

FOCAL SUMMARY OF NEWS ITEMS REPORTED ON CUBA January-December 2005

This resource is a compilation of news items on Cuba listed in FOCAL's monthly Chronicle on Cuba throughout 2005

DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

CATHOLIC CHURCH AND OTHER RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS

January 1: Celebrating the first Mass of 2005, before an audience of thousands at the capital's cathedral, Cardinal Jaime Ortega Alamino, Archbishop of Havana, called upon many Cubans to "banish hatred from their hearts." Attending the religious ceremony were the "Ladies in White," a group of wives and relatives of the 75 dissidents imprisoned in 2003. According to the prelate, "there are evils to overcome everywhere, even among us in Cuba," adding that "there is hatred in many hearts that should be cast out." (*EFE*, 1/1/05)

January 4: Revered priests of Cuba's Santeria religion warned of everything from environmental contamination to male impotence in 2005 as part of their annual New Year's predictions. Cuba and the world are also at risk of widespread disease, betrayal, and military interventions, according to the latest "Letra del Año," or Letter of the Year. "If mankind unites in faith, unites in prayer, unites in the constancy to work toward making things better, I think that these large-scale phenomena we've been able to predict will be less," Lazaro Cuesta, wearing a white cap and all-white outfit, told a news conference. "Not less in quantity, but less in pain and suffering, because we would be prepared to confront the problems," he added. The Yoruba Cultural Association, another Santeria group, made its own predictions, saying 2005 would fall under the sign of "Iroso Meyi" and would be a year of financial difficulties. The association recommended patience and respect for family members, and urged people to take steps to avoid robbery and protect leaders from attack. (*AFP*, 3/1/05)

January 12: The alternative Christian magazine "Espacios", one of a few independent publications in Cuba's mostly state-run media market, is closing after eight years because it has run out of funding and local church support. "We don't have the money to keep going," Joaquin Bello, director and founder of Espacios, told the press. The magazine touched on topics that are often rarely expressed in Cuban society. Espacios' recent topics have included Cuba's electricity crisis and criticism of the common practice of abortion in Cuba. One writer's critique of Havana's transportation system drew parallels between the city's crowded buses and the slave ships that brought ancestors from Africa. Another writer called for the liberation of Cuban political prisoners, while an editorial cartoonist commented wryly on the lack of material goods on the island. It became clear that the magazine would cease to exist in its current form after Bello met with Cardinal Jaime Ortega, lead bishop in Havana and the island's top Catholic churchman. The cardinal said the church wanted a publication "much more aimed at the laity," focusing mostly on events in the religious community, Bello said. (*AP*, 12/1/05)

January 27: Lamenting the recent billboard showdown between Cuba and the US, the Catholic magazine "Palabra Nueva" said that diplomacy should be used to bridge the differences between the two nations. The publication expressed sadness about a "social environment saturated with situations that put a dampener on the festive atmosphere this Christmas" and went on to say that "the possibilities that the exercise of diplomacy offers to establish bridges for dialogue should not be ignored." The magazine reminded that this year end was marked in Cuba by military exercises seeking to increase civilian combat readiness in the face of supposedly imminent US aggression and pointed that, "even on Christmas' Eve," the parliamentary sessions were broadcast on TV. (*AP*, 27/1/05)

February 23: The Cuban Catholic Church is distributing among its congregation fliers warning against the ills of alcoholism. Written in a FAQ format, the flyer declares alcoholism to be "a severe problem in Cuba, with major personal and social repercussions," the extent of which there is little awareness. (*Cubanet*, 23/2/05)

March 15: The President of Cuba's National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcón, criticized the treatment given by Miami airport immigration authorities to Cardinal Jaime Ortega. "It is an unacceptable act; the least that the US government should have done was to offer apologies and reprimand the officials who committed this act", said Alarcón. (*Notimex*, 15/3/05)

March 25: With a first-time blessing from Fidel Castro's communist government, a Roman Catholic Way of the Cross procession went through Havana streets on Good Friday. Cardinal Jaime Ortega, Archbishop of Havana, prayed for the fast recovery of Pope John Paul II together with hundreds of devoted Cuban Catholics who attended the procession in Old Havana. Every priest from this part of the Cuban capital petitioned the government for permission to lead the procession, unlike in previous years when only one priest would make the request, said Father Juan Miguel of the Christ of the Good Journey church. Catholic processions were also planned to take place on Good Friday and Easter Sunday in Havana's municipalities of Santa María del Rosario, Santiago de las Vegas, Jaruco and Bejucal. The government granted permission for the procession in five of Cuba's 14 provinces, the first time it has done so since the Castro-led guerrillas took power in the 1959 revolution. (*AFP, EFE*, 24/3/05)

April 1: In a rare appearance on state TV, Cuba's top Catholic leader informed the communist country of Pope John Paul II's health problems, paying tribute to a leader he called a "moral reference for humanity." For many, Cardinal Jaime Ortega's comments were their first word of the serious downturn in the pontiff's health. Ortega praised the pope for coming to Cuba, calling the visit "unforgettable." He said that the pope also spoke his mind about differences of opinion with Fidel Castro, calling for openings in the island's political system. John Paul also urged the world to reach out to Cuba. "He came to Cuba as a messenger of truth, of love, of hope," Ortega said. (*The New York Times*, 1/4/05)

April 3: Cuban Catholics gathered in Havana's towering cathedral for Mass, led by Cardinal Jaime Ortega, the island's top Roman Catholic churchman. Church bells had rung out on Cuba to announce the death of Pope Paul II, the only pontiff ever to visit the country. Ortega extolled John Paul's virtues and his message of peace, love and justice, saying, "The pope stirred humanity, just like Jesus did." The cardinal passed through the church after Mass greeting members of the crowd, some of whom kissed his hand. Ortega plans to celebrate a funeral Mass for the pope at the Havana cathedral on April 4, and then travel to Rome to

attend the pope's funeral there and participate in the conclave of cardinals that will elect John Paul's successor. Though he clearly did not want to mention himself as a candidate, Ortega did not reject the possibility that the future pope could come from Latin America. Granma, the Communist Party daily and official government voice, devoted extensive coverage to the pope's death. (AP, 3/4/05)

April 4: Fidel Castro, paying his last respects to a man he called an "indefatigable warrior" for peace and the world's poor, attended a funeral mass for Pope John Paul II in Havana Cathedral. It was only the second time Castro had attended a service in the cathedral since his 1959 revolution. Castro, dressed in a dark business suit instead of his customary uniform, was accompanied by members of Cuba's ruling Communist Party hierarchy for the two-hour ceremony. At the start of his funeral mass homily, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, Archbishop of Havana and Cuba's top Catholic prelate, thanked Castro and his government for the "heartfelt" way they had reacted to the Pope's death. State-run television has given wide coverage of the funeral preparations in Rome, presenting the Pope as a world leader who cared for the poor and opposed modern capitalism and the war in Iraq. The mass was also attended by the highest ranking government and communist party authorities, including the President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón, Vice-President Carlos Lage, Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, Culture Minister Abel Prieto and other officials. (Reuters, Radio Habana Cuba, 4/4/05)

