov Prize for human rights, the government may wait until "the last minute" before granting him permit. (November, Domestic Affairs)

Oswaldo Payá accused the government of Fidel Castro of preventing him from travelling to Brussels after an invitation by the European parliament. "Traveling is not a recognized right" by authorities on the island. (December, Domestic Affairs)

José Ribeiro, Portuguese member of the European Parliament, called "outrageous" Cuban authorities' refusal to allow dissident Oswaldo Payá to travel to Brussels to attend a session of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the European Parliament. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Carlos Alberto Domínguez, arrested in February for paying tribute in public to the four Brothers to the Rescue pilots who were shot down by the Castro regime, has been declared a prisoner of conscience. Amnesty International has declared Dominguez Gonzalez a prisoner of conscience detained for the non-violent exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and association, and has called for his immediate and unconditional release. Dominguez Gonzalez and his family have been granted visas to enter the United States but the Cuban government has categorically denied their exit permits. (December, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban independent journalist Bernardo Arévalo Padrón, who spent six years behind bars, has been released, news sources announced. Arévalo said he was released from prison on November 13. He thanked the Inter American Press Association for denouncing his imprisonment and applying international pressure for his release. "The IAPA campaign saved my life," he told the press. (December, Domestic Affairs)

## **Relations with the US Government**

[See also, US-Cuba Relations/ Diplomatic Activities and Statements]

Cuban opposition leader Oswaldo Payá, speaking at Georgetown University, said the island nation's exiles should not press property claims. Payá asked the Cuban exile community in the United States to dispel fears on the island that exiles might seek revenge or try to recover property and evict people living the houses they lost in Cuba. "Reclaiming lost property makes no sense, at least at first, and I say 'at first' because later the free Cuban people will decide this democratically, keeping in mind what is good for the majority," he said. The Cuban dissident, who resides in Havana, said the Cubans living on the island and abroad have been "exiled" from their liberties, and that they must unite to "defend our vocation for freedom, under the sign of love." (January, US-Cuba Relations)

A survey of dissidents living in Cuba shows an overwhelming majority like the news they hear on America's Radio Martí, but barely half believe the broadcast service to the communist-controlled island represents Cuban society. The survey, conducted by a group called the Cuba Commission, involved secret interviews with 343 Cubans, and some of the survey results were withheld because the commission said survey participants feared retribution by the government of Fidel Castro. Cuba Commission officials said in a statement that 93 percent of those surveyed think Radio Martí's Cuba and foreign news is "credible" and has the "right focus." But, the dissidents were more closely split on the question of whether Radio Martí represents Cuban society. Fifty-two percent said Radio Martí well represented Cuban society while 40

percent said it did not completely represent Cuban society. The remaining eight percent said it did not represent Cuban society at all. (January Exile Community)

US Governor of Florida, Jeb Bush, sent a message to Cuban dissident Oscar Elías Biscet, praising him for his "fight for the freedom of Cuba" and calling for his "immediate release from prison". (January, US-Cuba Relations)

Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet, a physician and civic activist in Cuba, received a democracy award for his "brave and courageous struggle" for human rights in Cuba. Biscet, jailed in Cuba, was not present for the ceremony. Senator John McCain of Arizona, chairman of the International Republican Institute, called Biscet "a truly courageous man" and vowed that supporters of democracy in Cuba "will continue to fight for his freedom." (February, US-Cuba Relations)

The top US diplomat in Havana attended a political event organized by dissidents seeking the end of Fidel Castro's rule. James Cason, chief of the US Interests Section, was front and center as some 40 dissidents met at the Havana home of dissident economist Martha Beatriz Roque. Organizers of the gathering, which was held to formally mark the 1895 start of Cuba's independence fight from Spain, said other diplomats were invited, but US officials were the only diplomats who turned up as a show of support. (February, US-Cuba Relations)

Marking the 7th anniversary of the shoot-down of two unarmed civilian planes belonging to Brothers to the Rescue, Senator's John Ensign and Bob Graham introduced a bi-partisan Resolution calling attention to the Cuban regime's systematic violation of human rights and asking for the international community's support for peaceful dissidents on the island. The resolution whose sponsors included Senate Majority leader Bill Frist, Senators George Allen, Sam Brownback, Bill Nelson, Jon Kyl, Jeff Sessions, Joseph Lieberman, Jon Corzine, Rick Santorum and Harry Reid calls upon the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to pursue the implementation of the 2002 Resolution regarding the situation of human rights in Cuba. It also urges the European Union and the Organization of American States to conduct individual investigations into the regime's human rights record and encourages international NGO's to lend their support to dissident project's like that of Oswaldo Paya's Project Varela. (February, US-Cuba Relations)

Works by Martin Luther King Jr., John Steinbeck and Groucho Marx were among 5,101 books seized by Cuban authorities after being shipped into Cuba by the US government, America's top diplomat in Havana said. American diplomats were told it was a "firm decision by the government" not to allow the books into the communist-run country for distribution to dissident groups, including independent libraries, US Interests Section Chief James Cason said. "They said it wasn't the books, but who we were going to give them to," he told a small group of international reporters. He said the American mission has imported similar books in the past. Rafael Dausá, North America Director in Cuba's Foreign Ministry, was not available for comment. (February, US-Cuba Relations)

Two US lawmakers expressed support for Cuba's Varela Project after meeting with the top organizer of the drive to ensure freedom of speech and other civil rights for Cubans. US Representatives Jim Davis (Democrat-Florida), and Jim Kolbe (Republican-Arizona), were the first American congressmen to meet with Oswaldo Payá at his Havana home. "We are in the presence of an individual who has truly moved ahead the dialogue in Cuba," said Kolbe, who chairs the US House of Representative's appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations. Later, the congressmen met with opposition members Vladimiro Roca, Héctor Palacios, Osvaldo Alfonso, Oscar Espinosa Chepe and Miriam Leiva. This time, they discussed the "Proposed measures to emerge from the crisis," issued by the Todos Unidos (All United) movement and the Independent Libraries Project. (March, Foreign Affairs)

President Bush accused Cuba of launching "personal attacks" against US diplomats and urged Havana to release more than 75 Cuban dissidents who had been arrested in a recent crackdown. "President Bush condemns the Castro government's intensified repression of Cuba's growing prodemocracy and human rights activists," a White House statement said. More than 75 activists, it said, have been "unjustly imprisoned" in a sweep that began last week and that has been described by Cuban officials as a crackdown on US-backed antigovernment conspirators. "Arrest of these dissidents comes on the heels of recent

personal attacks by the Cuban government against our diplomats in Havana," the White House said. (March, US-Cuba Relations)

Fidel Castro criticized the United States, warning that Cuba doesn't need its foreign office. The 76-year-old leader made the veiled threat about the status of the US Interests Section in Havana as an angry response to a public visit last month by section chief James Cason to a meeting with Havana dissidents. "Anyone can see that this is a shameless and defiant provocation," Castro said of Cason's meeting with the dissidents. "Perhaps the numerous US intelligence agents working at the Interests Section could explain to him that Cuba can easily do without this office - a breeding ground for counterrevolutionaries and a command post for the most offensive subversive actions against our country." Castro seemed to take special exception to Cason's declaration that "the Cuban government is afraid, afraid of freedom of conscience, afraid of freedom of expression, afraid of human rights." "Actually, Cuba is so afraid that it will calmly take all the time needed to decide on its course of action regarding this bizarre official," Castro said. (March, US-Cuba Relations)

The United States protested derogatory remarks by Fidel Castro about the presence of a US diplomat at a recent meeting of dissidents in Havana. State Department spokesman Philip Reeker replied that Castro's "defamatory language and criticism of Mr. Cason's comments in support of democracy and freedom underscore yet again that Castro abhors freedom of expression and fears any measure of support for human rights in Cuba." Reeker said the United States supports Cason's work in Havana and reaffirmed US support for a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba. (March, US-Cuba Relations)

A group of independent Cuban journalists conducted a professional ethics workshop at the residency of the chief of the US Interests Section in Cuba, James Cason. The workshop, with 34 participants from different opposition news organizations, was held on Cuban Press Day, also celebrated by the journalists. (March, US-Cuba Relations)

Underscoring an increasingly prickly relationship with the US government, Cuba dedicated an entire television show to America's top diplomat in Havana, calling his contacts with dissidents "provocative" and "offensive." US Interests Section chief James Cason has drawn criticism from Cuban officials in recent months over his public relationship with anti-government supporters in Cuba. "He has traveled the island, meeting with dissidents and repeatedly showing rude behavior," government intelligence analyst Manuel Hevia Frasqueria said of the American diplomat. "His actions are provocative (...) and his language offensive." Hevia and other analysts and journalists on the nightly "Mesa Redonda" -- the Round Table -- said Cason's actions seemed part of a campaign to strengthen Fidel Castro's opponents. The program reflects the government's positions. "This is not improvised and is hardly casual," said Rogelio Polanco, director of the Communist youth daily Juventud Rebelde. (March, US-Cuba Relations)

Cuba's communist-run government announced it had rounded up several dozen opponents and slapped new restrictions on the movements of American diplomats in Havana as already bad relations between the two countries further deteriorated. An official statement read on state television's evening news program said that Cuba's actions were the result of "the shameful and repeated attitude by the chief of Washington's diplomatic mission in Havana, James Cason, to foment the internal counterrevolution." (March, US-Cuba Relations)

During a daily briefing with the press, US State Department spokesman, Richard Boucher, referred to the arrest of more than two dozen dissidents in Cuba. Communist authorities in the island have accused the oppositionists of subversion and conspiracy with American diplomats. "This is an appalling act of intimidation against those who seek freedom and democratic change in Cuba," Boucher said in a statement. "These people have been arrested for simply speaking out, one of the most basic internationally recognized human rights." [[US Press Statement](#)] (March, US-Cuba Relations)

The United States has condemned the convictions of several leading Cuban dissidents and journalists who have received lengthy prison sentences in Havana for treason and subversion. At a briefing in Washington, State Department spokesman Philip Reeker condemned what he called "show trials" of members of Cuban civil society. Mr. Reeker said the government of Fidel Castro is persecuting journalists for acting like

journalists, economists for acting like economists, and peaceful activists for seeking a solution to Cuba's growing political and economic crisis. [[US Press Statement](#)] (April, US-Cuba relations)

The recent crackdown by Cuban officials on dissidents has helped create the potential for a large-scale exodus of the island nation's residents, similar to ones in 1980 and 1994, the top US diplomat based in Havana said. James Cason, chief of the US Interests Section in Havana said the actions taken by Cuba against activists is stoking renewed fear among the island's residents. The Castro regime accused Cason of fomenting unrest on the island by conspiring with dissidents to undermine Cuba's socialist system. "They say that when I go out to speak with anybody, it becomes subversive," Cason said at the University of Miami. "The continued disintegration of Cuban society generates instability throughout the region and creates the threat of a mass migration to the United States," Cason said. "This undermines our security and the long-term potential for the Cuban nation." "Cuban airplane hijackings are a product of frustration," Cason said, adding that there could be more such incidents to come. "To the extent that the Cuban government says the US is lax on hijackers and does not improve its airport security, you are going to see a lot of these violent attempts to get out." (April, US-Cuba relations)

Accusing Cuba of engaging in "despicable repression," Secretary of State Colin Powell urged Fidel Castro to free the scores of dissidents imprisoned recently and sentenced to long terms. "Nearly 80 representatives of a growing and truly independent civil society have been arrested, convicted and sentenced to lengthy prison terms in summary, secret trials," Powell said in a statement. (April, US-Cuba Relations)

USAID does support a number of non-governmental organizations in the US that promote democracy and help dissidents and other individuals in Cuba trying to "create a space for democracy and free-expression in that society," Alfonso Aguilar, assistant administrator at the US Agency for International Development's Latin American and Caribbean Projects, said. "They indeed might have supplied or provided assistance for dissidents and their activities, but we have not provided that assistance directly," he added. "That's an absolutely outrageous statement on his (Cuban Foreign Minister Perez Roque's) part," "We did not, although we're perfectly authorized to do so by law. It's absolutely legal for the US to provide assistance to dissidents and their families in Cuba," Aguilar said. "We have not done so, principally to avoid the kind of outrageous allegations and the untruths that have been uttered by the Cuban government." (April, US-Cuba Relations)

Cuba's crackdown on political dissidents only makes US efforts to promote democracy by working with opposition activists there "more urgent," the White House said. "Cuba's efforts to silence voices of opposition only make our policy goal of encouraging rapid, peaceful transition to democracy more relevant and more urgent," said spokeswoman Claire Buchan. "We'll continue to work with independent Cuban civil society and with the Cuban people, and are willing to consider steps to advance that policy goal in this climate," she told reporters. (April, US-Cuba Relations)

The United States has pledged increased support for activists in Cuba who are working to bring about peaceful, democratic change on the island, says Adolfo Franco, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) assistant administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean. In a briefing about Cuba before the House Congressional Human Rights Caucus, Franco said USAID will work with "all our partners throughout the hemisphere" to encourage support for Cuban democratic activists "and especially for Cuban political prisoners and their families." (May, US-Cuba Relations)

US government efforts to promote political change in Cuba have shifted away from the subtle "people-to-people" contacts favored by the Clinton administration to a more confrontational approach, including direct support for dissidents, two US officials say. One senior US official called the new focus a "pressure cooker" approach. He and another official, who is also a former diplomat, said that recent developments in Cuba, including the crackdown on opponents of Fidel Castro's government, the execution of three ferry hijackers, and a Cuban government threat to close the US Interests Section, were Cuba's reply to a "significant shift" in US Cuba policy. The two officials spoke separately and on condition of anonymity. (May, US-Cuba Relations)

The chief of the US mission in Cuba toasted the island's imprisoned dissidents on the eve of US Independence Day celebrations. "To those willing to illuminate the darkest night so that their countrymen may one day live in the light of freedom," US Interests Section Chief James Cason told about 300 people, including a sprinkling of dissidents, who gathered at his official residence. "There are those in this country who recognize and promote these universal values of tolerance and respect of the individual." Cason said earlier in his homage to Cuba's opposition. "Unfortunately, many of them are suffering for stating openly what most of their countrymen believe, but are afraid to articulate," he said. (July, US-Cuba Relations)

President George W. Bush will include \$7 million in next year's fiscal budget aimed at strengthening the growing civil society in Cuba. Submitted to the Presidency by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the proposal will be submitted to Congress for appropriation during its next session in October. (August, US-Cuba Relations)

In the new fiscal year, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) will give some \$7 million to groups involved with promoting civil society in Cuba in support of a democratic transition on the island. (December, US-Cuba Relations)

## **Varela Project and Oswaldo Payá**

The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) expressed its support for Cuban dissident leader Oswaldo Payá, President of the Christian Liberation Movement. Mr. Payá met with Secretary Colin Powell. "Today's meeting with Secretary Powell is very encouraging. It sends a clear message that the Administration not only recognizes the diverse and growing dissident movement in Cuba, but is also committed to lending support to dissident efforts like Mr. Payá's Project Varela," said Jorge Mas, Chairman of the CANF. "Mr. Payá and the increasing numbers of courageous men and women in Cuba who struggle for the rights guaranteed by international law, yet systematically denied to the Cuban people by Fidel Castro's regime, are worthy not only of our recognition but now, more than ever, of our unwavering support. It is individuals like Mr. Payá that will play a critical role in helping to bring about a transition to democracy in Cuba," stated Mr. Mas. (January, Exile Community)

Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá, who captained an island-wide pro-democracy petition drive last year, said change in Cuba can come about only from within the country, not from outside forces. Payá, speaking to reporters after a morning meeting with Secretary of State Colin Powell, said his campaign crossed an important threshold even though it did not bring about his objective of a national referendum to ensure the protection of human rights. He said he discussed the US embargo against Cuba with Powell, affirming his view that he does not see that four-decade old measure as a "factor for change" on the island. The Cuban people seek from the United States and other countries "solidarity and moral support," Payá said. "It's important to de-Americanize the problems of Cuba," he added. "We must bring change about through our own means." (January, US-Cuba Relations)

While polls show that many Cuban-Americans support the Varela Project, the Cuban Liberty Council and some 10 small Cuban-American organizations issued a joint statement in Miami asserting that Oswaldo Payá's efforts are not viable. The groups said Payá and his supporters give legitimacy to Cuba's National Assembly, judiciary and communist system without explicitly demanding an end to the one-party state in Cuba. "We feel it is important to establish that Cuba's internal opposition is much larger, varied and extensive than Project Varela," said the statement, which was signed by groups representing Bay of Pigs veterans, physicians, former political prisoners and other exile groups. Those groups did not include the Cuban American National Foundation, the largest exile advocacy group. (January, Exile Community)

Dissident leader Oswaldo Payá greeted John Paul II at the end of a general audience at the Vatican. Payá, founder of the Christian Liberation Movement, spoke with the Pope and regarded his meeting as a "symbolic message to the Cuban people and the Cuban Church to which I belong." "More could not be expected from an unplanned visit", said Payá, who referred to his brief contact with the Pope as "very positive." (January, Foreign Affairs)

Leading Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá met with Mexican President Vicente Fox and other political leaders with the aim of rallying support for his efforts to bring about democratic changes on the island. Fox praised the Varela Project and reiterated the commitment of his government to "defending human rights on the island and anywhere in the world". (January, Foreign Affairs)

Ten exile organizations issued a joint statement expressing skepticism about the Varela Project. In contrast, Payá is a genuine "freedom fighter," said Joe Garcia, executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation, which is seen as the most influential of the exile organizations. Some Cuban Americans may dispute some of Payá's views, as Garcia does the dissident's call for an end to the long-standing US embargo on trade with Cuba. But there can be no doubt he is a "real hero," Garcia said. For Frank Calzon, executive director of the Center for a Free Cuba, Payá is a deep and courageous thinker on a par with the late Soviet dissident Andrei D. Sakharov, and merits serious attention. Cuban-American Republican Congressman Lincoln Diaz-Balart, representing South Florida, suggested Payá, who has been jailed in his homeland for his activism and continues to suffer harassment there, is playing into the hands of the Fidel Castro regime. "If the Cuban government should accept the Varela Project and permit, for instance, dissident representatives, this would be interpreted internationally as an illusion of openness," Diaz-Balart said. "And this is precisely what Castro wants." Other Cuban Americans wondered if the fact that Payá was allowed to travel meant he was in accord with Castro, or being used to give a more human face to the only communist-ruled country in the Western Hemisphere. (January, Exile Community)

With a message of unity and a call to action, Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas spent a hectic day in Miami urging Cuban Americans to support his Varela Project. He courted support from Miami's Cuban community, saying it will have an important role in his referendum and in the country's reconstruction after Fidel Castro. "The role of the exile community is important in whatever changes happen in Cuba, primarily because they are an inseparable part of the Cuban people," said Payá. "The [Cuban] reality is very complex, and solutions to it are as well," Payá said after meeting with several hundred prominent members of the Cuban American community. "It's important that we respect each other in diversity." "This is where the other half of the heart of the Cuban people is, and when a heart is divided, both parts suffer," Payá told the Miami Cuban Americans. "Help me. This is a task for all of us." (January, Exile Community)

Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá met with Jorge Castañeda and praised the outgoing Mexican foreign relations secretary for his often critical stance toward the Cuban government. Payá said Mexico's policy toward Cuba "should continue growing in the direction of recognizing diverse sectors of Cuban society -- which I believe has been thwarted by barriers put up by the Cuban government." (January, Foreign Affairs)

Leaders of President Vicente Fox's conservative National Action Party (PAN) lauded Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá, comparing his push for nonviolent change in Cuba with their own long effort for true multiparty democracy in Mexico. "The struggle of Oswaldo Payá without doubt is a struggle that is very similar (...) to that of National Action," said Luis Felipe Bravo Mena, president of the PAN. (January, Foreign Affairs)

Mel Martínez, United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, who fled to the U.S. with other Cuban refugee children as part of Operation "Pedro Pan", believes that the Varela Project is a commendable effort and the most important step taken by Cuba's internal opposition to achieve significant changes on the island. (January, US-Cuba Relations)

Answering questions to international reporters after voting in parliamentary elections in the island, Fidel Castro became irritated by a question about the Varela Project. "Let's talk about serious things, not silliness," Castro said. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba's National Assembly has rejected as unconstitutional the Varela Project, an opposition petition seeking political and economic reforms through a popular referendum, an aide to the assembly's president said. "The Constitution and Legal Affairs Committee carefully studied the petition and decided not to move it forward because it went against the very foundation of the constitution, amongst other reasons," Miguel Alvarez, advisor to National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon, told the press. "It has already been shelved", Alvarez added, in the first official declaration from the assembly that Cuba's one-chamber

parliament considered the Varela Project dead. Alvarez could not detail the reasons the project was declared unconstitutional and referred questions to Jose Luis Toledo, committee president and dean of the University of Havana law school. A secretary at Toledo's office said he was out of town. Alvarez said the project's leader, dissident Oswaldo Payá, was informed of the decision last November. Payá was out of the country and not immediately available for comment. (January, Domestic Affairs)

A spokesman for the Varela Project said no formal response had been received from the National Assembly and the petition drive continues. "They have not given us a response. The Varela Project is going forward with thousands of citizens continuing to sign," Efrén Fernández, a member of the project's steering committee, told the press. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Archbishop of Havana, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, congratulated dissident leader Oswaldo Payá, for winning the Sakharov prize for freedom of expression, informed the catholic Cuban magazine Palabra Nueva. "On the occasion of your winning the Sakharov Prize, I wish to express to you my regards as a pastor of this archdiocese for your unwavering loyalty to Christ and His Church", read Ortega's letter. "As a lay Christian you have always followed your catholic consciousness in your actions, without depending on the Church but by assuming your responsibilities as a layperson and a Christian", continues the text. (January, Domestic Affairs)

President Vaclav Havel met in Prague Castle with Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá, presidential spokesman Ladislav Spacek told the press. Payá, who was invited to Prague by the humanitarian organisation People in Need, will also meet with other public officials, such as the chairmen of the Chamber of Deputies, Lubomir Zaoralek, and the Senate, Petr Pithart. Havel endorsed Payá as worthy candidate for the Nobel peace award. (January, Foreign Affairs)

Speaker of Slovakia's Parliament Pavol Hrusovsky received distinguished Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas in Bratislava. The meeting was attended by head of the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee Laszlo Nagy, and head of the ruling Christian Democrat (KDH) caucus Frantisek Miklosko. Payá told journalists after the meeting that "our goal is, as it was with the Slovak people in the past, to have a right for the rule of law". (January, Foreign Affairs)

Slovakia's current prime minister, its speaker of parliament and a former president are among the public figures who think that Cuban human rights campaigner Oswaldo Payá deserves to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Radio reports said Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda, former president Michal Kovac and parliamentary speaker Pavol Hrusovsky all support the idea of Nobel recognition for Payá, who has been in Bratislava for talks with political leaders. (January, Foreign Affairs)

Foreign Office Minister Bill Rammell re-iterated the UK's support for Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá's project for peaceful political change. Bill Rammell met the Nobel Peace Prize nominee in London. Mr Rammell said: "I want to congratulate Oswaldo Payá for encouraging political, economic and civil freedoms in his home country of Cuba in a peaceful way through the Varela Project. Mr Payá and I discussed today how the UK's policy of constructive engagement with Cuba can help to achieve a better human rights record and peaceful democratic change. "The UK continues to support the Varela Project. We and the EU continue to urge the Cuban Administration to recognise the project and publish a response." (January, Foreign Affairs)

Dominican President, Hipólito Mejía, received in his Santo Domingo's residence Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá. Payá was accompanied by U.S. Ambassador to that country, Hans Hertell. President Mejía praised the Cuban dissident for "carrying Cuba to an atmosphere of respect and democracy". (January, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban dissident Oswaldo Paya returned to Havana from a global tour, pledging to continue his pro-democracy petition drive and stressing that a peaceful change of regime in Cuba will be possible. "I'm back at home with the same hope," said a cheery and excited Paya at José Martí International Airport. "Our Varela project continues. It's a campaign from the Cuban people and we will continue until all Cubans achieve their rights." (February, Domestic Affairs)

Oswaldo Payá, the most relevant leader of the Varela Project, issued an appeal to all churches and other fraternal institutions on the island to lend their support to the cause of greater openness in Cuba. "It is time for you to stand up for the people and those being persecuted", said Payá, candidate to the Nobel Peace Prize, in a written statement released in Mexico titled "El signo de Varela: La verdad no está encadenada." (February, Domestic Affairs)

The Mexican National Action Party (PAN) expressed concern over the detention of two collaborators of Oswaldo Payá, promoter of the Varela Project. In a brief communiqué, the PAN said that with absolute respect to Cuban sovereignty, but in the context of the protection of human rights, we are deeply concerned with this situation. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Former President Jimmy Carter said that he is "disappointed" by the Cuban regime's lack of response to the request he made in Havana concerning the Varela Project. In an interview with the press, Carter called on Cuba's National Assembly to vote on the Varela Project, the petition signed by 11,020 Cubans on the island that asks for a referendum under the current Cuban laws on whether the island should enact legislative changes guaranteeing freedom of speech, and free elections. Carter said that "we have to be constantly critical of any violation in Cuba of their own Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly, which in my opinion authorizes the Varela Project." (March, US-Cuba Relations)

Argentine senator Pablo Walter handed Fidel Castro a copy of the Varela Project during the Legislative Assembly session for Peronist President-elect Néstor Kirchner's swearing-in ceremony, according to the Argentine Commission for Human Rights in Cuba. A note from the Commission said that Mr. Walter told Castro he was delivering the copy on behalf of Librado Linares and Osvaldo Alfonso Valdés, two Cuban non-violent opposition activists, recently arrested and imprisoned. (May, Foreign Affairs)

By a majority vote, the Chilean Parliament showed its support for Cuban opposition leader Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas' nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize for 2003. (July, Foreign Affairs)

The Uruguayan Parliament passed a resolution of support for the nomination of Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas for the Nobel Peace Prize, according to the office of the legislative body's press secretary. The discussion of the proposal, submitted by the International Affairs Commission, sparked a stormy debate between left-wing members and representatives of the Nacional and Colorado parties. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Former President Jimmy Carter has endorsed the nomination of Cuban opposition leader Oswaldo Payá to receive the prestigious Prince of Asturias Award for Concord. The award is given by the Prince of Asturias Foundation, established by the Spanish monarchy, to recognize those who contribute to fraternity, the struggle against injustice and the defense of liberty. "Oswaldo Payá is a man of courage who speaks out for all Cuban citizens to have a voice in their country's future," Carter said in a written statement issued from Atlanta. "His leadership of the Varela Project and Christian commitment to human rights deserve international recognition." (August, US-Cuba Relations)

Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá could not attend a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the EU Parliament because Cuban authorities didn't grant him the exit permit to travel to Strasburg. (September, Domestic Affairs)

Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright called for an international embrace of Cuban dissidents and said world leaders should give Varela Project leader Oswaldo Payá whatever he wants. Albright recently joined a group of European leaders, including former Czech President Vaclav Havel and Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar, formed to build international support for dissidents on the island seeking legitimacy and resources to fight the Castro government. (September, US-Cuba Relations)

A leading activist delivered more than 14,000 signatures to Cuba's parliament demanding a referendum for sweeping political changes in a new challenge to Fidel Castro's government. It was the second year in a row that activist Oswaldo Paya has delivered piles of signatures to the government as part of the Varela Project

- seen as the biggest homegrown, nonviolent effort in more than four decades to push for reforms in Cuba's one-party system. "The Varela Project lives," Paya told reporters "The campaign continues across the country." He then went to the National Assembly, accompanied by his wife, Ofelia, and another project volunteer. (October, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba's internal opposition expressed mixed opinions about dissident Oswaldo Paya's delivery of more than 14,000 new signatures in support of the Varela Project to lawmakers, an initiative that proposes democratic changes on the island. For Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo, who moved back to Havana after almost 20 years in exile, the Varela Project will not help unite the internal opposition because "the Americans have a hand in it (...) it's a project where there is a lot of foreign manipulation and many interests." "For me, it doesn't say a thing," Gutierrez Menoyo told the press. But Todos Unidos (All United) spokesman Vladimiro Roca said the Varela Project "represents a tremendous demonstration of courage, not only by Paya but by the people who signed this form after the government's wave of repression." Roca said the fact that another 14,000 signatures were obtained for the Varela Project shows that "the people are no longer afraid and are reacting courageously to the government." Blanca Reyes, wife of writer Raul Rivero - one of the dissidents sentenced in March to jail terms averaging 20 years - said Paya has maintained "a very honorable and very courageous position at a time of crisis such as the one we are going through; it is unbounded courage." (October, Domestic Affairs)

The initiative led by dissident Oswaldo Payá to present more than 14 000 signatures to the Cuban National Assembly in support of a referendum on democracy was called by Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, "a charade". (October, Domestic Affairs)

Opposition activist Oswaldo Payá asked the European Union for "moral support" in a national campaign in favour of "a peaceful transition led and designed by Cubans themselves." Payá, the main promoter of the Varela project, said "Cuba wants and needs peaceful changes." "Every one is invited to take part," he added in a "Message from Cuba to the European Union." (December, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban dissident leader Oswaldo Payá released a 72-page manifesto in Havana that seeks political reform and a transition to democratic rule. Mr. Payá, head of the opposition Christian Liberation Movement, called on all Cubans — including Cuban exiles — to participate in a national dialogue calling for democracy. "The final goal is to achieve a democratic government elected by the people and with a program defined by the people," Mr. Paya said in a statement. The document foresees a democratic government being installed under a presidential college composed of three members. Its members, who would have to reside in Cuba, would be charged with overseeing a transition to democracy, according to the document. "Cubans not only want their rights, but want to know what the transition and their lives will look like," states the introduction to the manifesto, distributed to foreign correspondents. Payá intends to distribute the manifesto through dissident-led committees across the island. [[National Dialogue](#)] (December, Domestic Affairs)