April 7: "We have brought about a revolution to bring freedom and dignity to the individual, and I think it's insulting not to respect a person's right to believe", said Fidel Castro at the Havana International Conference Centre upon the death of Pope John Paul II. "Every revolutionary or politician should respect the beliefs and sentiments of individuals, whatever they are, because we have not fought to disrespect human beings", he added. (Juventud Rebelde, 8/4/05)

April 7: Fidel Castro said his government is willing to "support" the activities of the Catholic Church but only "legal and truthful activities." The leader also indicated that "in recent years tensions between the Catholic Church and the State have diminished." (AFP, 7/4/05)

April 8: A photo exhibition of John Paul II was inaugurated at the "José Martí" Memorial, in Havana's Revolution Square. It includes pictures of Fidel Castro's visit to the Vatican, 1996, and the Pope's visit to the island two years later. (Granma, 8/4/05).

April 19: Bells tolled in churches across communist Cuba after the election of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as pope. The first appearance of the new Pope Benedict XVI was shown live on state television in the country which until 1992 was officially atheist. Dozens of tourists gathered outside the main cathedral in Havana to hear the name of the new pope and a spokesman for the conference of Cuban bishops said "we are very happy" at the election of Ratzinger. (AFP, 19/4/05)

April 21: The Vicar of the Archdiocese of Havana, Msgr. Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, said that the new Pope, Benedict XVI, will not be an obstacle to the relations between the Catholic Church and the government of Fidel Castro. The prelate was convinced that with Joseph Ratzinger relations between the Church and the Cuban government "will remain at their current level," after the late John Paul II "raised them to a higher level." (EFE, 21/4/05)

May 8: Jose Miller, president of the Cuban Jewish community council, known as the 'Patronato' told the press how in the 60's Jews were mainly considered part of the rich middle classes whose land and goods were expropriated and nationalised by the communist government. The Patronato has its headquarters in the Beth Shalom synagogue, the biggest of the three in Havana. With the revolution, "came a style of life and thought that did not favour religious practices at all," said Miller, a retired surgeon now in his 80s. By the end of the 1980s, the Jews who remained believed they had no future, according to Miller who called it a time of "agony." But since the middle of the 1990s, there has been a new spirit of openness toward religion and the faithful have returned to churches and synagogues. In Cuba, he assured, "there is a social police that is not far from biblical." (*AFP*, 9/5/05)

May 9: Pope Benedict XVI has named a new bishop for central Cuba's Matanzas diocese in his first decision concerning the Roman Catholic church on this communist-run island, the Bishops Conference of Cuba said. The Reverend Manuel Hilario de Céspedes y García Menocal, great-great grandson of Cuban independence leader Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, will fill the post left vacant by Bishop Mariano Vivanco's death, the bishops said in a statement. De Céspedes, a priest, has been vicar general in the western province of Pinar del Rio. Born in Cuba on March 11, 1944, De Céspedes emigrated to Puerto Rico in the 1960s, where he studied electrical engineering. But in 1966, he entered a seminary in Venezuela to study for the priesthood. Ordained in 1972, De Céspedes developed his ministry in Venezuela for 12 years before returning to Cuba. (*AP*, 9/5/05)

May 30: More than 100 leaders of African-Cuban religions highlighted the force of spiritual freedom in Cuba during a national meeting with leaders of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC). Babalao Enrique Gómez Armenteros, from Guanabacoa municipality in the island's capital, rejected the anti-Cuban campaigns against alleged violations of religious freedom, and gave as an example the home temple that he directs, which has always received the support of the local authorities. Babalao Antonio Castañeda, president of the Yoruba Cultural Association of Cuba (ACYC), explained the work of this institution that was created in 1991. The chairs of the meeting included Esteban Lazo, member of the Political Bureau of the PCC and vice president of the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba, and Caridad Diego Bello, head of the Religious Affairs Department at the Central Committee of the PCC. Also participating in the events were members of the Councils of High Priests of Ifá, Oriatés, and Iyalochas, and representatives from the Abakuás, Ararás, and Vudú, among others. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 30/5/05)

June 1: Pope Benedict XVI expressed hope that a recent meeting in Havana "would give a new impulse to the tireless missionary efforts of the Church in Cuba." The Pope relayed that expectation in a message to the participants in the 1st Missionary Meeting of Cuba, held in Havana in May. The text was read by the apostolic nuncio in Cuba, Archbishop Luigi Bonazzi, in the course of the first meeting of the event. The conference attracted 141 delegate representatives from the 11 Cuban dioceses, including 110 lay missionaries, in addition to 23 seminarians, according to Father Raúl Rodríguez Dago, national director of the Pontifical Missionary Societies in the country. Resolutions reached by the participants included the decision to endorse the commitment taken by the National Meeting of the Catholic Church in Cuba in 1986. That commitment included making the mission central to pastoral work. Among those attending the Missionary Meeting was Cardinal Jaime Ortega Alamino of Havana. (*Zenit*, 1/6/05)

July 25: The Catholic community of Santiago de las Vegas celebrated the day of Santiago the Apostle with the inauguration of the recently restored chapel of the Holy Sacrament. The mass was presided over by Cardinal Jaime Ortega y Alamino, Archbishop of Havana. A procession carrying an image of the Apostle riding on horseback marched through the town's streets. (*Cubamet*, 25/7/05)

July 29: The World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Dr. Samuel Kobia started a pastoral visit to Cuba, responding to an invitation from the island's Council of Churches. Kobia's agenda includes meetings with religious leaders and visits to sites of social interest in several Cuban provinces. The World Council of Churches, founded on August 23, 1948 in Amsterdam, has its current headquarter in Geneva and assembles 342 churches in over 100 countries, as well as 400 million Christians from the evangelic and protestant faiths. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/7/05)

August 4: World Council of Churches (WCC) Secretary General Samuel Konia said that the US embargo on Cuba should be lifted immediately. Konia, whose visit at the invitation of the Cuban Council of Churches is winding up, said there is absolutely no justification for continuing the US embargo, and criticized President George W Bush's measures curtailing travel to Cuba. The WCC leader said his interview with Fidel Castro was very positive. During his meeting with Castro, Kobia expressed his concern about the need to build more temples in Cuba, as well as having access to the media in order to disseminate the mission of the church. Kobia also held a meeting with the Catholic Archbishop of Havana, Cardinal Jaime Ortega. (*Prensa Latina, La Jornada*, 5/8/05)

August 16: The global alliance Action by Churches Together (ACT) has been busy helping victims left homeless in the Granma region of Cuba after Hurricane Dennis ravaged the island between 7 and 9 July. ACT has been working to re-house approximately 700 homeless, many of whom continue to shelter temporarily in schools and other public buildings after their houses were partially destroyed in the violent winds. José Marin, the liaison officer for religious matters, accompanied a delegation of the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC) – a member of ACT International – to the region. In total 23,000 roofs in Granma province were partially or completely ruined by the hurricane. An impressive 7,000 have already been repaired. (*Christian Today*, 16/8/05)

September 6: Cuban authorities denied permission to hold several religious events related to the feast of Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre but authorized 60 processions across the island to honor the patron saint of Cuba. The Cuban Catholic Bishops Conference (COCC) said the celebration of the feast of the Virgin on September 8 would include a procession through the streets around the Church of Our Lady of Charity, in Havana, where Cardinal Jaime Ortega will celebrate Mass. On that same day, processions are planned in the Havana neighborhoods of Calabazar, Batabanó, Tumba 4, Wajay, Jaruco and Bejucal, among others. Processions are also planned on September 7-8 in the Dioceses of Cienfuegos, Santa Clara, Ciego de Avila, Camagüey, Bayamo-Manzanillo and Holguín, while church officials are still awaiting permission to stage a procession in Matanzas. The COCC said authorities denied seven permits to stage religious processions, two of them in the Diocese of Bayamo-Manzanillo, on the grounds that they were "not convenient." Five permits were denied to the Archdiocese of Camagüey based on the fact that "there was no tradition" of processions in some cases and that "a procession has already been authorized in the same municipality" in others. (*EFE*, 6/9/05)

September 7: The leader of the Catholic Church in Cuba, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, rejected as "truly outrageous" a Communist government official's charge that Cuban bishops served the interests of the United States. Ortega, archbishop of Havana and president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Cuba, said statements made by Cuba's envoy to the Vatican, Raul Roa, were "insulting." "Ambassador Roa uses disrespectful and sometimes offensive language never before employed in public by a Cuban ambassador to the Holy See," the cardinal said in a statement. In an interview with an Italian news agency, Roa said the Catholic Church hierarchy served Spanish colonial rule and, after the Spanish-American war of 1898, continued in the service of a foreign power, the United States. Ortega was most annoyed by Roa's remark that Cuban priests are closer to the people and the socialist work of the government, while some bishops are "closer to the people in Miami, the Cuban emigres." "His opinions about the Cuban bishops and their distance from the priests are unacceptable and false," the cardinal said. (*The New York Times*, 7/9/05)

September 8: Cuban Cardinal Jaime Ortega said that relations between the Catholic Church and the State are continuing "the status quo, but without there being any problem", despite his rejection of statements by the Cuban ambassador to the Holy See. The also archbishop of Havana celebrated a mass in the church of the Sanctuary of the Virgin de Regla, in Havana, on the occasion of the festivities of the Patron Saint of Cuba, Our Lady of Charity, which was celebrated on the island with religious services and public processions. (*EFE*, 9/9/05)

September 20: Protestant Christians in Cuba are concerned about new regulations on house churches that may restrict religious freedom. This month, new regulations concerning house churches in Cuba drawn in April 2005 will take effect. The new laws, called Directive 43 and Resolution 46, mandate that all house churches register with local officials to obtain permission to operate. House churches that do not receive authority to hold services do not have legal permission to operate. Cuban Protestant Christians are expressing concern because it is unlikely that all house churches will receive authorization to hold service before October. There are approximately 10,000 to 15,000 house churches in Cuba, according to Cuban Protestant pastors. The house churches are usually affiliated with "well-established denominations," acting as a satellite church for the main congregations. (*The Christian Post*, 20/9/05)

September 30: Cuban Catholic Cardinal Jaime Ortega expressed his concern about the situation of three political prisoners on hunger strike and asked them to put an end to that kind of protest. "They have all their right to protest, but not that way". "I understand their desperation and anguish, and that is why we should do whatever is possible to make them stop that kind of protest", Ortega made these comments after a ceremony in which the publication of Havana's archdioceses "Palabra Nueva" granted its annual awards. "If the Cuban authorities have access to these statements, I would also tell them that they should try by whatever possible human mean to feed these persons," Ortega added. The political prisoners on hunger strike are Víctor Rolando Arroyo, José Daniel Ferrer García, and Félix Navarro, sentenced to 26 years in March 2005. Ortega also said that the nomination of the "Ladies in White" to the Sajarov award was something "natural". "They have a very peaceful attitude in their demands in favor of their relatives (...) they protest in a peaceful and correct way", the cardinal said. (*AFP*, 30/9/05)

October 3: Elsa González, wife of political prisoner Víctor Rolando Arroyo, on hunger strike since mid September due to poor conditions and harassment by Cuban authorities in jail, said

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

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

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

November 8: Institutional relations between the Catholic Church in Cuba and the State "can be improved," if consideration is given to the fact that both pursue "the common good of society at large," affirmed the magazine "Palabra Nueva", of the archdiocese of Havana. Palabra Nueva states that any plans for the celebration of 70 years of relations between Cuba and the Holy See "should entail an improvement of relations between the Cuban State and the Church." (*AFP*, 8/11/05)

November 8: After several decades without erecting temples in Cuba, the Catholic Church began to work on a new building for the San Carlos and San Ambrosio Seminar School, in the outskirts of Havana. According to sources with the Archdiocese, the project is being financed with donations made to the Church, without involvement of the Cuban State. (*AFP*, 8/11/05)

November 17: Fidel Castro met with top leaders of Cuba's Roman Catholic Church to mark the nation's 70 years of diplomatic ties with the Vatican, the island's official media reported. The island's top Catholic churchman Cardinal Jaime Ortega, all of Cuba's bishops, and the Holy See's diplomatic representative in Cuba, Papal Nuncio Monsignor Luigi Bonazzi, were among church leaders who met with Castro and other government leaders, the Communist Party daily Granma reported. During a dinner hosted for the group by Castro, the Cuban leader recalled the historic visit by the late Pope John Paul II to the island in January 1988, and "expressed that the greatness of John Paul II was his wonderful way of seeing and understanding the problems of the world today," the newspaper said in a front page story. (*AP*, 17/11/05)

November 29: The Catholic Church warned that the campaign against corruption launched by the Cuban government must not only target the administrative ranks, but it must also entail structural reforms and the rescue of society's moral values. "A country that wants to be rid of corruption (...) must carry out structural reforms (...) to stop the cycle of vices and find remedy for this evil," the catholic magazine "Palabra Nueva" pointed out. (*AFP*, 29/11/05)