Opposition leaders reacted with cautious skepticism to a plan being promoted by noted dissident Oswaldo Paya calling on Cubans to help draw up a program for a transitional government and a new constitution for the post-Castro era. "Nobody knows who is really behind this. It appears to deal with matters that are the competence of a state," said Eloy Gutierrez, who recently returned to Cuba after spending 20 years in Miami, where he headed the "Cambio Cubano" exile group. But Manuel Cuesta Morua of the moderate but illegal "Progressive Arch" group said that with government repression at unparalleled levels, the on-the-ground situation in Cuba was hardly propitious to the sort of "dialogue" Paya says he wants to foment. "As ever, we respect all proposals for a political dialogue but once again repeat our stance that the priority should be dialogue concerning human rights in Cuba, which is what we are working to achieve". "Later," he added, "there will be time to draw up an agenda for the transition" though he wished Paya well "and all those who want to give him their support, but we are not going to take part because the constitutional matters are too involved". (December, Domestic Affairs)

Several internal dissident leaders refrained from commenting on the platform for a peaceful transition, presented by opposition activist Oswaldo Payá. "I have no opinion as I have not seen the plan. I want to see it first. I have neither received it nor did I know of its presentation," said the representative of the 'All

United' movement, Vladimiro Roca. The wife of economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, serving a 20-year prison sentence, Miriam Leiva, said she "knew only a few lines" she heard on the radio. Lawyer René Gómez Manzano made similar comments. (December, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba's fragmented internal opposition movement is attempting to recover from harsh blows received this year, while continuing to call for the release of the 75 activists sentenced to lengthy prison terms in April. "We're alive and kicking," Vladimiro Roca told the press. The activist is a spokesman for Todos Unidos (All United), a coalition that emerged in 1999, bringing together groups working for change and democratization in this Caribbean island nation. As proof that the opposition movement is still alive, Roca pointed to a recent proposal launched by Oswaldo Payá, the head of the Christian Liberation Movement, for a "National Dialogue" in which Cubans would design their own blueprint for a transition to democracy. Another sign that the movement is getting back on its feet, according to Roca, was the submission to parliament in October of new signatures in support of the Varela Project, which is seeking to hold a public referendum on changes to Cuba's socialist system. (December, Domestic Affairs)

The social democratic groups that joined together in the Mesa para la Reflexión de la Oposición Moderada (Moderate Opposition Reflection Panel) or the Arco Progresista (Progressive Arc) received a copy of the National Dialogue document and a formal invitation to participate in this initiative. Arco Progresista spokesman Manuel Cuesta Morúa argued that proposing a new constitution was overly ambitious. In a conversation with the press, he said it was best to start out with small steps that gradually create a climate of confidence. In Cuesta Morúa's opinion, both of Payá's initiatives -- the Varela Project and the National Dialogue -- are lacking in political realism. "I'm not saying we don't need constitutional changes, just that this is not the time to demand them," he underlined. The Mesa para la Reflexión de la Oposición Moderada and Arco Progresista presented a "Charter of Fundamental Rights and Duties of Cubans" this year, after consulting more than 30,000 citizens. "We will continue to dedicate ourselves to our work aimed at creating the foundations of a human rights culture through citizen dialogue on the issue," said Cuesta Morúa. (December, Domestic Affairs)

## **EDUCATION**

Cuban education authorities have underlined the exceptional importance of the family cell in Cuba and that, together with the school, should be a vital component of the "Battle of Ideas" led by Fidel Castro. "The family has a special role to play in the education of children from early ages" said Vilma Espín, president of the National Commission of Social Prevention. The commission has stepped up its efforts against scourges like alcoholism and drug-addiction. (February, Domestic Affairs)

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said here it will provide computer technology to Cuba for teaching purposes. At a meeting between visiting UNESCO official Walter Erdelen and Cuban Science Minister Rosa Simeon, they hailed as fruitful the ties between Cuba and the UN body. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Over 80 Cuban education centers form the Net of Schools associated to the UNESCO, that promotes environment education, peace, cultural exchanges and human rights. (June, Domestic Affairs)

University enrollment for Fall classes is up and is fast approaching an historic record. According to reports from the Cuban capital, some 300,000 students across the island will begin classes in September. (July, Domestic Affairs)

The Cuban government undertook an island-wide computer census. The measure, code-named "Operation Windows," seeks to inventory all computers, including those in government offices as well as the ones in private hands, and to confiscate any that are deemed of "dubious origin." The questionnaires intended for use in private homes ask for the name of the owner, the brand description of the machine, documents that attest to the legal ownership of the computer, year and manner of acquisition, and the purpose for which the computer is intended and used. The sale of computers in Cuba has always been tightly controlled and, on occasion, banned outright, especially to private persons. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Fidel Castro has received the 2003 Literacy Award from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The award was presented to the Cuban leader by the regional representative of UNESCO, Francisco José Lacayo, during the official inauguration of the new school year. (September, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba will become known for its results in education, health and culture and contributions made to mankind, said Fidel Castro in the official act that inaugurated the 2003-2004 school year. "These contributions have taken place in the toughest of times for mankind, in moments when blockade and other acts against Cubans have worsened", he stated in the Revolution Square that included the presence of students from different levels, and 4 881 new integral High School professors. (September, Domestic Affairs)

Multimedia is being used in Cuba to submit children to 15 psycho-pedagogical tests to establish a standard of behavior, logical and audiovisual memory, and levels of maturity and self-esteem. Edgar Cedeño, creator of the software, explained that the initiative allows to implement, from day one of this year's classes, the tests that help establish each child's educational needs and those of his family's. (September, Domestic Affairs)

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has acknowledged Cuba's achievements in the area of child and adolescent care. According to Prensa Latina News Agency, reporting from the Bolivian city of Santa Cruz, Cuba has been recognized for fulfilling the goals of Ibero-American countries in child care. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba is to host an international forum on mathematics and informatics. The conference will be attended by experts from Mexico, Germany, Uruguay, Brazil and Honduras. Laudelino Solano, president of Sancti Spiritus Mathematics and Informatics Society, said the results of research on mathematics, informatics and teaching will be presented at the 8th International Congress (Compomat 2003) conference. (November, Domestic Affairs)

More than 46,000 computers have been installed in Cuban schools. Currently, there are over 2,243,140 students of all levels taking computer courses given by over 218,560 teachers. (November, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban education gives top priority to the teaching of mathematics and information technology, assured a director of the sector during the 8th COMPUMAT 2003 International Congress taking place at Camagüey's Higher Pedagogical Institute. Leonardo Forneiro, vice minister of education, told the press that over 10,000 information technology teachers have been trained in Cuba, aimed to teach this subject in all schools. (November, Domestic Affairs)

Five blind students at the "Antonio Suárez" school in Camagüey province are using JAWS, a sophisticated computer software for blind people. There are 91 students in the school, including blind, visually impaired, strabismic and partially sighted students. (November, Domestic Affairs)

A total of 78 computer software programs are used within Cuba's education system with 37 used in secondary education programs and the rest in primary levels, announced Luis Ignacio Gómez Gutiérrez, minister of education. (December, Domestic Affairs)

## **ELECTIONS**

Cuban dissidents said they intend to monitor parliamentary elections this month to try to prevent Fidel Castro's government from inflating the vote. A recently formed umbrella group of the dissidents said its planned efforts at the January 19 vote do not mean the dissidents think the vote will be legitimate, but that they feel they must show that there are opponents. The group calling itself the Assembly for Promotion of

Civil Society told a news conference it will try to ensure that election workers don't inflate the number of voters or count ballots that have been purposefully annulled as a form of protest. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Juan Miguel Gonzalez, who fought US-based relatives bent on keeping his shipwreck-survivor son Elian in the US against his will, has been nominated as a candidate for Cuba's National Assembly, official media reported. Gonzalez, who works in a restaurant in the resort city of Varadero, was nominated for a district in Cárdenas, where he lives. (January, Domestic Affairs)

The Cuban Central Workers Union (CTC) called on its 3,198,942 million members to vote in the general elections on January 19, and reassert their support to the process that began in 1959. The text exhorted all workers to vote, "in a message of participation, discipline and revolutionary conscience facing our powerful enemies." CTC also called on its affiliates to promote voting at their workplaces, as an invitation to achieve an overwhelming political triumph. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas said that his country's elections for the National Assembly and provincial assemblies are unconstitutional and illegitimate. "In Cuba, candidates are put forth by organizations controlled by the government," Payá said. "In Cuba there is an environment of disrespect for [civil] rights. This is neither constitutional nor legitimate." Payá said that he respected people's right to go to the polls, but "I don't say 'to vote' because there is no vote." (January, Domestic Affairs)

Fidel Castro urged Cubans to turn out for the general election to show support for the communist-run island in the face of US imperialism. "What is needed is an overwhelming and energetic victory that demonstrates to the enemy our unity and force," Castro said in a reference to the United States during a nationally televised program on the election. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Several leading dissident groups announced they would not vote in Cuba's parliamentary elections and called on others to protest by abstaining, or by annulling a ballot by marking it incorrectly or casting it blank. In an unusual protest, dissident Mayelín Cedeño erected a sign outside her Havana home reading: "No to the electoral farce. No to the vote. No to more of the same." "It occurred to me after hearing Castro on the television. He said that in Cuba there is democracy and that's not true," Cedeño said. "Voting is practically obligatory to keep from being humiliated." About 100 neighbors crowded outside Cedeño's home in their own protest, chanting pro-government slogans and waving signs reading "Viva Fidel!" (January, Domestic Affairs)

Cubans voted in one-party general elections, while leading opponents refused to participate. The election is held every five years and will select 609 deputies to the National Assembly and representatives to provincial assemblies. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Those in charge at an electoral college in Havana did not allow three dissidents to attend as observers the recount of votes to elect national and municipal deputies. Martha Beatriz Roque, Arnaldo Ramos and Francisco Pijuán, of the Instituto Cubano de Economistas Independientes, went to the electoral college No. 1, of the 68th district in the municipality of Diez de Octubre, but were not allowed in. Television cameras and journalists from Spanish Television, CNN, AP, Reuters and AFP accredited in Havana were kept out too. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba's Communist Party said that more than 97 percent of voters showed overwhelming support for the nation's socialist system by electing 609 candidates who ran uncontested for parliament. While Fidel Castro and millions of other Cubans voted in general elections, many dissidents labeled the process a farce and refused to participate. About 8.1 million of Cuba's 8.2 million registered voters cast ballots, prompting the Communist Party daily Granma today to declare the elections "overwhelming proof of popular support for the nation, the revolution and socialism." (January, Domestic Affairs)

Provincial members of the Assembly of the People's Power met in the 14 Cuban provinces to elect by secret ballot their respective presidents and vice-presidents. (February, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba's newly elected parliament has rescheduled its first meeting, evidently postponing the installation of new deputies by one day to give Fidel Castro time to return from and rest up after his Asia tour. The short government announcement didn't give a reason for the delay. (March, Domestic Affairs)

The Cuban National Assembly unanimously elected Fidel Castro to a sixth five-year term as president. Running as the only candidate, he won January's general election with 97 percent of the vote amid calls by Cuban dissidents to ignore the polls. Fidel Castro has been in power for 44 years. He is the world's longest serving national leader. (March, Domestic Affairs)

## **ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES**

### **Drugs**

The Cuban government promised to crack down on foreigners bringing illegal narcotics into the communist country and complained that US officials refuse to cooperate in their fight against drugs. "Recently the illicit use of drugs (in Cuba) has grown, although at a much lower rate than it has in other countries," said an editorial on the front page of the Communist Party daily Granma. The editorial called on Cubans to "permanently battle for the present and future of the country against threats and risks as dangerous as the imperialism out to exterminate us." That use of illegal narcotics "must be prevented and caught in time," it added. The editorial offered no statistics about drug use on the island, but said that 252 foreigners had been arrested since 1995 for bringing narcotics here, including 146 who were either awaiting trial or serving sentences in Cuban prisons. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Fidel Castro announced that the problem of drug consumption that has arisen in Cuba can be most effectively and radically fought as part of the "Battle of Ideas", a wide propaganda campaign launched by the Cuban government. Castro said that the most urgent programs of the Battle of Ideas in the areas of education and culture can contribute to helping the young understand the dangers and consequences of such harmful habits. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban authorities detained 252 alleged drug-traffickers from 1995 to 2002 and impounded 175 shipments of drugs at local airports, according to a report presented by Cuba's minister of Justice, Roberto Díaz Sotolongo at the opening of the II Regional Conference on Drug Control in the Caribbean that took place in Havana. The shipments would either be carried to Europe or commercialized inside the island. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Fidel Castro says Cuba wants to develop tourism fit for the whole family, without the illegal drugs and gambling. "You won't see any casinos here," Castro said as he inaugurated a new resort on the island's northeastern coast. "Nor will there be drugs." (January, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba, after believing itself immune from the problem of drugs for many years, has now declared war on drug trafficking. A government campaign against the illegal use and trafficking of drugs in Cuba has intensified in recent days with the participation of the main social organizations and the island's mass media. A statement from the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), a state organization with more than seven million members in block-by-block watch groups around the island, said its members were "closing ranks" in the fight against drugs and the corruption associated with the illicit trade. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Forces of the Cuban Interior Ministry (MININT) arrested several citizens in Havana for links to drug traffic and consumption, according to a report in the local TV. The note, which was read in the prime time Cuban TV news report, did not mention the number of people arrested, nor the municipalities in Havana where the operation took place, which will continue "as long as necessary, to put an end to this phenomenon", as the note said. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba's small farmers pledged to help fight the communist island's incipient drug problem, saying they will watch out for and report others who grow, sell or use narcotics in the countryside. While the government blamed the island's narcotics problem on foreigners who bring in drugs, the farmers' vow - in a letter published on the back of the Communist Party newspaper Granma - for the first time publicly raised the possibility that drugs are being grown in Cuba. The letter from the National Association of Small Farmers also acknowledged that drugs are now being shipped here specifically for use on the island, not just for temporary storage on their way to other countries. (January, Domestic Affairs)

In Havana, the 200 participants attending the second Regional Conference to Control Drugs in the Caribbean are concluding with a call to unify efforts in the anti-drug fight. Representatives from international organizations, like Interpol, countries including Canada, Britain and Spain, and the US Coast Guard, are participating in the Conference. (January, Foreign Affairs)

The President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón, closed Havana's 2nd Regional Conference on Drug Control in the Caribbean and reiterated the island's willingness to continue fighting drug trafficking. (January, Foreign Affairs)

A pair of Key West boaters were arrested by Cuban authorities for allegedly carrying 600 pounds of marijuana inside their sailboat and are now awaiting prosecution, authorities said. Kevin Bolman and Duane Townson were arrested after Cuban border officials who boarded their 36-foot sailboat, Dulcinia, allegedly found 221 bales of marijuana, US Coast Guard spokesman Luis Diaz said. (January, US-Cuba Relations)

The US people would benefit if an agreement between Cuba and the US to fight drug trafficking is signed, confirmed Cuban minister of Justice Roberto Díaz Sotolongo. The signing of an agreement would also include advantages for the Caribbean, affected by the trafficking of drugs to the US and Europe, the world's main markets, Díaz told the press. (January, US-Cuba Relations)