December 18: Eight years after Communist Cuba restored December 25 as a national holiday in a gesture to Pope John Paul II, there is not much Christmas spirit to show for it. Cubans have not taken to saying "Merry Christmas," which is not surprising since the atheist state had the holiday crossed off the calendar from 1969 to 1997. Most use "Happy Holidays" as their greeting and tend to see New Year's Eve as a bigger seasonal holiday. That's when Fidel Castro's government celebrates the anniversary of the revolution that brought him to power in 1959 and authorities put on street fairs with salsa music and cheap beer. This year, for the first time, authorities have allowed a choir of 93 singers from 28 Christian churches to sing Christmas carols in Cuba's main cities and broadcast a performance on state-run television. (*Reuters*, 18/12/05)

December 19: The catholic diocese of Guantánamo-Baracoa, regretted in a communiqué the detention of missionaries and youngsters who were taking part in a vocational workshop. Father Lambert Okere, (an Italian citizen) had been detained for his response to social workers that refused to sell him gasoline for his vehicle. The communiqué also denounced another case in Guantánamo, in the context of the Vocational Claretian Workshop, when several youths who were heading to the outskirts of the city to meditate were arrested by a highway patrol. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 19/12/05)

December 20: The Cuban catholic priest José Conrado called "shameful" and "scandalous" the acts of repudiation against "defenceless persons", in reference to the attacks against a dissident family in Palmarito de Cauto, Santiago de Cuba. Conrado considered it a "real cowardice to attack defenceless persons, who would not even raise an arm to defend themselves from the blows". "The government must take responsibility and forbid publicly this kind of activities," said the priest. (*CubaEncuentro*, 20/12/05)

December 25: The official Cuban radio station CMBF broadcasted a special Christmas worship in the morning and evening, sponsored by the Cuban Council of Churches. The night before all Catholic temples were packed with Cuban families attending the traditional Christmas Mass of the Rooster (Misa del Gallo). (*Monitor*, 27/12/05)

CULTURE

January 17: The 46th Casa de las Americas Literary Awards opened in Havana with the presentation of the jury and a speech by well-known Chilean writer Volodia Teitelboim. More than 547 works by writers from 20 countries, mainly Argentina, Brazil and Cuba, are competing for awards in fiction, theater, literary essay, literature for children and youth and Brazilian literature. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 17/1/05)

January 28: This year, authors from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Cuba won the Casa de las Américas Award in the categories of Best Novel, Theatrical Play, Children's Book, Literary Essay and Brazilian Literature. By unanimous decision, Cuban author and poet Marilyn Bobes' book "Fiebre Invernal" (Winter Fever) won the Award for Best Novel. 582 works of literature

were submitted for consideration in the 46 th Annual Casa de las Américas Awards. (*AFP*, 28/1/05)

January 28: Cuban authorities organizing Havana's annual international book fair declined to invite, for the first time, a Puerto Rican publishing company owned by the daughter of a moderate Cuban dissident. Maria Mederos, the director of the organizing committee, confirmed that Plaza Mayor, owned by Patricia Gutierrez-Menoyo, would not be attending this year's event, despite participation in several previous fairs. In an e-mail response to a query by the press, Gutierrez-Menoyo said organizers told her she was not welcome due to her activities at last year's fair, when she read statements - some of which were critical of the island's communist government - from Cuban authors not allowed to attend. "It's not my place to censor," she said. "My place is to bring together quality works by Cuban authors in one collection." Plaza Mayor, based in San Juan, publishes a broad variety of books, including several works written by Cuban authors living both on the island and abroad. (*AP*, 28/1/05)

February 3: Havana's International Book Fair opened its doors with an activity at the San Francisco de Asís Plaza in Old Havana. This year's fair is dedicated to Cuban writer Abelardo Estorino and Poet Jesús Orta Ruiz, known as El Indio Naborí. Brazil is the guest of honor and boasts a delegation of over 80 renowned intellectuals and artists. A record number of over 500 publishing houses from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe Australia and Oceania are attending the fair. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 3/2/05)

February 8: One of Cuba's most important Afro-Cuban singers, Lázaro Ross, died in Havana at the age of 79. Lazaro Ross, a self-taught musician, considered "the king of Yoruba songs", was born in the Cuban capital. Ross, who was nominated for a Latin Grammy in the category of Folkloric Music in 2001, was strongly influenced in his music by his religious beliefs. He made two important records entitled: "Yemaya" and "Chango". In 2002, Lázaro Ross received Cuba's Fernando Ortiz International Prize which is a recognition awarded to artists, researchers and specialists who have contributed to the social sciences, anthropology and culture. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 9/2/05)

February 13: The first stage of Cuba's Book Fair was successfully closed at the San Carlos de Cabaña fortress, visited by nearly 600,000 people from Havana for 10 days. In the closing ceremony, Brazilian Culture Minister Gilberto Gil highlighted his country's contribution of 7,000 titles and 18,000 copies of his nation's best literature, to enrich Cuban culture. The Brazilian minister invited Cuba to participate in the Rio de Janeiro Book Biennial later this year. Cuban Book Institute chairman Iroel Sanchez emphasized the fair's diversity of options, and announced next year's event will be dedicated to other two important Cuban writers, Nancy Morejon and Angel Augier, both winners of Cuban National Literature Awards. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 13/2/05)

February 14: Hundreds of artists from Holguin, the Cuban eastern province 743 kilometers from Havana, are preparing to paint the biggest outdoor mural in the country's history. Fifteen meters long by five meters high, in low and high cement relief, the work will represent the main heroic deeds that have occurred in this north eastern city since the arrival of its first inhabitants up to today. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/2/05)

February 17: The Cuban capital is preparing for 10 days of Carnival festivities set to begin February 26 along the city's oceanfront, organizers said. The fete will include parades of floats

and performing troupes as well as street dances and performances by popular artists, state-run media reported. Most of the activities will take place along the Malecon, Havana's seaside boulevard, where crews are putting up bleachers and reviewing stands that will stretch for some 3,000 meters (almost 2 miles) to accommodate spectators. (*EFE*, 17/2/05)

February 22: Harry Potter made the Cuban media but not the death of Guillermo Cabrera Infante, the world famous exile writer whose books are banned on the island because of his criticisms of Fidel Castro. Cuba's government-controlled dailies such as *Granma*, *Juventud Rebelde* and *Trabajadores* printed stories about J.K. Rowling's upcoming installment of the Harry Potter series or the Havana International Book Fair. But the newspapers, as well as government television and radio stations, ignored the death in London of Cabrera Infante, who left Cuba in 1965. Only the online version of the culture magazine *La Jiribilla* noted Cabrera Infante's passing -- in a four-paragraph story that said his writings were "unfortunately tainted with his stance against the Cuban revolution, which became a fanatical obsession." (*The Miami Herald*, 23/2/05)