The Cuban Minister of Justice, Roberto Sotolongo, urged the Cuban population to support police raids against drug trafficking and consumption in the country. "The readiness of the population in the battle against the incipient drug trade is absolute, as can be seen in their support of the measures put in place", said the Minister in a statement to the press. (February, Domestic Affairs)

A highly-publicized series of raids against a proliferating domestic drug trade has turned up a large number of self-employed tradesmen who try to cope with Cuba's ongoing economic crisis by operating outside the rigid, government-controlled economic system. The thorough searches police have been conducting have exposed people who had set up small private business. Since any such independent activity is illegal in Cuba, tools and materials are confiscated. Police have confiscated merchandise from street vendors, and videotapes from the homes of people who rent them to their neighbors for a fee. The tapes are typically recorded off satellite signals, intercepted by home-made antennas, which are themselves also illegal. (February, Domestic Affairs)

Three foreign drug traffickers who tried to use Cuban territory as a base to conduct their drug operations were given severe prison sentences in a Havana court. The people's Provincial Court of the City of Havana sentenced Colombian Rafael Miguel Bustamante Bolaños to life imprisonment for international drug trafficking and being in possession of a false passport. Mauricio Francisco Noguera Salcedo, also from Colombia, was sentenced to 23 years in jail for the same crimes. A third man, Robert Lewis from the Bahamas was given a 25 year prison sentence also for international drug trafficking. (February, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban authorities will confiscate the property of anyone involved in the traffic or consumption of illegal drugs or linked to irregularities or corruption, the government said in a decree published in the state-run newspaper. Official Cuban newspaper Granma announced, "The confiscation of all those residences or buildings in which drugs are produced, trafficked, acquired, stored, consumed, hidden or are linked in any way, directly or indirectly, to drugs." A spokesman for the prosecutor's office said the government will also confiscate the property of anyone linked to corruption, prostitution, procurement, pornography, people

trafficking, corruption of minors or any such crime. This punitive measure will also apply to property owners who rent out a residence or local without submitting the proper documentation to the official registry or, after having registered, fail to notify authorities. The Cuban Deputy Attorney General pointed out that the new law is in agreement with Article 60 of the Cuban Constitution, which provides for confiscation of property as long as it is carried out in compliance with existing legal procedures. (February, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban Justice Minister Roberto Díaz reiterated his government's interest in signing an agreement with the US to fight drug traffic in the region. We are losing the opportunity to strengthen actions of confrontation in the Caribbean when there is no integral cooperation between both countries, Díaz told Prensa Latina. His statements take into consideration the Caribbean's high level of incidence of this phenomenon, as a convergent point used by several networks to transport drugs to the US market, the world's largest consumer. (February, US-Cuba Relations)

In its "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report" for 2002, the US Department of State states that Cuba doesn't seem to be "a significant producer of drugs or precursor chemicals, although government reports indicate that marijuana is being cultivated for a growing domestic market". The report emphasizes the "little cooperation" that has existed between the Cuban authorities and the US on international drug trafficking issues. (March, US-Cuba Relations)

Amid a crackdown on drug trafficking and other illegal businesses in Cuba, communist authorities acknowledged a recent rise in attacks on police agents and reminded citizens of the severe penalties for such assaults. The Communist Party daily Granma dedicated an inside page to a story about the problem, accompanied by the text of the criminal code applying to attacks on police. The article provided no specifics on the size of the problem, including how many police officers had been assaulted. (March, Domestic Affairs)

A court in Havana has issued stiff sentences against 2 Colombians and 3 Cubans convicted of drug trafficking. Cuban Diego Evelio Sombert Fernández, a resident of Colombia, was sentenced to 30 years in prison for having participated in the repeated introduction into Cuba and distribution of several kilograms of cocaine. Sombert Fernández was found to have brought the drugs to Cuba hidden in his digestive system, in swallowed capsules, while he posed as a business representative. Cuban Juan Ramírez Aguero was sentenced to 27 years for accepting cocaine from the traffickers and selling it in Cuba's national territory. Cuban Juan Carlos Morales Fundora was sentenced to 25 years in the same case. Morales Fundora worked in a tourism hotel restaurant, where one of the Colombians stayed during a first visit to Cuba, and agreed to try to sale approximately one kilo of cocaine also brought to the island by the drug traffickers. Edna Ruth Duarte Bejarano and Jaime León Roballo were sentenced to 20 years in the same case. Cuba's Granma news daily front-paged the story, affirming that the severity of the sentences once again demonstrate that there will be no clemency for individuals who "endanger the health and well-being of Cuban youths". (March, Domestic Affairs)

Three Dominican students now face expulsion from Cuba after two of them were arrested in connection with the illegal cultivation of marijuana and the other with smuggling of Cuban nationals into Dominica, Education Minister Roosevelt Skerritt has confirmed. The students are in Cuba under the Cuba-Dominica scholarship programme. Skerritt, who did not disclose the names of the students, said that the two held on drugs charges were arrested following a sting operation, while the third student was involved in a scheme to get Cuban nationals to visit Dominica, from where "they would be able to travel to any Caribbean island or to the United States". (April, Foreign Affairs)

Three Russian nationals, arrested in Cuba last summer when attempting to smuggle in a large batch of heroin, have been sentenced to 30 years imprisonment, the defendants' lawyers told the press, after receiving a formal notification about the court ruling. Long prison terms were given to Rodion Dobrorez and Pyotr Voichinsky, who lived in the United States, and Muscovite Dmitry Kiselev. Investigators said they arrived in Havana from Ecuador last June. During an inspection of their luggage at the international airport Jose Martí, customs officials found on them more than 1.9 kilograms of heroin packed in plastic bags. (April, Foreign Affairs)

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

Cuba and Canada agreed to share seized profits from the illegal drug trade. This is the first such deal Havana has signed, officials said. "The agreement shows the will of both countries to increase cooperation in fighting against drug trafficking," said Rafael Dausa, the Cuban foreign ministry official in charge of North American affairs. (July, Foreign Affairs)

A Cuban court has imposed long prison sentences on 5 Curacao citizens, 2 Spanish, and 7 Cubans for involvement in a drug-smuggling ring run by a Curacao man. (July, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban official daily Granma reports that a group of two Venezuelans and eight Cubans were sentenced in Havana charged with drug trafficking. The group smuggled nearly four thousand grams of cocaine, carrying them in their digestive tracts. The provincial court of the City of Havana sentenced to a prison term of life to the Venezuelan Marco Tulio Daza Velazco, who had been judged in Germany for having illegally introduced 700 grams of cocaine in that country. The other Venezuelan was sentenced to 20 years in jail. The Cuban Jorge Luis Perez Hugueta was sentenced to 30 years, Gilberto Gómez, José Lake, Javier Lake Brown and Maximo Gómez Muñoz were sentenced to 20 years. Other people were sentenced to 10-15 years in jail. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Four tons of narcotics were impounded by Cuban authorities in the first semester of 2003. Of this volume, 98% was seized as a result of actions against international trafficking. According to the Cuban Ministry of the Interior (MININT), the bulk of drugs impounded consisted of marijuana (86%), with slightly less than half a ton of cocaine and small quantities of other illicit substances. According to MININT sources, during the first half of 2003, there has been an increase of maritime and aerial incursions by drug traffickers near the island evidenced by the seizure of 196 floating packages of drugs - 154 of marijuana and 42 of cocaine - that washed ashore and the sighting of 27 suspicious speedboats and 14 aircraft, a higher total than in the same period last year. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Havana's anti-doping lab received the backing of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) at an organization's executive committee meeting. The Cuban institution has now become the fifth one on the American continent to receive IOC approval, following Los Angeles, Montreal, Bogotá and Rio de Janeiro. It is also the world's 31st lab with full capacity to analyze all kinds of tests in any sports event. (September, Foreign Affairs)

A collaboration agreement between Cuba and Venezuela has made possible that 60 drug addicts from the South American country are under treatment on the island. The Villa Colibrí Therapeutic Community located in Baconao, southeast of the city of Santiago de Cuba, specializes in rehabilitation and has provided assistance to Venezuelans. (September, Exile Community)

Cuba has reduced the impact of illicit drugs with the participation of local institutions and the support of the population, Attorney General Juan Escalona asserted in an interview with Granma newspaper. Escalona recalled that Cuba began 2003 with Operation Shield against the use and trafficking of prohibited substances, "under which we managed to reduce the phenomenon but continue fighting it." However, he noted, it is easier to combat drugs than to fight corruption, which is not detected rapidly, but gradually. (December, Domestic Affairs)

## **General**

The Cuban National Tax Administration Office (ONAT) pointed out that during 2002 inspectors identified more than 10,000 'illegals' who received severe fines. The term "illegal" refers to individuals who conduct small businesses without state authorization or paying taxes. (February, Economy)

More than 720,000 counterfeit habano cigars were seized last year at international airports in Cuba, said the Vice-President of the Habanos S.A. Corporation, Manuel García. As to sales, García added, "Europe remained the top consumer, followed by Latin America, where the Cuban market is the strongest, keeping its third place after Spain and France." (February, Economy)

The battle against drugs in Cuba has turned into a "national crusade against illegalities" in general, said el Attorney General of the Republic, Juan Escalona. Cuban legislation was tightened recently with the passing of Decree-Law 232, which provides for the seizure of personal assets, including real estate properties in most serious cases. (February, Domestic Affairs)

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

New rules for private landlords about to be put into effect by the socialist government of Fidel Castro have begun circulating among renters over the past few days, said a landlord, who agreed to talk to the press on condition of anonymity. "We live in a state of permanent stress, worrying about whether we'll have enough guests, or waiting for more restrictions to be slapped on," complained a 58-year-old Cuban woman who rents out two of the five bedrooms in her home, mainly to foreign tourists. The circular, dated June 5 and signed by the president of the National Institute of Housing, Víctor Ramírez Ruiz, states that "negative tendencies and behaviors have emerged in the exercise of this activity that distort the very essence of renting." The new provision, which is to go into effect shortly, mentions -- as examples of "negative behaviors" -- the use of homes as "brothels", and the "excessive enrichment" of landlords. "That is offensive," said the renter who was interviewed. "I am an honorable person who has worked all my life, and only after retiring did I decide to rent out rooms to improve the income of my large family." (July, Domestic Affairs)

Approximately 40 tons of illegal lobster are seized every year in Cuba, authorities said. National fishing bureau chief Juan Fung Riveron said the confiscations and accompanying fines are aimed at preventing illegal trade that could endanger lobster populations in the future. Official estimates indicate that economic damages resulting from the illegal fishing and sale of lobsters, shrimp, turtles and other valuable and protected species may exceed \$5 million per year. (October, Economy)

Between January and September disciplinary measures have been taken against 9,643 illegalities. Penalties ranged from fines to police operations. According to the official newspaper "Granma", specialists from the National Tax Office (ONAT) said to have supervised 49% of personal income tax returns submitted by taxpayers. (November, Economy)

## **MIGRATION**

[See also US-Cuba Relations/ Migration/ Hijackers, Smugglers and Cubans Returned by the US Coast Guard]

### **Hijackings**

US authorities say six Cubans who hijacked an airliner to Florida face air piracy charges. Federal officials say the knife-wielding hijackers surrendered peacefully after the DC-3 propeller plane landed safely at the airport on Florida's resort island of Key West. Earlier, the hijackers took control of the aircraft, which departed from Cuba's Isle of Youth, and diverted it from a scheduled landing in Havana. Thirty-five people were on board. None of the passengers or crew was injured. (March, US-Cuba Relations)

Fidel Castro's government expressed satisfaction with the US decision to prosecute six men accused of hijacking a Cuban plane to the United States. The six men who diverted the DC-3 at knifepoint in an apparent bid to gain asylum were charged with conspiracy to seize an aircraft by force and violence, which is punishable by a minimum of 20 years in prison. "The decision to submit them to justice on piracy charges (...) constitutes, without doubt, a modest step forward," the Cuban government said in a statement. (March, US-Cuba Relations)

A man claiming to have two grenades tried to hijack a passenger plane from Cuba's small Isle of Youth to the United States, but was forced to land in Havana because of insufficient fuel. Cuban authorities were negotiating with the man, who was on board the grounded Soviet-made AN-24 plane along with 46 other people. A government statement said the plane was on a regular flight from the Isle of Youth's main city of Nueva Gerona when the pilot reported it was being hijacked to the United States by a man armed with grenades. (March, US-Cuba Relations)

To Fidel Castro, the real culprits behind air hijackings not only of Cuban airliners but the world over are the US governments that in the last 44 years have fought the revolutionary process he leads. "They are the ones who first thought of that crime and it was done against Cuba," said Castro in a several hour TV show during which he talked with crew members and passengers of the DC-3 flight diverted to Key Largo at knife-point. Castro defined the hijacking of the plane as an act of terrorism. In the morning, the Cuban president welcomed the airliner's crew at Havana's José Martí international airport. (March, US-Cuba Relations)

For the second time in less than two weeks, a Cuban aircraft has been hijacked to Key West where the alleged hijacker was again snared – this time in a rare moment of cooperation between the United States and Cuba. Adelmis Wilson Gonzalez was taken into FBI custody after a 12-hour negotiation in Havana during which he threatened to blow up the plane with what turned out to be fake grenades, Cuban and US officials said. In a surprising move at a time of tense relations, the top US diplomat went to the control tower at Jose Marti International Airport in Havana to warn the man that he would be criminally charged in the United States if he flew there. US Interests Section chief James Cason "explained to him by radio that hijacking was a serious offense and that if he came here as a hijacker they would investigate the crime and prosecute," said Robert Zimmerman, a State Department official. (April, US-Cuba Relations)

At the same time the Cuban man with grenades was forcing an airliner to the US, six other accused hijackers were appearing in front of a Miami federal judge on another case. The six -- Alexis Norneilla Morales, Eduardo Javier Mejia, Yainer Olivares Samon, Neudis Infantes Hernandez, Alvenis Arias Izquierdo, and Mikel Guerra Morales--, are being held at the Federal Detention Center in Miami. In a move that outraged the Cuban government and US prosecutors, all six were granted \$100,000 bonds and put under house arrest last week by US Magistrate Judge Hugh Morgan in Key West. But the six are still being held pending a to-be-scheduled hearing on the government's appeal of the bond ruling. (April, US-Cuba Relations)

Hijackers armed with pistols and a knife took over a Cuban ferry and threatened to throw passengers overboard unless the boat sailed to the US, the Cuban government said. The FBI in Miami said the ferry was drifting in international waters about 60 miles off Key West, Fla. The ferry was hijacked overnight by a group of people armed with three pistols and at least one knife, a government statement said. (April, US-Cuba Relations)

A federal magistrate denied bond to the 33-year-old man whose fake grenades and alleged threat of violence unleashed a diplomatic crisis and forced a Cuban government-owned plane to land in Key West. US Magistrate Hugh Morgan also ordered the government to give the attorney for Adermis Wilson Gonzalez at least 24 hours to interview 19 of the plane's 31 passengers, who immigration officials said have asked to be returned to Cuba. (April, US-Cuba Relations)

A small ferry boat hijacked in Havana Bay and forced to sail toward Florida had returned to Cuba after Cuban authorities chased it some 30 miles into international waters. The boat left international waters under Cuban government escort, a US Coast Guard official in Miami said. (April, US-Cuba Relations)

Seventeen Cubans aboard a passenger plane that was hijacked and forced to land in Florida returned to Cuba, while another 10 chose to stay in the United States. The plane was diverted to Key West International Airport during an ordeal spent largely at a Havana airport. A man carrying two fake grenades demanded that the passenger plane be refueled to reach the United States. He released 31 passengers and crew before surrendering in Florida. The 10 who decided to stay in the United States were released from a federal detention center, said Ana Santiago, spokeswoman for the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The wife and son of accused hijacker Adermis Wilson Gonzalez were among them. (April, US-Cuba Relations)

Cuban authorities have informed that a group of men who hijacked a ferry boat in Havana and diverted it to the U.S. are being prosecuted in "summary" trials. A brief statement was read on the main Cuban television newscast without mentioning further details, including the number of accused. (April, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban authorities thwarted an attempt to hijack a plane on the Isle of Youth and have arrested four people in connection with the affair, according to an official statement released by local media. The government noted that this marked the third attempt in less than a month to hijack a plane on the Isle of Youth. The two previous attempts, which were successful, took place in March, when planes were hijacked and diverted to the United States. According to the official statement, this is "a diabolical plan" orchestrated by anti Castro groups of Cuban exiles living in Florida. (April, US-Cuba Relations)

Cuba has executed three men convicted of hijacking a passenger ferry to sail to the US, Cuban state-run television reported. The firing squad sentences were carried out immediately after a Cuban court found the men guilty of terrorism. They were part of a gang of approximately 10 involved in the hijacking in which the ferry, carrying at least 30 men, women and children, was forced to sail into the Straits of Florida, but ran out of fuel 30 miles from Havana. [\[Official Statement\]](#) (April, US-Cuba Relations)

A court in Cuba has ordered life imprisonment for five men who attempted to hijack a passenger plane last month the island's authorities say in a statement published by the ruling Communist Party daily Granma. A judge in Havana said the men had been found guilty of acts of terrorism when they tried to force a plane on a domestic flight to head to the United States, an official statement said. Three other defendants received jail terms of between 20 and 30 years, it said. (May, Domestic Affairs)

Three men were shot dead and a boy seriously wounded in the head during an attempted hijacking of a fishing boat in western Cuba, Cuban authorities said. A government statement said the three men, accompanied by a woman and her two sons, tried to hijack a fishing boat in La Coloma, 20 miles south of Pinar del Rio. The statement said the hijackers could not get the boat started and had threatened to shoot hostage fishermen aboard. It did not make clear who shot whom or identify those killed but said the shooting broke out among the hijackers. The kidnappers shot a 10 years old boy in the head and then tried to kill him, but the gun didn't fire. [\[Official Statement\]](#) (July, Domestic Affairs)

Would-be Cuban immigrants are believed to be responsible for hijacking a boat belonging to a government geographic company and are heading for the United States, according to a statement from the Cuban government. The boat, belonging to GeoCuba, was hijacked from Boca de Nuevitas in Camaguey province, according to Cuban authorities. The vessel may have come ashore in the Bahamas, according to officials there. The Cuban coast guard immediately notified US officials after the hijacking, the Cuban government said. The coast guard followed the vessel but did not try to board it in open seas because it was too dangerous, it said. The crew of the Cuban coast guard ship said seven men could be seen on the deck of the boat and about 20 people were inside. (July, Domestic Affairs)

Six of the 12 accused Cuban hijackers whose repatriation launched a firestorm of criticism of the Bush administration, have been released by the Cuban government while others remain at state security headquarters. Barbaro Perez Novo, 29, one of those repatriated, said that authorities released him and five others. "Although they told us we were free, we have to present ourselves at the trial," Perez Novo said from his home in the north central town of Nuevitas. His younger brother Yosvel Chavez Novo, remains at

the Villa Marista security headquarters in Havana apparently accused of leading the group that stole the government-owned Gaviota 16, Perez Novo said. No trial date has been announced. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Six of 12 men implicated in the hijacking of a government boat last month were immediately freed upon their return to Cuba, one of the men said. Fermín Suárez said Cuban authorities let him walk free, but his 27-year-old son was among the six still in custody in the provincial capital of Camagüey pending trial on charges of theft. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Six Cubans who hijacked a boat to get to the United States but were repatriated by the US Coast Guard were tried and face sentences of 8 to 10 years in jail, officials said. The six men pleaded guilty to stealing a government-owned surveying boat in which they tried to reach the United States. Prosecutors asked for sentences of seven years for Abel Nápoles Rodríguez, eight years for 22-year-old bakery worker Yosvel Chávez Novo, nine years for Angel David Velázquez Roldán and Mijael Suárez Martínez and 10 years for Antonio Carrión and Noelvis Martínez Carrión. A panel of five judges who presided over the one-day trial in the Provincial Tribunal of Camaguey have 10 days to return a verdict and decide on the sentencing recommendations, defense attorneys said. The defendants all testified in court and the proceedings were open to relatives and the international media, offering a rare glimpse into Cuba's judicial process. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Six men sent back to Cuba by US authorities were convicted and sentenced to 7 to 10 years in prison for hijacking a government boat and trying to reach Florida, a court official said. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Prosecutors have expanded charges in a politically sensitive case against six admitted Cuban hijackers by adding two counts carrying a possible life prison sentence. The six Cuban men already had been facing possible life sentences on air piracy and conspiracy charges. They now also are charged with interfering with a flight crew and a related conspiracy count. (September, US-Cuba Relations)

## **General**

During 2002, the US Coast Guard intercepted 931 Cubans at sea, the highest number since 1999. Actions against human smugglers doubled compared to the previous year. "The Attorney's Office has been at its busiest time since stricter actions were taken against smugglers of Cubans", said Jacqueline Becerra, spokeswoman of the City of Miami's Attorney's Office. However, during the fiscal year 2002—which closed on September 31—the Coast Guard Patrol reported the arrival of 1,335 Cubans. (January, US-Cuba Relations)

A group of 19 Cubans landed on the Florida coast. US authorities have arrested two individuals under suspicions of having smuggled them into the US. (January, US-Cuba Relations)

Thirty Cuban migrants intercepted by the Coast Guard five miles from Sugarloaf Key -- and thrown into the sea when their smuggler's boat capsized -- were taken back to the Communist-ruled island, the Coast Guard said. Relatives and activists did not know the Cubans had been repatriated when they gathered in Little Havana to protest what they said was the use of excessive force to stop them. Coast Guard Petty Officer Danielle DeMarino said the migrants are lucky that rescuers were there when the boat capsized. (January, US-Cuba Relations)

Prosecutors filed misdemeanor charges and offered probation to two Miami men accused of smuggling four relatives and two family friends into the United States by boat. Their 21-foot boat ran out of fuel and was towed to Key West by the Coast Guard in November. Once at dockside, five Cubans scampered from the boat to the dock to establish claims for legal residency. A 14-year-old boy who initially stayed aboard was later allowed ashore, too. The two counts each against Elizardo Ruiz Alvarez and Martin Mendez cover only the two friends who made the trip and do not claim smuggling for profit. (January, US-Cuba Relations)

The US Coast Guard intercepted 79 Cubans who tried to get to the United States and returned them over the weekend, Cuba said. Seventy-five tried to make the journey aboard two smugglers' speedboats, the Communist Party newspaper Granma said. The other four were intercepted in a small boat, it said. Twenty-nine of the migrants had to be rescued when their boat capsized after they refused to stop for the Coast Guard, the newspaper said. (January, US-Cuba Relations)

José Ariel Contreras, the Cuban pitcher who defected last year in Mexico, finally made it to Yankee Stadium to finalize his four-year contract worth US\$32 million. At his introductory news conference, Contreras said Castro called him the Titan of Bronze because the right-hander was the Cuban ace. Contreras, however, wouldn't say what he thinks about Castro, whose communist regime has caused many Cuban baseball stars to defect, leaving their families behind. "I can talk about Cuba, I can talk about Cuban baseball," Contreras said through a translator. "But I'm not here as a politician to talk about politics." (February, US-Cuba Relations)

Eight Cuban rafters arrived in Honduras. The group landed on Islas del Cisne, 600 km north of Tegucigalpa, and were later taken to Trujillo by immigration authorities. The rafters said their intention was to sail to the United States but got lost. (February, Foreign Affairs)

The Namibian Government has quietly released a Cuban national following an appeal by human rights group Amnesty International not to deport him to Cuba. Pedro Osvaldo Ortigas Suárez and his wife, Jeny Magalis Hernández Heredia, were detained in Namibia in November on suspicion that they were illegal immigrants. Amnesty said it was concerned that the couple's safety "may be at risk" should they be deported to Cuba. The National Society for Human Rights (NSHR), which has been trying to secure political asylum for the couple, said the husband was released. His wife, who was released on bail of N\$2 000, has disappeared. "We suspect that she might have fled back to Angola," said NSHR National Director Phil ya Nangoloh. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Five Cubans reached the coasts of South Florida on board a fishing boat of the Cuban government, US authorities informed. Julio Gómez, a police officer in Key West, said the group had left the island on Friday and had arrived at a beach close to "Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park", in Key West. (February, US-Cuba Relations)

Four Cuban coast guards defected, docking their patrol boat at a Key West resort, walking into town and surrendering to a police officer, authorities said. The men, dressed in their military uniforms, approached Officer Matt Dorgan and told him they wanted to surrender, Key West police spokeswoman Cynthia Edwards said. "They were happy to be here and were compliant with all of our requests," said Officer Tara Koenig, a Spanish-speaking officer Dorgan called for assistance. The men's patrol boat has been turned over to the US Coast Guard. A Coast Guard spokeswoman had no immediate comment and it could not be determined if the US military had been tracking the men before they arrived at Key West. No one answered the phone at the Cuban Interests Section in Washington. (February, US-Cuba Relations)

A group of six Cuban migrants beached their homemade boat on Navy property that includes a key nerve center for the war on drugs. The Cubans sprinted past the house of the Navy's top officer in the Keys, scaled a gate and proceeded to drink beer and phone relatives on a busy street before police caught up with them. The landing comes as the Coast Guard has heightened security in and around Key West by dispatching additional boats and an extra helicopter. The Navy has also stepped up its boat patrols in and around its Lower Keys facilities. (February, US-Cuba Relations)

Cayman Islands authorities detained 14 Cuban migrants who had been trying to get to Honduras when they ran out of fuel and one of their two boats sank. The Cubans had landed on Cayman Brac, one of the three islands in this British Caribbean territory, to stock up on fuel and food for the journey, police said. (March, Foreign Affairs)

The 10 Cuban refugees who arrived in Key West last month, four aboard an armed Cuban patrol craft and six on a makeshift wooden vessel that landed on a US Navy installation, pale in comparison to the more than 2,000 migrants interdicted at sea since October, said a US Coast Guard spokesman. "We do feel that

we have success in the interception of migrants (...) when you look at the magnitude of what we have to deal with," said Lt. Tony Russell, public affairs officer for the Seventh Coast Guard District in Miami. (March, US-Cuba Relations)

The US Coast Guard Service issued an appeal to Cuban "raftpeople" not to attempt against their own lives as a means to avoid being deported back to Cuba when intercepted on the ocean. The warning was issued after nine Cuban immigrants ingested pills upon detection by US authorities while attempting to reach the coast of Florida. Agreements between Havana and Washington stipulate that Cubans intercepted on the ocean must be repatriated. However, US legislation allows those who reach US soil to remain in the country and become residents after a year. (March, US-Cuba Relations)

Seven Cubans were found on Honduras' Caribbean coast searching for food and water on their way to the United States, officials said. The small boat carrying the six men and one woman landed on Honduras' coast in Puerto Cortes, 150 miles (250 kms) north of Tegucigalpa. The Cubans were being questioned by migration officials. (March, Foreign Affairs)

The US Coast Guard has repatriated 16 Cuban migrants after they were caught at sea trying to enter the United States illegally. The incident brings the total number of such repatriations to at least 230 this year. The 16 repatriations came after three boatloads of people were intercepted at the weekend as their crafts attempted to reach the south Florida coast, Coast Guard officials said. (March, US-Cuba Relations)

A Cuban couple, one of whom worked for Cuba's mission to the United Nations, sought asylum in the United States, sources at the United Nations said. The man and woman, who were not identified, walked into the US mission to the United Nations, across the street from UN headquarters. No reason was given for the defections. (April, US-Cuba Relations)

Three Cuban men swam about two miles to shore near Key Largo after their boat was intercepted by Coast Guard vessels and they jumped overboard. After navigating some dense mangroves near the Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, the men were taken into custody by the US Border Patrol. They will be processed at the Krome Detention Center in southwest Miami-Dade County, immigration authorities said. A fourth man, identified by relatives as Jorge Parrado, had been on the rickety wooden boat with the other three, but he got tired and was taken aboard a Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission vessel. Parrado likely will be interviewed by immigration authorities to determine whether he has a credible fear of persecution if returned to Cuba. According to his family, Parrado was once a permanent US resident and lived here for seven years, but he returned to Cuba and ended up serving 12 years in a Cuban prison. (May, US-Cuba Relations)

Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso said her government was waiting for a Cuban who arrived in Florida to file an asylum petition. The unidentified man entered the United States with three of his countrymen after fleeing the communist island in a small boat. Moscoso told reporters that for now, only one of the men had expressed interest in going to Panama, "and the documents requesting asylum are coming." "We have to review the case, but we're discussing it (now)," she said. Regarding the asylum request, a Panamanian foreign ministry spokesman told the press that "no written documents have arrived yet, and everything has been only verbal so far." (May, Foreign Affairs)

A group of US-bound Cuban migrants jumped into the ocean to elude Coast Guard crews and have tried to swim ashore in the Florida Keys, treading water until they tired and surrendered. The last holdout treaded water for nearly three hours before giving up and crawling aboard an inflatable Coast Guard boat. Six Cuban men aboard a small boat were spotted about 3 miles (5 km) off the upper Florida Keys. When Coast Guard vessels approached to prevent them from entering the country illegally, they jumped overboard. Three surrendered quickly but the others tried to swim away, Coast Guard Petty Officer Carleen Drummond said. (May, US-Cuba Relations)

Five Cubans who built a boat in hopes of sailing to Florida got lost on the high seas and drifted for six days before landing on an island off Mexico's Caribbean coast, authorities said. The men told Mexican migration officials that they had packed three days worth of food and other supplies and left the Bay of Pigs before dawn May 12. They probably would be returned to Cuba. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Grammy-nominated Cuban classical guitarist Rey Guerra, is asking for asylum in the United States, along with part of his family, so he can "seek new horizons." "I got tired of the paternalism and always being told what to do," Guerra said from his parents' home in Hialeah, west of Miami, where is staying along with his wife, Giselle Rangel, and the youngest of their four children, 6-year-old Gabriela. Guerra said the prevailing tendency in Cuba is "to use the cultural movement to promote a political ideology, and artists have lapsed into total inertia, because they don't see any other way to survive." The musician, who was born in Santa Clara in 1958, has given recitals and concerts at prestigious venues like New York's Metropolitan Opera, Washington's Kennedy Center and Moscow's Tchaikovsky Hall. (May, US-Cuba Relations)