March 7: After praising the achievement of the International Book Fair in Cuba, Cuban Culture Minister Abel Prieto launched a challenge to keep it open throughout the year. Extended to 35 cities for a month, the 14th Fair sold more than 4 million books and closed in Santiago de Cuba, 843 kilometers from Havana. The effort to increase the Cuban access to literature on its widest meaning should be maintained, as well as the boost and vigor displayed during those days, should be maintained, Prieto stated. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/3/05)

March 7: The 6th International Documentary Festival Santiago Alvarez In Memoriam closed in Santiago de Cuba with the announcement of the awards for which 80 works from 20 countries compete. Argentina brought the highest number of documentaries, followed by Cuba, Brazil, Spain and Mexico, and also productions from Algeria, Germany, Belgium, Bolivia, the United States, Colombia, Italy, Peru and Uruguay. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/3/05)

March 13: The president of the Jose Marti Cultural Society, Armando Hart, has called on Cuban intellectuals to scientifically develop the Cuban and Latin American philosophical thinking, the local media highlighted. Addressing the closing ceremony of the 31st Jose Marti National Studies Seminar, held in the Central province of Cienfuegos, Hart emphasized the need to carry out researches on humanism, justice, and ethics as well as work for the unity of the Cuban people. Hart, who is also director of the National Jose Marti Program Office, said his country is claiming the presence of people with higher cultural knowledge to deal with the new challenges of the scientific, political and social thinking in the region. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/3/05)

April 8: Some 500 films from 13 countries will compete at the III International low-budget Film Festival to take place in the eastern Cuban municipality of Gibara, according to organizers. Filmmakers from Mexico, Spain, Brazil, France, Argentina, Bolivia, Iran, Algeria, Russia, Italy, Australia, Finland and Cuba will compete in the categories of fiction and documentary. (*EFE*, 8/4/05)

April 18: Some 15 years after first trying to get to Cuba, UK musician Rick Wakeman has finally made it to Havana, launching a weeklong trip in which he plans to give three concerts in the Cuban capital. Logistical challenges such as shipping music equipment to the communist-run island have consistently created barriers that complicated the trip, the former Yes star told a news conference. "I tried for quite a few years (...) but there was always some reason I

couldn't come," said the keyboard player. "It really was an amazing feeling getting off the plane yesterday." Wakeman and the New English Rock Ensemble, or NERE, will perform at Havana's Karl Marx Theater, then at an open-air venue next to the Malecon, the city's famed seawall. The artist, who is scheduled to perform in Mexico and Costa Rica after his Cuba tour, declined to talk politics about the communist country, but pointed out he has turned down invitations to countries whose policies he disagrees with in the past. "I am here because I want to be here, and I want to be part of what Cuba is," he said. (*AP*, 18/4/05)

May 24: The 10th International Poetry Festival opened in Havana, dedicated to the 100th birth anniversary of late Hungarian writer Attila Jozsef (1905-1937). As part of the homage to Jozsef, his book "Pure Heart," translated into Spanish by late Cuban poet Fayad Jamis (1930-1988), was launched. Attendees at the event will have the opportunity of meeting with several Cuban and foreign poets, and attending a seminar on Puerto Rican contemporary literature and a colloquium on Portuguese poetry. (*Prensa Latina*, 24/5/05)

June 2: Pastor Vega, a Cuban filmmaker widely known for such films as "Retrato de Teresa" (Portrait of Teresa), has died. He was 65. His death was announced by Cuba's International Press Centre. Other films made by Mr. Vega during his 40-year career included "Vidas Paralelas" (Parallel Lives) and "Las Profecías de Amanda" (Prophecies of Amanda). Mr. Vega was married to Cuban actress Daisy Granada, with whom he also worked as a theatre director. (*Globe and Mail*, *EFE*, 2,10/6/05)

June 4: Cuban actor and playwright Alberto Pedro passed away in Havana, the National Council for the Theatrical Arts told the press. Alberto Pedro wrote some of the plays that helped define the Cuban theatre of the 80s and 90s including, among others, "Manteca", "Delirio Habanero" and "Weekend en Bahía". (*EFE*, 4/6/05)

June 6: The 4th International Congress on Culture and Development kicked off in Havana with the participation of some 500 national and foreign delegates. The delegates to the event will analyze cultural policies, diversity and heritage. The forum will be divided into six working groups, in which participants will analyze folklore, popular culture, neoliberal policies, diversity, gender, race and minorities, as well as the role of heritage and culture regarding tourism. Foreign figures attending the meeting include US actor Danny Glover and political scientist James Cockcroft, Italian novelist Valerio Massimo Manfredi, Venezuelan narrator Luis Brito and Brazilian actress Leticia Spiller, among others. Among the Cubans are Roberto Fernandez Retamar, Lisandro Otero, Marta Arjona, Miguel Barnet, Julio Garcia Espinosa, Reynaldo González, Eduardo Heras, Eusebio Leal, Rogelio Martinez Fure, Eliades Acosta and Desiderio Navarro. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 6/6/05)

June 9: After four days of intense debates and reflections, the 4th Congress on Culture and Development wound up in Havana with the conviction that "capitalism is responsible for the planet's destruction." The final agenda included Networks and Resistance, Role of Cinema, Television and Other Media in Culture, History and Memory for a Diverse Cultural Future, and others. The closing panel tackled Contemporary Anti-capitalist Thinking, with the participation of Argentinean Atilio Boron, Belgian Francois Houtart, American James Cockcroft and Brazilian Maria Clavatta Franco. During debates at the Conference, the word "destruction" was associated to the International Monetary Fund, neoliberalism, discrimination, marginalization and other expressions linked to the US system. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/6/05)

June 14: Juan Antonio Picasso, a Cuban mulatto descendant of Pablo Picasso's grandfather, opened an exhibition of 15 watercolors at a Havana gallery. "I'm proud to belong to the family of a great painter, the greatest of the 20th century," the budding artist said. "At times the name is a burden, though," the 30-year-old bank clerk added. His great-great-grandfather was Francisco Picasso Guardeno, who vanished in 1864 from Malaga, Spain, leaving behind his wife and four children, including Maria, the great artist's mother. Like many Spaniards at the time, Francisco Picasso headed for Cuba, fell in love with the daughter of freed slaves, settled down and started another family. His descendants had no clue they were related to Pablo Picasso until Cuban historian Barbara Mejides found the link in 1998, finding members of the black branch of the family who bore an amazing resemblance to the artist. A documentary film ``The Black Picassos'' further established the connection. (*The New York Times*, 14/6/05)