Four Cuban migrants reached Keys shores near the Seven Mile Bridge, the US Border Patrol confirmed. Border Patrol spokesman Keith Roberts said Border Patrol officers responded after the four men turned themselves in to the Monroe County Sheriff's Office. They told Border Patrol officials they made landfall in the area of Mile Marker 47. (May, US-Cuba Relations)

A Cuban stowaway who endured -40 temperatures in the wheel well of an airliner has been allowed to stay in Canada. Víctor Alvarez Molina was detained after the jet landed in Montreal in December, 2002. He was later freed pending the immigration hearing. The Immigration and Refugee Board ruled yesterday there are sufficient grounds to allow him to stay in Canada, saying his life would be in danger if he were to return to Cuba. He served in the Cuban military. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Mexico suspended the deportation of five Cuban "raftpeople" that washed upon its shores, sent off course by ocean currents. According to a National Migration Institute (INM) press release, the Cubans submitted an appeal for refuge to avoid repatriation. (May, Foreign Affairs)

The Cleveland Hotel bar was the site of the landing of five Cuban migrants. After arriving by boat, the five men walked across the sand and made the bar their first stop in South Florida. Bartenders gave them Cleveland T-shirts, then called Miami Beach police, who turned the group over to Border Patrol. The men's names had not been released by authorities. (May, US-Cuba Relations)

Border Patrol agents took four Cuban men into custody after they were found on a beach, having survived a weeklong trip in a homemade wooden boat. The four men were found near Gulf Stream, about 16 miles south of West Palm Beach. They were taken to Krome Detention Center in Miami-Dade County for processing, officials said. It's only the second instance since October of Cubans coming ashore in Palm Beach County. Most fleeing migrants usually try to reach land in Miami or the Florida Keys, in part because the boat trips there are considerably shorter. (May, US-Cuba Relations)

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

Five Cubans attempting to illegally reach the coasts of Florida were intercepted by the US Coast Guard. (June, US-Cuba Relations)

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

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

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

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

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

Dominican migration officers detained five Cubans trying to reach Miami with false documents. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Abel Francis Acea, a Cuban artist allowed to fly to Toronto last month for an exhibit of his work, made his request for political asylum in New York state. He and four other Cubans who crossed the border from Canada into Buffalo, N.Y., are being held at a federal immigration detention center, where they face an uncertain future -- possibly even deportation, according to immigration officials. One of them -- an engineer who worked at the controversial Juragua power plant in Cienfuegos and was also headed for Miami -- has been held for more than three months and has already been denied parole. Those cases are indicative of disparities between South Florida, where the arrival of Cuban migrants is commonplace, and other border cities where many federal authorities are unfamiliar with policies specific to Cubans. (July, US-Cuba Relations)

Costa Rica gave political asylum to a Cuban nuclear engineer after she defected and requested the protection of the San Jose government. The Foreign Relations Ministry announced that after a careful study of the legalities of the move, asylum had been granted for Yoandi Sánchez Díaz. Sanchez Diaz argued that as an official of the Cuban Science and Environment Ministry she was being subject to measures by Havana to "restrict her fundamental rights and is subject to an ever stricter control and monitoring regimen." (July, Foreign Affairs)

Twelve Cubans aboard a floating truck crossed the turbulent waters of the Florida Straits and made it to within 60 kilometers (40 miles) of Key West, Florida, before being intercepted by the US Coast Guard. The men, who were repatriated to Cuba, mounted the Chevy, tires included, on empty metal drums that served as pontoons. According to Coast Guard officials, the Cubans attached a propeller to the drive shaft of the green vintage flatbed, which was controlled using the steering wheel. Coast Guard spokesman Ryan Doss

said in his years of service he has seen Cubans make the perilous crossing in rafts or small boats made out of refrigerators, bathtubs, surfboards and inner tubes, but never in a truck. (July, US-Cuba Relations)

Over 15 Cubans were detained while trying to get to Puerto Rico from the Dominican Republic in a boat. Dominican marine officers sent the group to the National Immigration Department to be interrogated. (July, Foreign Affairs)

A group of about 50 Cubans, one of the largest to arrive on Florida soil, came to shore in Key Largo, on a strip of beach near mile marker 106, behind the Ocean Reef Club. The US Border Patrol, which took the Cubans into custody, suspects the migrants may have been spirited to the United States by smugglers, said agency spokesman Cameron Hintzen. (July, US-Cuba Relations)

The 53 Cuban migrants who made it to the Florida Keys have been released into the community. The 53 were released from Krome Detention Center, a spokeswoman for the US Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement said. The 32 men, 19 women, one boy and one girl were spotted on Key Largo. (August, US-Cuba Relations)

A second group of Cuban refugees in less than three months was discovered off Mexico's Caribbean coast, migration officials said. The five men and three women were in good health when they were rescued from a small boat near Isla Mujeres, an island near the resort city of Cancun, said National Migration Institute spokeswoman Alicia Caballero. The Mexican Navy, which conducted the rescue, refused to divulge information on the case, including how long the refugees were at sea, where they were headed, or when they were rescued. (August, Foreign Affairs)

The men who converted a 1951 Chevy truck into a boat to sail to the United States were visited by police who hauled away the metal frame of an old tractor one had in his garage. No one was arrested in the police operation, said Marcial Basanta, one of the men involved in the unsuccessful attempt to emigrate to the United States. Eduardo Pedro Grass, who was also in the same group, said the officers thought they were trying to build another floating vehicle. The men denied that and said they are awaiting word from the US government on their applications to emigrate legally. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Argentina suspended two of its diplomatic representatives in Havana after a federal judge order their detention and transfer to Buenos Aires under charges of selling passports to Cuban migrants. First Secretary Eduardo Porretti and Councillor Jose Maria Aller were ordered to remain in the diplomatic mission until their repatriation is processed. (August, Foreign Affairs)

One of Cuba's male gymnasts defected at the world championships after the team competition finished. Michel Brito Ferrer planned to compete in the meet so he could travel to the United States and then defect, according to his uncle, Ramon Ferrer, who lives in Los Angeles. (August, US-Cuba Relations)

A second Cuban male gymnast defected at the World Gymnastics Championships at Anaheim, California, joining a teammate who left the Cuban delegation a day earlier. Charles Leon Tamayo joined teammate Michel Brito Ferrer, whose uncle brought Brito Ferrer to his Los Angeles home. (August, US-Cuba Relations)

Three Cuban athletes have defected to the Dominican Republic, where they were competing in the Pan American Games, an official said. The defections occurred during the international competition said General Fernando Cruz, director of the Dominican intelligence agency. Cruz refused to give further details on the defections. (August, Foreign Affairs)

A third Cuban athlete defected at the World Gymnastics Championships, joining two male teammates who left the Cuban delegation earlier this month. Janerky de la Peña left her team's hotel in Anaheim, attorney Luis Carrillo said. De La Peña was picked up by the uncle of teammate Michel Brito Ferrer. Teammate Charles Leon Tamayo also defected. All three athletes are staying at the Los Angeles home of Ferrer's uncle, Ramon Ferrer. The three are seeking asylum and plan to present themselves to US immigration authorities, Carrillo said. (August, US-Cuba Relations)

Eight Cubans who landed illegally in Jamaica have been refused political asylum and are to be sent back to their country, the security ministry said. "(...) They do not meet the criteria of the (United Nations) refugee convention. They are economic migrants. They are not political refugees," said Donovan Nelson, a spokesman for the security ministry. The Cubans landed at Whitehouse in Montego Bay after being at sea for two days. They came with documents, including their passports, but were placed in police custody. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Twenty-four Cubans, including an athlete who defected during the Pan American Games in the Dominican Republic, were taken into custody after their boat landed on an uninhabited island off the west coast of Puerto Rico. The largest group of Cubans intercepted in the island in years, their arrival reflects the growing use of this US commonwealth as a back door into the United States for refugees from Cuba. By reaching desolate Mona Island, a speck of American territory jutting out of the shark-infested channel that separates the main island of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, the Cubans apparently qualify as "dry-foot" arrivals, eligible to stay in America. (September, US-Cuba Relations)

US Border Patrol took more than two dozens Cuban migrants into custody after they came ashore on Coco Plum Beach in Coral Gables. (September, US-Cuba Relations)

Acclaimed Cuban documentary filmmaker Jose Padrón says he has requested political asylum in the United States to escape official censorship and harassment in Cuba. Some of his films were shown for only a few days because they presented a critical view of the regime, Padrón told the press. "They were constantly taking them off," sometimes on direct orders from Fidel Castro, the filmmaker said. (September, US-Cuba Relations)

A group of 27 Cuban migrants arrived on the Florida coast and US authorities are investigating whether they were transported by alien smugglers, local news media reported. The migrants were discovered by authorities on Boca Chica Key in Biscayne Bay near Miami, but no boat was found nearby, leading officials to believe that they had been deposited on the key by smugglers. The group was composed of men, women and children. (September, US-Cuba Relations)

Fidel Castro denied that his government makes it difficult for professionals with visas to emigrate to the United States. In remarks closing a conference of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, Castro denied US allegations that Cuba is failing to comply with migration agreements. "They say that Cuba is making it hard for doctors, computer specialists and other professionals to emigrate, but as far as I know, we have never signed an agreement to protect brain-drain," Castro said, the official Prensa Latina news agency reported. (September, US-Cuba Relations)

Two of the people who converted a 1951 Chevy pickup into a boat in a failed bid to reach American shores were granted interviews giving them a chance to get US visas, one of the men said. Ariel Diego and Luis Grass received letters from the US Interests Section inviting them to interviews. Such interviews do not guarantee being granted a visa. (October, US-Cuba Relations)

Another member of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba has defected, the fifth to do so since the company began its current tour of the United States. Adiaris Almeida, 19, who said in Miami that she was forced to change her name from Adriana when she joined the BNC, is expected to request political asylum in the near future. Almeida joins Gema Diaz, Cervilio Amador, Luis Valdes and another BNC member whom she did not identify. (October, US-Cuba Relations)

Nine Cuban migrants washed up on Smathers Beach, a half-mile east of the Key West Airport, in a small yellow boat with a two-piston engine, police said. The migrants, all men between the ages of 32 and 53, said their voyage from Cuba took 17 hours. Medics determined that the migrants were in good health, and officers searched their vessel for weapons or drugs before transporting the men to the Coast Guard base for processing. (October, US-Cuba Relations)

Cuban baseball stars Maels Rodriguez and Yobal Dueñas confirmed in a radio interview that they have defected with the goal of playing professional baseball in the United States. The pair, reported missing by Cuban authorities, surfaced on Miami Spanish-language radio station WQBA. Rodriguez, a 24-year-old right-handed pitcher, would easily be the best major-league prospect to defect from Cuba. Dueñas, a 6-2, 187-pound second baseman from Pinar del Rio, is a five-tool player and former Cuban stolen base champ. Dueñas confirmed he was suspended by Cuban officials for his relationship with the family of recent defector and former teammate Jose Ariel Contreras. (October, US-Cuba Relations)

The Bahamian government is mistreating asylum seekers from Cuba and Haiti by not giving them forms in their own language and by detaining their children for prolonged periods without much exercise and education, Amnesty International said. In particular, the organization questions a Bahamian government policy that provides Cuban authorities with the full names, addresses, photos, and dates of birth of undocumented Cuban immigrants, potentially putting these individuals at risk upon their re-arrival in Cuba. (November, Foreign Affairs)

A group of seven Cuban dissidents who fled the island in a makeshift raft have not been heard from since and are feared lost at sea, according to the Cuban Liberty Council. "They left in a homemade raft," said Luis Zuñiga, president of the Miami-based Cuban Liberty Council. "The seas are high, so you can only imagine." Among those missing: Bárbaro Antonio Vela Crego, the president of the January 6 Civic Movement, or Movimiento Civico 6 de Enero, who faced 20 years in prison for his opposition to the Castro regime, said Zuñiga. He and six other dissidents slipped away from the city of Alamar, east of Havana Bay. Their vessel was powered only by pieces of cloth patched together to form a sail and had no engine, Vela's wife told the Cuban Liberty Council. The Coast Guard had no information on the group and said no migrants had been repatriated to Cuba this week, said Petty Officer Carleen Drummond, an agency spokeswoman. (December, US-Cuba Relations)

The Argentinean government is studying the possibility of interceding with the Cuban government on behalf of renown Cuban doctor Hilda Molina so that she's authorized to visit Argentina where her two grandchildren live. The Special Representative for Human Rights at the Argentinean Foreign Ministry, Alicia Oliveira, met with Molina's son and promised to "help as much as possible" in the reunification of the family, reported the daily La Nación. "The system does not allow me to meet with my only child or hold my grandchildren – who only know me from photos and phone conversations" she complained in talks with the media. (December, Foreign Affairs)

A Cuban flight attendant, who came to the United States to testify against six countrymen accused of hijacking a plane to Key West, Florida, has not returned to his homeland. Abilio Hernandez Garcia apparently escaped his guards on December 12, one day after the six Cubans were convicted of hijacking the passenger plane. It was not immediately clear if Mr. Garcia has formally requested political asylum. The six defendants claimed the March 19 hijacking was actually a freedom flight undertaken with the crew's cooperation. Defense lawyers say the flight attendant's apparent defection would help the defendants in their appeals for a new trial. (December, Foreign Affairs)

After drifting for four days in their wooden boat, with only dry cake and sugar for food, Cuban dissident Barbaro Antonio Vela and eight men were picked up by a "Good Samaritan" 20 miles northeast of Islamorada, Florida, on December 13, according to the US Coast Guard and the Miami-based Cuban Liberty Council. They spent almost a week aboard a Coast Guard cutter before being flown to the Guantánamo Bay Naval Station. It was only then that news of their rescue started to trickle down. The Cuban Liberty Council called an independent journalist in Havana who delivered the news to the dissidents' relatives. (December, US-Cuba Relations)

## **POLITICAL AFFAIRS**

### **Cuban Communist Party, Youth Communist Union, Mass Organizations and National Assembly of People's Power**

The Cuban Communist Party (PCC) in the province of Sancti Spiritus announced that first secretary in this territory, Juan Antonio Díaz was replaced by Miguel Acebo Cortiñas. (June, Domestic Affairs)

Cubans marched, held ceremonies, watched special television programs and in other ways paid tribute to legendary leftist guerrilla Ernesto "Che" Guevara on the 75th anniversary of his birth. Around 100,000 people gathered in Santa Clara, the capital of central Villa Clara province, to honor his memory. Guevara, a physician by profession, was awarded an honorary doctorate by Havana's Institute of Medical Sciences. Fidel Castro attended a cultural gala held at Karl Marx Theatre in Havana. (June, Domestic Affairs)

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

The Cuban Communist Party (PCC) in the province of Villa Clara announced that first secretary in this territory, Miguel Díaz-Canel will be replaced by Roberto López Hernández. A report on local TV news recognized Díaz-Canel for his positive work in economic, political and social tasks during his nine-year term in the region, 155 miles from Havana. (July, Domestic Affairs)

Following a motion by the Cuban Communist Party's leadership during an Extraordinary Plenary Session of its Central Committee, Miguel Díaz Canel was promoted to the Party's Political Bureau. Also admitted into the Central Committee were Elizabeth Cámara Báez, Iván Ordaz Curbelo, Roberto López Hernández, and Marcia Cobas Ruiz. (July, Domestic Affairs)

The Plenary Session of the Communist Party's Provincial Committee in Holguín ratified the election of Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez as its First Secretary, at the request of the Political Bureau of the Party's Central Committee. (July, Domestic Affairs)

The sixth congress of Cuba's largest citizens' organization, the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), which boasts more than 8 million members, or 93 percent of the adult population, kicked off in Havana. Some 1,500 Cuban delegates and guests, along with representatives from 20 countries, are in attendance, according to the National Information Agency (AIN). Cuban citizens 14 and up register in the organization, which has an office on every street on the island, a total of 131,000 around the country. The CDRs have 8,114,200 members - 93.5 percent of all Cubans over 14 - according to the organization. During the debate, delegates presented information about the people's military preparation in order "to prevent an enemy (US) attack". Raúl Castro, Minister of Armed Forces, concluded the debate saying that it was a priority to strengthen military training in the island, and to reinforce "internal unity" among the population. (September, Domestic Affairs)

The National Committee of the Young Communists League (UJC) has made several changes at its top ranks. In a special meeting, Hassan Pérez Casabona was appointed Education Secretary at the national level, while Yoan Cabo Mijares replaced Hassan at the head of the Federation of University Students (FEU). Other appointments were made at the national and provincial level as well. (November, Domestic Affairs)

The Federation of University Students (FEU) will have a new structure which includes municipal and provincial councils. The decision was taken in light of an increase of registered students from all regions of the country. (December, Domestic Affairs)

The 10th permanent committees of the Cuban parliament are in session, prior to the 2nd local legislative body's general session this year. According to the agenda, committees on economic affairs, constitutional and judiciary affairs, assistance to youth, childhood and equality of women, and national defense, are meeting yesterday in the Havana Conference Center and Palco Hotel. There are also committees on international relations, health and sports, attention to services, education, culture, science, technology and environment and attention to productive activity. Sugar Industry Minister Ulises Rosales established strategies at the Peoples' Power National Assembly (ANPP unicameral congress) to lower sugar production costs to three cents per pound, in response to the international drop in sugar prices. The unicameral Cuban congress also agreed that most surplus workers receive technical updating courses or different studies, while continue to receive their salaries. (December, Domestic Affairs)

The second regular session of the Cuban People's National Assembly (Congress) sixth legislature began in the Havana Convention Center. In the last two days, congress people from the 10 congressional Permanent Committees reviewed the country's performance in all areas this year and gave their opinions about the 2004 State budget, which will be published. The congressional plenary is expected to call for intensification of the people's actions demanding freedom for the Five, a group of Cubans who were sentenced for spying in the US for the Cuban government. (December, Domestic Affairs)

## **Government of Cuba**

Juan Contino Aslán, the former National Coordinator of the Committees for The Defense of the Revolution (CDR), has been elected president of Havana's Provincial Assembly of People's Power, a position equivalent to that of mayor. (February, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba has fired four of six deputy ministers at the Economy and Planning Ministry in a major shake-up amid mounting economic problems and faltering recovery, government officials said. Local analysts could not recall when a majority of deputy ministers at a single ministry had been replaced in one fell swoop, and wondered if Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez would go too. The powerful ministry, which government members refer to as Fidel Castro's economic command center, coordinates plans and budgets for all sectors of an economy that is 90 percent controlled by the state. (March, Domestic Affairs)

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

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

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

"Self-employment is not an ideal option for the Cuban economy," said Juan Triana, head of the Cuban Economy Research Centre of the University of Havana. "Of all forms of economic production, it is the least compatible with socialism, as it is the one that most emphasizes individualism." Triana added that the economic reforms implemented ten years ago, including among others the legalization of US currency circulation and of self-employment to provide limited services, helped in the preservation of socialism and would have to be "reinstated" to achieve the desired economic growth that would consolidate the system. However, he excluded private enterprise and maintained that cooperatives are a more suitable choice for Cuban socialism. (July, Economy)

The Council of State of Cuba has removed the Minister of Light Industry, Jesús Pérez Othón from office. In its place, it appointed Engineer Estela Domínguez Ariosa who up until then had been vice-minister of the Iron and Steel industry, stated an official note. (October, Domestic Affairs)

The Cuban Gazette, the official publication of the Ministry of Justice, published in its September 12 edition a note from the President of the Council of State, Fidel Castro, accepting Daniel Yail Pérez Legón's resignation as Attorney General. The note is followed by the appointment of Guillermo Hechavarría Trujillo to the position. Both Council of State agreements, dated August 5, were not published in the Cuban official press. (November, Domestic Affairs)

Fidel Castro insisted his socialist system will survive him, characterizing as "idiots" those who believe otherwise as he feted shipwreck survivor Elian Gonzalez on his 10th birthday. "This revolution does not depend on one individual, or two, or three," Castro declared in a speech of more than two hours at a birthday celebration in the courtyard of Elian's school in the child's hometown of Cardenas. (December, Domestic Affairs)

## **PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH**

Cuba's infant mortality rate last year registered a national average of 6.5 for every 1000 live births: the lowest infant mortality rate in all of the Americas. Infant mortality for the year 2002 was among the third lowest in the history of the Cuban Revolution – with 6.4 in 1999 and 6.2 in 2001. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Developing a vaccine for typhoid fever is the most relevant achievement of the Carlos J. Finlay, Cuban Research Institute in 2002, Cuban official daily Granma reports. The Institute is widely known for its leading product: a vaccine for Meningitis B and C. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Japan and the United Nations have donated more than \$1 million to support AIDS control and prevention system on the island, considered by many international health authorities as one of the most effective in the world. According to a dispatch from Tokyo, the donation was channelled through the UN Human Security Fund and is aimed at reinforcing control and prevention of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD). (January, Foreign Affairs)

"Cuba has a lid on the HIV/Aids problem," said Byron Barksdale, the director of the American Cuban Aids Project, a non-profit organisation that provides humanitarian aid to the island. There has been no dramatic increase in HIV transmission in Cuba since the beginning of the epidemic, said Dr Barksdale at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Denver. Cuba's 3% infection rate is one of the lowest in the world. In addition, certain forms of HIV transmission that plague the rest of the globe are almost non-existent on the island. There is virtually no transmission of the virus through intravenous drug use, blood transfusion or to newborns at birth. The country now produces enough anti-retroviral medicines to supply the country's patients. As a result, the 25% predicted mortality rates for patients with Aids in 2002 were instead 7%. (February, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba has begun its annual preventive campaign against poliomyelitis. The campaign includes the vaccination of half a million children under 3 years of age. The Ministry of Public Health said that the 42nd polio vaccination campaign would be extended for one week. (February, Domestic Affairs)

An official from the Cuban Public Health Ministry (MINSAP) announced that a survey is being carried out in Cuba to determine the number of mothers that breastfeed. Pediatrician Pablo Carlos Roque Peña, coordinator of the MINSAP National Breastfeeding Commission, said the survey is being carried out by the Ministry's National Board of Statistics with support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (February, Domestic Affairs)

According to authorities from the Public Health Ministry (MINSAP), over 234 health technicians and professionals from the eastern Cuban province of Holguín are collaborating in 17 countries of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. Holguín province has a notable presence of doctors and technicians in African nations such as Gambia, Namibia, Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Lesotho, Mali, Eritrea and Burundi, and in the Latin American nations such as Honduras, Guatemala, Venezuela, Haiti, Paraguay and Belize. (February, Foreign Affairs)

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has allocated \$26 million US for a five-year project to strengthen Cuba's national response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The UN Development Fund (UNDP) on the island, principal recipient of the grant from the Global Fund, is responsible for administering and monitoring the initiative. Although Cuba's HIV/AIDS prevalence is one of the lowest in the Caribbean, with less than 0.1 per cent of adults living with the disease, the island is located in an area that has one of the highest infection rates in the world, and is therefore at risk from a rapid spread of the epidemic. (February, Foreign Affairs)

The Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have proposed Cuba as the cooperation center headquarters to archive information gathered in the battle against dengue fever. Dr. Patricio Yépez, PAHO and WHO representative on the island, made the announcement during the final session of a meeting in Havana's International Conference Center. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro highlighted the complete restoration and implementation of new services in ten of the capital's local health centers. This work is part of a fundamental overhaul of the Cuban health services already underway. Castro said that 16 other health centers in Havana and 36 in the rest of the country are currently being renovated and enlarged. (April, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban scientists have created an extract from the bark of the mango tree that they claim will help improve the quality of life. The new formula, named VIMANG and which has been presented by a laboratory in Havana, has antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, anti-allergic and neuro-protective properties, among other characteristics. According to Daniel Amaro González, researcher at Havana's Center of Pharmaceutical Chemistry, VIMANG is one hundred per cent natural and it can only be obtained from 17 of the over 200 mango species on the island. (May, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba is manufacturing the anti-retroviral drugs used in the triple therapy treatment given to HIV/AIDS patients, who receive them free of charge. Melvis Heredia Molina, director of NOVETEC Laboratories -- a part of the West Havana Scientific Center -- told Granma International that this year the company has plans to produce sufficient quantities of the drugs for 1,500 patients. She explained that to date, Cuba only has five anti-retrovirals registered (Zidovudine, Didanosina, Lamivudina, Estavudina and Indinavir), adding that they are working together with the Center for the Research and Development of Medicines (CIDEM) "so that this figure reaches 13." A combination of three drugs is used to fabricate the anti-AIDS "cocktail" treatment. (May, Domestic Affairs)

From the age of two months, breastfed babies are to be immunized with a Cuban vaccine (Hib) to fight B-type Haemophilus influenza, the bacteria that causes a significant percentage of meningitis, pneumonia and otitis cases and is responsible for the deaths of half a million children a year worldwide. Vincente Vérez Bencomo, a researcher at the Faculty of Chemistry of the University of Havana who developed the vaccine,

told the press that the product will be administered to babies at two, four and six months after birth, with a booster dose at 18 months. The vaccine is currently in the final registration stage with the State Center for Medication Control (CECMED) after a total of six clinical trials. (June, Domestic Affairs)

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

Fidel Castro attended a graduation ceremony at the Karl Marx theater in Havana during which more than 1 500 nurses received their diplomas. In his speech, Fidel Castro gave an overview of Cuba's health system and praised Cuban doctors and nurses abroad. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Fidel Castro said that Cuba is "speeding up" research on the human genome, which will insert the island in current international genetic programs. At a ceremony for the inauguration of the National Centre for Medical Genetics and the graduation of 202 Masters in Genetics (specialists), Castro emphasized that the country "is in a position today to step up research on the human genome as soon as possible." (August, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba has begun breeding scorpions to use their poison to make medicines to treat uterine, breast and lung cancer. The Cuban company Labiofam S.A. is combining scorpion venom with other natural substances to create a medicine that is used at Havana's Pedro Kouri Tropical Medical Institute to treat cancer patients. (August, Domestic Affairs)

The Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) accepted Cuba's proposal to turn the island into a collaborating center to fight dengue fever in the region. Dr. Jose San Martin, PAHO consultant on the theme, said the regional sanitary organization welcomed Cuba's initiative. Cuba's offer was made during the two-week 8th International Course on Dengue Fever held in Havana's Pedro Kouri Tropical Medicine Institute. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba will help establish a regional center for the prevention of AIDS and other sexually-transmitted infections in Africa. Under the auspices of the United Nations, Cuba will be responsible for the organization of the centre, which will be dedicated to training health care workers specializing in HIV-AIDS prevention. According to Yoire Ferrer Savigne, a Cuban medical expert working with the United Nations, the objective of the new center will be to do everything possible to stop the terrible AIDS pandemic that is sweeping the African continent. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban projections on the development of special software and the use of minimum-access surgery techniques are being presented at the First International Symposium on Neurosurgery, currently underway in the Cuban capital. The event, presenting cases of more than 15,000 patients from Cuba and other countries treated at the International Center of Neurological Restoration (CIREN), should facilitate an exchange information on the use of new technologies in neuro-rehabilitation. (September, Domestic Affairs)

Some 1055 new health specialists have joined the Cuban health services. In recent years, Cuban health-care services have seen a shortage of staff as well as of medical instruments. The new specialists are the first graduates from the Escuela Emergente de Técnicos de la Salud de La Habana, a project launched in 2002 at the request of Fidel Castro. (September, Domestic Affairs)

Doctor Mirta Roses, General Director of the Panamerican Health Organization, stressed the success of the Cuban health system, particularly the island's development of medical genetics. During a visit to the National Center of Medical Genetics, the international body official learned about recent Cuban studies on

Medical Genetics and said that such results must be shown to the world since they are based on solid humane principles. (October, Domestic Affairs)

According to Cuban Public Health Ministry statistics, after abortion was legalised in 1965 in Cuba, maternal mortality dropped from 120 to seven per 100,000 live births in 2000. The Statistical Profile of the Cuban Woman, published in 2000 by the National Statistics Office (ONE), reports that there were a total of 5.6 million live births between 1968 and 1996, and 3.2 million abortions. Last year, 21.5 abortions were documented for every 1,000 women between the ages of 12 and 49, and 49.8 for every 100 births. The gap between desired family size and the number of abortions practiced was pointed out by a survey on reproductive health carried out in two provinces by ONE's Centre of Studies on Population and Development. The study will be extended to the rest of the country with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). (October, Domestic Affairs)

Using a strategy that critics have called excessive but that some health experts praise as effective, Cuba has managed to control the spread of the AIDS virus more successfully than most nations. While the Caribbean's HIV infection rate is exploding and now is second only to sub-Saharan Africa, officials in Cuba say that only .05 percent of the country's population has been infected with the AIDS virus, by far the lowest rate in the region. Cuba's aggressive campaign against the AIDS virus involves universal treatment for those who are HIV positive. There also is an extensive outreach program that uses television advertisements and volunteers distributing educational materials and condoms to encourage safe sex and limit transmission. But the government also closely monitors the lives of those infected with the AIDS virus. Most Cubans who test positive are required to stay in a sanitarium for at least three months. Once there, they can leave only with the permission of the staff. (October, Domestic Affairs)

"We have four therapeutical vaccines in clinical trial in Cuba aimed primarily at cancer in lungs, breasts and colon," said Tania Crombet, specialist of the Molecular Immunology Center. Crombet, who participated in the 9th Oncology Congress that concluded in the Cuban capital, told reporters that there are also other studies begun, with hopes that they can pass to the clinical evaluation stage in the coming years. Current trends of immune-therapy in cancer, the use and development of vaccines, conservative treatment of some neoplasias and control of cancer, were at the center of debates at this event attended by some 300 delegates. (October, Domestic Affairs)