July 8: Air Supply is performing for two nights in Cuba, adding the communist country to a list of exotic venues including North Vietnam, Lebanon and mainland China. Vocalist Russell Hitchcock said the rock group produces music that is able to transcend language. "We're always very excited to take our music to places we've never been before," he said at a news conference in Havana. Cuba invited Air Supply to the island, indicating a new pattern of encouraging rock and pop music in a country where rockers were once chastised for having long hair. (*Canadian Press*, 9/7/05)

July 13: Cuban Pianist Harold Lopez-Nussa, was awarded First Prize in the "Piano Soloist Contest", as part of the 29th Montreal International Jazz Festival, Canada. The second prize went to the American Max Haymer, followed by Philippe Baden Powel de Aquino, from Brazil, and Nial Djuliarso, from Indonesia. The Montreal International Jazz Festival has been internationally recognized for its quality and the variety of its programming. (*A/N*, 13/7/05)

July 13: Lizette Vila, the only Cuban among the 999 women from 150 countries collectively nominated for this year's Nobel Peace Prize, told the press that as long as diversity is viewed in terms of "otherness", "there can be no harmony, and exclusion will continue to exist." Nearly 20 years ago, Vila began working in Cuba with the disabled, transvestites, people living with HIV and alcoholics. One of Vila's best known works as a filmmaker is the documentary "Y hembra es el alma mía" (And My Soul is Female), a ground-breaking exploration of the lives of transsexuals and transvestites in Cuba. She has won two Coral Prizes and two critics' awards at the Havana Festival of New Latin American Cinema. Vila has also represented the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba on a UN special commission on the legal and social rights of women from 1996 to 2002. The campaign, "1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005", was launched in 2003 at the initiative of Ruth-Gaby Vermot-Mangold, a member of the Swiss Parliament and the Council of Europe, with the support of Swisspeace (the Swiss Peace Foundation). It has since earned the backing of a worldwide network of organisations, including a number of United Nations agencies. (*IPS*, 13/7/05)

July 20: In Cuba, a small and poor nation proud of having produced a disproportionate number of acclaimed classical dancers, the path toward tutu and toe-shoes on a Parisian or New York stage begins early, with students as young as 4 receiving instruction at one of several "baby-ballet" schools. Cubans's passion for classical ballet has been fed by the National School of the Arts - created after the triumph of the 1959 revolution - and by the success of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba, led by venerable lead dancer and choreographer Alicia Alonso. Cuban ballet stars, and others, took their first steps under the tutelage of Cuba's Centro ProDanza, founded in 1988 under the direction of Laura Alonso, daughter of Alicia and

Fernando Alonso. ProDanza operates from an impressive academy in Havana's Vedado neighborhood as well as in a renovated tobacco factory in the rundown district of Marianao, where locals were initially skeptical about the project. Today, more than 500 children and adolescents are now studying classical ballet and contemporary dance at the Marianao facility. (EFE, 20/7/05)

August 6: Ibrahim Ferrer, the mild-mannered singer of the Buena Vista Social Club group that took him from shining shoes to world fame late in life, died in Havana, his manager said. He was 78. The Grammy winner known for his trademark cap and gray mustache died of multiple organ failure after returning ill from a European tour, manager Daniel Florestan said. He was lifted from obscurity by the Grammy-winning 1997 Buena Vista Social Club album recorded by a group of vintage Cuban musicians brought together by Texas guitarist Ry Cooder. Ferrer launched a solo career and released records in 1999 and 2003, winning another Grammy and two Latin Grammys, including one in 2000 for best new artist at the age of 72. During his latest tour in Europe, which took him to the Montreux Jazz Festival, Britain, the Netherlands, Austria, France and Spain, Ferrer sang a collection of boleros he was recording and planned to release next year. (Reuters, 7/8/05)

August 7: Noel Nicola, one of the founders of modern Cuban trova music, died in Havana, the island's state-run media reported. He was 58. Newspapers did not state the cause of death, saying only that the singer and composer passed away. Nicola, who was born in the Cuban capital October 7, 1946, came from a family of musicians. He was composing songs by the time he was 13 years old. His first onstage performance came in 1968, next to Cuban greats Silvio Rodriguez and Pablo Milanés at Havana's Casa de las Americas. The trio and several others founded the modern Cuban trova movement. Modern Cuban trovas recall American protest songs of the 1960s and 1970s that focused attention on social problems through musical storytelling. Among Nicola's most well-known songs are "Por la vida juntos," or "For Our Life Together," and "Es más, te perdono," or "Furthermore, I forgive you." Nicola performed in more than 30 countries in Europe, Africa, and North and South America. He also spent some of his time composing music for movies and the theater. (AP, 8/8/05)

August 23: Visiting Havana for two concerts, member Mick Huncknall of the British rock group "Simply Red" described Cuba as "a unique country in the world." Huncknall, the band's vocalist and composer, said he was surprised by the lack of commercial ads along Havana's streets. "It's different to the rest of the world, where all the cities seem to be the same," he added. Simply Red is in Cuba to shoot and record a DVD at the Great Theater of Havana. (A/N, 23/8/05)

August 28: While performing in Havana, Simply Red front man Mick Hucknall was forced to defend himself when a crazed fan jumped on stage and attacked him. Hucknall was performing when a man ran on to the stage and tried to punch him, he fought back and ended up pushing the attacker into the orchestra pit. The show was then ended and police arrested the man. Hucknall's manager Ian Grenfell commented: "It was bizarre". "What is so worrying is that we don't know what the man's intentions were. He was a Cuban American in his twenties and he stormed the stage and tried to attack Mick." (Sound Check Music, 1/9/05)

September 11: The well known Cuban composer and conductor, Manuel Duchesne Cuzán, one of the mainstays of the symphonic movement on the island, died of cancer in Havana at

the age of 72. He was one of the founders of the National Symphonic Orchestra in 1960, which he directed for more than two decades. (*Granma*, 11/9/05)

September 15: Actors from 16 countries are attending XII International Theater Festival in Havana. Participating countries include Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Puerto Rico, Germany, Spain, Italy, France, Belgium, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Greece, Switzerland, South Korea and Cuba. Twenty-two facilities and 17 alternative places host the 195 scheduled functions throughout the city. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/9/05)

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

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

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

November 11: The 18th edition of the Cuban Festival of African roots, Wemilere 2005, will honor the Republic of Mali and late Cuban singer and twice Grammy nominee, Lazaro Ross. The Festival, slated in Guanabacoa, 7 miles from Havana, will gather more than 200 musicians, dancers, researchers, sculptors and painters from different countries. Wemilere, which means Orisha celebration in the Yoruba language, aims to preserve and promote African-Cuban identity and culture. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/11/05)