The experiences of Cuba in the application of homeopathy have been revealed in the 59th Pan American Medical Congress on Homeopathy, inaugurated in Havana. In the inauguration of the event, that gathers more than 250 delegates from 10 nations, including Cuba, was showed the efficiency of this therapeutic method in the control of bronchial asthma, diabetes mellitus, arterial hypertension, allergy, and other conditions. (November, Domestic Affairs)

A New Cuban vaccine has been released against "Hemophilia influenza type B", a bacteria that causes pneumonia and meningitis primarily in children up to five years of age. The technology to produce this vaccine, made from synthetic antigens, was jointly patented in 1999 by the University of Ottawa and the University of Havana. In statements to the press, Vicente Pérez, Head of the Chemistry Faculty's Synthetic Antigen Laboratory at the University of Havana, said that the vaccine is in the process of being patented in other nations and will begin to be used in Cuba in 2004. (November, Domestic Affairs)

Fidel Castro's scientists have been churning out an impressive line of genetically engineered products, from fast-growing fish to recombinant vaccines and cancer therapeutics. Biotechnology Havana, a big conference held in the Cuban capital, aimed to bring together scientists and businessmen as part of the country's renewed search for risk capital from abroad. One of the most promising drugs promoted is a novel anti-cancer vaccine developed by Canadian YM Biosciences Inc. and Havana's Centre of Molecular Immunology. David Allan, boss of YMB, says that the drug is evidence of a Cuban ability to "think outside the box" in approaching cancer treatment. A big goal of this meeting was to dispel the belief that Cuban biotech has prospered by developing knock-off versions of already patented drugs: a common complaint against the drugs industries of poorer countries. Cuban officials say their country enforces international

protocols, such as the World Trade Organisation's Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights agreement. (November, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban authorities have reported progress in the prevention, control and treatment of AIDS in the island. During World AIDS Day celebrations authorities indicated there are 3,969 persons living with HIV/AIDS in Cuba. (December, Domestic Affairs)

A Cuban study on eliminating any transgenic risk was at the center of attention by participants at the Science, Technology and Sustainability, underway at Havana's Capitol building. Carlos Borroto, Vice-Director of the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center (CIGB) explained that Cuba is promoting research on genetically-manipulated products and plants with emphasis on guaranteeing the elimination of any harm to human health, the environment and technology. For that reason, we have been doing research for 15 years without having yet released any product for its commercialization, said the Cuban specialist during the event, which is being attended by experts from eight countries. Meanwhile, Nephrology Institute delegate Sergio Arce said that the country's position as to cloning is that it should only be aimed at creating tissues to save lives, but not at human reproduction. (December, Domestic Affairs)

An infant mortality rate of 5.5 per thousand live births from January to the present was reported for Cuban mountainous regions. The rate was made known during the International Mountain Day, celebrated in San Cristóbal, a community in Pinar del Rio province. (December, Domestic Affairs)

## **SOCIAL ISSUES**

Access to reliable water supplies has improved significantly in the Cuban capital over the past three years, thanks to investment from Spain that has helped this Caribbean island nation overcome severe shortfalls. Although more than 94 percent of Cuba's 11.2 million people now have access to potable water, only 73 percent are connected to the central water pipe system, according to official statistics. Up to 2000, Havana, a city of 2.2 million, was plagued by serious water supply problems. Some districts totally lacked piped water, while delivery was unreliable in others, due to an antiquated, dilapidated system of water pipes. (February, Domestic Affairs)

The official daily "Granma" newspaper announced that the average monthly wage in the predominantly "civil state sector" grew by 4.2% last year to 262 pesos, which is equivalent to around \$10 according to the current exchange rate on the island. (February, Economy)

Despite the huge changes that the 1959 revolution made in Cuban society, some social problems have not been completely eliminated, including racial discrimination, Fidel Castro acknowledged. Closing an international educators conference in Havana, Castro said that "while science shows unquestionably the real equality that exists among human beings, discriminations lives on," especially among the island's poorest groups. Fidel Castro told a group of educators from around the world that education can create a better world by helping to resolve social problems, such as the nagging racial discrimination that still exists in Cuba. (February, Domestic Affairs)

During the Balance Meeting of the Ministry of Transport in Havana, Vice-president of the Cuban State Council, Carlos Lage, made reference to worsening conditions in the capital's public and freight transport services. "This year there will be no increase in the allotment of equipment or fuel to improve public and freight transportation services," pointed Lage. (March, Economy)

Havana ranked 52nd in a study of 175 countries performed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on human development. In the latest report, UNDP tied its analysis on human development to important objectives such as the reduction of the infant mortality rate, improvement of the mother's health, the fight against dangerous childhood diseases, the right to primary school education and gender equity. According to the report, " the proportion of hungry people almost tripled in Cuba, from 5% to 13%". (July, Domestic Affairs)

The Centre for Psychological and Sociological Research (CIPS) at the University of Havana has released a study on the lives and aspirations of youth in Havana. Focusing particularly on their daily lives, the study notes that most youths lack hope for the future. They expressed special interest in having their own businesses while career wise they seek "money-generating professions or ones that would allow them to work for themselves" like computers, languages and some traditional trades. Females favour stay-at-home strategies, taking themselves from the work force as a means of grappling with the crisis from the domestic front. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Renting a private home in Cuba will be more expensive and difficult after the recent measures taken by the government on the island, increasing taxes and toughening conditions on landlords. According to the new legislation a private owner may rent two rooms of his/her home to foreigners and non-resident Cubans and can only rent the whole house to Cuban residents. He must obtain authorization and pay a fixed tax which fluctuates according to city and zone and which may reach \$US250 a month per room in Havana, regardless of the number of days the room has been rented. (August, Domestic Affairs)

An investment process underway in the Cuban capital to improve water supply systems has benefited several municipalities with long-term difficulties in their water infrastructure. Authorities say that several territories with deteriorated pipes and other structural problems have already benefited from the program, which aims to provide the local population with regular water supply service. (September, Domestic Affairs)

Although the ration book entitles everyone to buy five eggs a month, they've become scarce in some parts of Cuba. That's the case in the province of Ciego de Avila on the north coast of central Cuba. Even though there are two large agricultural units near the town of Moron, no eggs have been available at the state stores where the ration books are required. (September, Domestic Affairs)

Scores of residents staged a rare protest in a Havana neighborhood when police arrived to evict a family that had built a home on a vacant lot without the government's permission. "Down with the eviction!" the neighbors shouted during the protest in western Havana. The eviction, coming amid a crackdown on illegally constructed or modified dwellings, was another reminder of the severe housing crisis in this capital of more than 2 million people. While much of Havana's older housing has grown dilapidated and uninhabitable, new-housing construction has slowed to a trickle. (September, Domestic Affairs)

A new opportunity was opened for over 35,000 Cuban young people, previously unemployed or not involved in studies. The young Cubans have been incorporated in an integral education course that will prepare them to access to higher education. The three-year-old program, created at the initiative of Fidel Castro, seeks to reincorporate thousands of young people into the national social life, most of whom are too young to work and gave up studying for different reasons. (September, Domestic Affairs)

Since the Cuban economic crisis became more intense and Spain's government restricted visas to immigrants, the number of marriages between foreigners and Cubans has skyrocketed. Only 15 Spaniards married Cubans in 1990, Spain's El Pais newspaper reported in 1997. That number shot to 670 by 1993 and to 1,190 by 1996, a year when 117,000 Spaniards of both sexes visited the island. Today, Spain and Italy each record between 1,000 and 2,500 such marriages per year, diplomats say. Mexico, Canada, Germany and Portugal also see a considerable number, they say. (September, Domestic Affairs)

Matches have not been available in Havana quota stores for the last four months and the prices on the black market are going up. "There are no matches in the dollar markets, either," said an employee of a grocery store in the Havana municipality of 10 de Octubre. Prices on the black market have gone up from about one peso to 1.50 pesos in the last few days. (September, Economy)

Cuba's high life expectancy, averaging 76 years, combined with an extremely low birthrate and a steady stream of young migrants have created a graying boom which will make it one of the oldest countries in Latin America by the end of the decade. With Cuba's social security system already straining under a stagnant economy, a significant elderly population creates challenges both in the immediate future and for a potential post-Castro transition to a market economy, experts say. According to Cuba's 2002 census 14.7

percent of Cubans are over 60, a number similar to the older populations of Argentina and Chile. But by 2010, demographers estimate that figure will jump to 18 percent, surpassing many countries in the region. By 2025 one in four Cubans will be over 60 and by 2050 an estimated 40 percent of the island's population will be in their golden years with about 156 seniors for every 100 children, presuming no major demographic shifts, officials said. (October, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban Vice-president Carlos Lage underscored the results of a project aimed at improving living and social conditions of sugar workers' communities based around sugar mills. The program prioritizes sugar factories that remain inactive after the restructure of that economic sector. (October, Domestic Affairs)

A governmental commission of architects from the Housing Institute is inspecting the technical conditions of houses in the capital. The municipalities with the highest levels of deterioration are Habana Vieja, 10 de Octubre, Centro Habana and Cerro. Deterioration levels are estimated to be at 80% in the residential sector of these municipalities. (October, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba is trying to adapt to the impact of its own generation of "baby-boomers" born in the 1960s. First, it was a question of providing enough spots in child-care centers and primary schools. Now, in the not-so-distant future, the pension system will begin to feel their weight. "When those born in the 1960s reach retirement age, the economically active population will begin to shrink, in absolute terms," said Otilia Barros, director of the Centre for Demographic Studies (CEDEM) at the University of Havana. The "demographic transition" process is marked by a plunge in birth and mortality rates. In Cuba, the tens of thousands of people who emigrate has also played a role. A study by Barros published by CEDEM states that between 2000 and 2050, the total number of people over 75 could grow by more than one and a half million. According to projections by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), by 2025 Cuba will have the oldest population in Latin America and the Caribbean, with 25.9 percent of the population over 60, followed by Barbados (25.4 percent), Trinidad and Tobago (20.5 percent), Uruguay (20 percent), and Chile (18.4 percent). (October, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba is no longer one of the world's top destinations for sex tourism after five years of relentless police crackdowns, travel experts say. But another trend has emerged: More travelers are using the Internet to find prostitutes in Cuba. And rights advocates say that computer-assisted sex tourism is troubling because it makes it easier for men to sexually exploit Cuban women and teenagers. Police enforcement has driven many prostitutes off the streets, and in some towns, few can be found at all. Prostitutes, increasingly fearful of going to jail, spend more time dodging police than cavorting with customers. "It's terrible. The police are everywhere," said a 17-year-old who was looking for clients in Old Havana. "I don't think Cuba ranks any longer as a prime sex destination," said Christopher Baker, an award-winning writer and author of Moon's Cuba Handbook. "The Dominican Republic and Thailand continue to be the top destinations. Cuba is now in the second tier." Still, some sex tourists can't stay away from Cuba. And via the Internet, they share information on where to find women, how to approach them, what to say and what to pay. (November, Domestic Affairs)

## **SPORTS**

The International Olympics Committee (IOC) has decided to postpone the accreditation of Cuba's anti-doping laboratory until the end of the year, informed José Ramón Fernández, president of the Cuban Olympics Committee (COC). "We don't understand why the laboratory will not be certified in Havana this April as promised. This decision is upsetting, disappointing and irritating," Fernández said during a press conference in the Cuban capital. Fidel Castro inaugurated the anti-doping laboratory in Havana two years ago. In November 2002, IOC president Jacques Rogge visited and praised the center. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Friends and athletes cheered Cuban champion high jumper Javier Sotomayor when he stepped onto the Olympic Stadium track for the first time in almost two years. Sotomayor was there only for a friendly competition with fellow Cuban Marino Drake, but the acclaim was appreciated by the former Olympic gold

medalist who retired in 2001. He also enjoyed beating his old rival Drake, Cuba's best high jumper after Sotomayor, by 10 centimeters with the bar at 2.10 meters. "Leaving sports left a huge emptiness in my life," Sotomayor said after competition. Sotomayor still holds the world high jump record of 2.45 meters, set in 1993. Drake is Cuba's No. 2 record holder, at 2.34. He announced his retirement shortly after having tested positive for steroids following a meet in Spain. The lanky athlete has long denied taking the steroid, and refused to talk about that painful period of his life. (May, Domestic Affairs)

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

Cuban shooter Eglis Cruz earned the first gold medal of the 2003 Pan American Games after winning the women's air rifle competition. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Olympic Committee President Jacques Rogge refused to throw out Havana's bid to host the 2012 Games - pitting the tropical capital against New York and seven other cities. Rogge said he was confident the Cuban capital's proposal would be as strong as any of the other cities. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba won their ninth consecutive Pan American Games baseball gold medal, 3-1 over the United States. Cuba coach Higinio Velez dedicated the win to Fidel Castro on the eve of his birthday. Ariel Pestano dedicated his efforts to his late mother who died in March. (August, Domestic Affairs)

The Pan American Games ended with Cuba's team finishing second in the medal count. Cuba took home 150 medals, including 72 golds. (August, Domestic Affairs)

With ten medals and the twelfth position among 64 nations, the Cuban delegation that participated in the 2nd World Tournament of Sports for Blind People, in Canada, returned to the island. Cuban blind athletes competed in athletics, swimming, judo and for the first time in goalball, a team event introduced in the island for that sector. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Yipsi Moreno of Cuba won the women's hammer throw title at the world athletics championships. Moreno threw the hammer 73.33m in the second round and no one could match the gentle giant, who won the Pan American Games title earlier this month. (August, Domestic Affairs)

The Cuban Track and Field squad had a poor performance at the World Championship in Paris, dropping down to ninth place in the medal standings. The Cuban delegation tallied one gold and one silver medal. Cuban sports sources regarded the performance as modest. Cuba had finished sixth at the previous World Championship, which took place in Edmonton, Canada. (August, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba blanked Canada 5-0 to win the regional Olympic baseball qualifying tournament held in Panama City. Both teams qualified for the 2004 Olympics in Athens. (November, Domestic Affairs)

Cuban sports authorities reiterated their interest in making the island an Olympic host. Cuban Olympic Committee president Jose Fernandez told the local press that the country meets every condition to organize the Olympic Games. Fernandez reminded that the island is one of the bidders for the 2012 Olympics and pointed out that next June, it will be known whether or not the country will become a candidate or be eliminated. (November, Foreign Affairs)

The Cuban anti-doping laboratory has received official certification by the Director of the International Olympic Committee's Medical Commission, Patrick Schamasch. Schamasch handed over the certification to Mario Granda, Director of the Sports Medicine Institute, who called the certification something very valued. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Prominent Cuban athlete Zoila Barro was awarded as best attacker of the Pre-Olympic Women's Volleyball Tournament of the Americas, where Cuba won the event. The three-time Olympic champion team beat the Dominican Republic at the Juan Pablo Duarte Sports Center in Santo Domingo, for the only qualification for the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. A modest ceremony at the end of the game included awards to Canada (third place), Dominican Republic (second) and Cuba (first). (December, Domestic Affairs)