November 14: La Villa de San Cristobal de La Habana, Havana's full name, is preparing to celebrate the 486th anniversary of its founding with a huge effort to clean up and rebuild after Hurricane Wilma spawned the worst flooding of its long history. Once known as the "Pearl of the Caribbean," this island's main city with its 2.2 million inhabitants is shaking off the effects of the hurricane. Most of the coast-hugging road is already passable to pedestrians and Havana residents can once again stroll along the Malecon for a breath of fresh air during the long blackouts suffered almost daily by a large part of the city. Any good tour of the Malecon must end, or begin, in Old Havana, the heart of the city and its main attraction. Designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1982, Old Havana contains more than 3,000 buildings of historic or architectural interest within its 142 hectares (325 acres). Many Havana residents are sure to be present at midnight on November 15 on the Plaza de Armas to commemorate the founding of the city. There, they will pass three times around the plaza's high-sacred ceiba tree, throw a few coins into the air and ask the city's patron, St. Christopher, to grant them a wish. Among those in attendance at the long-standing ceremony will be Eusebio Leal, the city

historian and the moving force behind the recovery of old central Havana, who says that the city "is a piece of the memory of Cuba, of the Americas and the world." (*EFE*, 14/11/05)

December 4: Inside the decades-old Teatro Mella in the bustling Vedado neighborhood, 19 photos of jazz legend Dizzy Gillespie greeted visitors and announced that Cuba remains a jazz mecca. The exhibit's scenes of Gillespie in Cuba were a fitting backdrop for Havana's 22nd annual International Jazz Festival: The island's musicians, along with Canadian, Brazilian, Argentine and other artists, sought to emulate the legendary bandleader. They delivered an impressive series of concerts dedicated to keeping jazz alive in a country where tough living conditions make performing, recording and touring difficult. The opening gala at the Mella, featuring a big band of Cuban performers, set the festival's tone with Afro-Cuban versions of standards such as "Fly Me to the Moon", "Thank You Very Much" and "Embraceable You". The band's blaring horns, thundering percussion and improvisational solos made a highlight of a Spanish version of "A Night in Tunisia", a song Gillespie popularized. (*Sun Sentinel*, 5/12/05)

December 6: The 27 th New Latin American Film Festival kicked off in Havana with a gala event in the Charles Chaplin theatre and the words of event organizer Alfredo Guevara, who called the gathering a festival of friendship, art and intelligence. Welcoming participants, Guevara spoke of a new era for Latin American cinematic art, tracing the roots of this new vitality back four decades to the Viña del Mar Film Festival in Chile and the Mérida Film Festival in Venezuela. Among those present at the gala opening were Cuban Culture Minister Abel Prieto; Omar Gonzalez, president of the Cuban film institute (ICAIC); and writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who is also the president of the Latin American New Film Foundation. The festival, with 103 feature films, documentaries and animated films in competition, was officially inaugurated with the Argentine movie "Iluminados por el fuego", by director Tristan Bauer. (*Granma*, 7/12/05)

December 8: Those crazy about cinema wait all year for Havana's international film festival, which brings movies from around Latin America and the world to some 20 screens in the capital in December. The festival serves as a window to the rest of the globe for those living on an island where few get the opportunity to travel and television programming is run by the state. Many Cubans even save up vacations days to watch a half a dozen films per day at the festival, and make long lines in front of movie theaters. "I'm an economist, but I love the movies and took off time to be here," Jose Luis Martinez said outside the Payret Theater across the street from Havana's historic Capitol Building. "I'm going to see as many movies as I can, probably about 40." The theater seats aren't that comfortable, and there's no extra butter for the hardly fresh popcorn sold outside. But with tickets selling for just two Cuban pesos per film -- about 10 US cents -- Cubans go to the movies in droves. More than 80 feature-length films, including documentaries and animated movies, will compete in the International Festival of New Latin American Cinema. Most were produced in Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and Cuba, but European flicks and independent films from the United States also are shown. (*AP*, 8/12/05)

December 14: Cuba hasn't exactly been tolerant of homosexuality. In the late 1960s, Cubans were sent to labor camps for being gay, with homosexuality derided as an illness of the capitalist past. Even today, Cuban transvestites are sometimes detained and threatened with prison. But a new tolerance over the past decade has led to what many believed they would never see on the island: an exhibit by Robert Mapplethorpe, the controversial American photographer known for his homoerotic images. The "Sacred and Profane" exhibit, which

opened at a recently restored gallery in the heart of Old Havana, features 48 photographs spanning Mapplethorpe's career. The exhibit doesn't include Mapplethorpe's roughest images. Parliament Speaker Ricardo Alarcón, one of Cuba's highest ranking officials said Mapplethorpe "achieves the transmission of a purely artistic message and sense." "Frankly, this really doesn't strike me as a sexual exposition," he told the press. "Nudity is found in cultures dating much further back than the United States or Cuba. Classicism is full of the nude human body." Several Cuban artists have started tackling some of Mapplethorpe's themes in the last decade, including Rene Peña and Eduardo Hernández Santos. Peña is among a dozen photographers with an exhibit called "Descartes" opening in a Cuban gallery. (*The New York Times*, 14/12/05)

December 27: Cuban publishing houses are closing 2005 with an increase in the number of publications, which include local, national and world authors. In statements to the press, the vice president of the Cuban Book Institute, Edel Morales, highlighted the development achieved by national publishing houses such as Letras Cubanas and Ciencias Sociales. Morales noted the outstanding work of Arte y Literatura, which keeps pace with international contemporary literature, and Gente Nueva, which publishes works in great demand by children and youngsters. (*A/N*, 27/12/05)

December 27: Cuba honored five artists, including singer-songwriter Pablo Milanés and performer Rosita Fornés, with its 2005 National Music Awards. The prizes were handed out at a gala in Havana's Amadeo Roldan theatre. Awards also went to pianist Frank Fernández, musicologist Maria Antonieta Henríquez and choral director Cuca Rivero. Performing at the event were guitarist Pancho Amat and his El Cabildo del Son group, opera soprano Bárbara Llanes, pianist Pura Ortiz, the Children's Choir, the National Choir of Cuba and the National Symphony Orchestra. The evening also featured honoree Milanés teaming up with singer-songwriter Carlos Varela on their respective compositions "Días de gloria" and "Habáname". (*AP, Prensa Latina*, 28/12/05)

December 28: Cuba's film industry is planning to make 10 feature films, seven joint productions with Latin America, and 15 documentaries next year, showing an increase in production from 2005. The figures mark a gradual recovery in the Institute of Art and Film Industry (ICAIC), an infrastructure that was severely affected by economic depression in the 90's. Prospects for 2006 include the premier of a film by Cuban filmmaker Rigoberto López about the life of Benny More, a legendary figure of Cuban music. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/12/05)

December 30: Cuban poet Jesús Orta Ruiz, 83, popularly known as Indio Naborí, died in Havana. Orta Ruiz, who wrote an extensive number of poems marked by strong social denunciations, had been conferred the National Literature Award. He was born on the outskirts of Havana on September 30, 1922. His parents were poor farmers who cultivated their Spanish traditions and folklore in rural areas. This marked most of his poems. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/12/05)

DISSIDENTS

(See also, Foreign Affairs and US-Cuba Relations/ Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba, Diplomatic Activities and Statements)

Activities and Statements

January 10: The number of political prisoners held in Cuba dropped slightly over the past six months to 294, a veteran rights activist reported. The decline from 317 prisoners six months ago and 315 a year ago is not significant enough to mark a change in the government's policy toward jailed dissidents, said activist Elizardo Sanchez, who heads the Havana-based Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation. "The fact that the number of political prisoners has stayed stationary during the last few years reflects the highly repressive position that the government of Cuba maintains," Sanchez wrote in the non-governmental commission's latest report, which was distributed to international journalists. Among those named on the commission's list are all 75 dissidents arrested in a roundup on the opposition in spring 2003 even though 14 of them have since been freed on parole for health reasons. Sanchez said those 14 remained on the list because they were not released unconditionally and could be returned to custody if they violate parole. (*AP*, 10/1/05)

January 11: A moderate group from the Cuban domestic dissidence stated that both the Cuban government and the US Administration are contributing to a "dangerous" political situation and pointed to "persisting lack of direction" in the island's economic affairs. A report released in Havana by the umbrella organization Arco Progresista examines the Cuban situation on different fronts and concludes that "a lack of direction is the only certainty the Cuban people has." According to the report, subscribed by the organization's spokesman, Manuel Cuesta Morúa, the US policy towards Cuba "successfully" seeks to "wear out" the Cuban government and "gradually lay the groundwork for US hegemony over Cuba." (*EFE*, 11/1/05)

January 18: A group of young former university students requested guarantees from the Cuban authorities to discuss with higher education students a project to restore University autonomy. Entitled "University Students without Borders," the project developed by the illegal Movement of Cuban Youths for Democracy (MCJD) proposes a plebiscite on the issue to be held in higher learning institutions. The director of the so-called "Center for Alternative Studies," Rolando Rodríguez, said that a "reassessment" of the project was submitted last July to the Ministries of Justice and Education, as well as the State Council. (*Notimex*, 18/1/05)

January 19: A group of Cuban dissidents made public the draft of a motion to be presented to a UN panel which calls the state of human rights on the communist island "highly deficient." The document entitled "Citizens Motion on Human Rights in Cuba - 2004" was presented to journalists by the opposition group Corriente Martiana, which takes its name from Cuban independence hero Jose Martí. The proposal, to be presented to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, recommends an amnesty for Cuban political prisoners and national mechanisms to "promote, protect and supervise" the respect for human rights, among other things. Dissident Moisés Leonardo Rodríguez, one of the signatories to the document, said that the document, which was also sent to the Cuban Council of State, was written by a group of Cuban citizens with various political stances who are seeking a solution to the island's human rights problem. The motion proposes, among other things, a reform of the current Constitution and the laws regarding the restriction or elimination of the rights to freely gather, demonstrate and associate, and it calls for the legal recognition of alternative political institutions. (*EFE*, 19/1/05)

January 19: Cuban dissident groups have called on the European Union (EU) to formalize a dialogue with opposition groups on the island. The request was made by the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL) and made public by top dissident and architect of the Varela

Project Oswaldo Payá . Payá stressed the need to maintain official contacts with European diplomats in order to "promote peaceful change towards democracy". The request was made ahead of a meeting of EU foreign minister on 31 January to reconsider diplomatic sanctions imposed on Cuba in the wake of a crackdown on dissidence in March 2003. (*WMRC Daily Analysis*, 20/1/05)

February 13: The reorganization process of the dissident organization Confederation of Democratic Workers of Cuba (CTDC) ended in Havana, a spokesman of the organization reported. "All plans encompassing the current year's agenda were discussed and approved during the first month of this year", Niurka H. Martínez told the press. According to Martínez, the newly elected members of the National Executive are: Raúl Sosa Torres as president and Pedro Arocha Urquiza as vice president, while the affiliated dissidents Obet Matos Rodríguez, Alián Trojillo Larraza, Manuel Florencio Piedra Rivas and Alexie Gutiérrez Estrada were elected for the positions of National Coordinator, Advisor and Attention to Political Prisoners, respectively. (*Puente Informativo*, 13/2/05)

February 18: Cuban opposition leader Oswaldo Payá launched a new stage in his campaign for a peaceful democratic transition, calling on Cubans within and outside the island to participate in a national dialogue to shape a post-Castro future. Payá, who earned international attention for organizing a petition drive signed by 25,000 Cubans in favor of government reforms, hopes his Committee for National Dialogue will spark a discussion across political and geographic lines and dispel some of the uncertainty shrouding Cuba's future. "Here there is room for liberals, conservatives, social democrats and those communists who have liberty and courage," Paya told reporters. Paya said activists in the new project have been harassed by the government, receiving visits at home from state security agents trying to persuade them not to take part. Paya announced the creation of a committee to organize participants, which he estimated in the thousands. The committee is made up of 110 Cubans, about half on the island and the rest participating from the United States, Spain, Puerto Rico, Mexico and Brazil, he said, emphasizing that it was nonetheless a distinctly Cuban project. The Cuban government has not publicly commented on the movement, which was formally launched last summer. (*The New York Times*, *Sun Sentinel*, *EFE*, 18/2/05)

February 19: Differing views on Cuba's future among Havana dissidents are becoming more apparent with ongoing efforts by prominent activists to reinvigorate a movement crippled by a government crackdown in 2003. Oswaldo Payá and Martha Beatriz Roque agree that Fidel Castro must release his 46-year grip on the island and that the future should be decided by the Cuban people. But differences between Payá's Committee for National Dialogue and Roque's Assembly to Promote Civil Society have become more clear in recent days as both groups gear up for upcoming events meant to search for a consensus. "We want nothing to do with the government," said Roque, whose group is planning a gathering May 20 and has invited notable figures like former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and former Czech President Vaclav Havel. "We can't include them because the government doesn't listen," added Roque. "Ours is a dialogue without borders," said Payá. He said the National Dialogue will soon make formal proposals for everything from revamping the justice system to ecological concerns. "What we are trying to do is find common ground." "We can't exclude people who have government jobs just because they might think differently." "If we want change, we must include them," he said. "Otherwise, it won't happen." (*The Miami Herald*, 19/2/05)

March 1: Differences between anti-Castro groups in Cuba have erupted into the open, with dissident leader Oswaldo Payá accusing others of trying to discredit his movement. Payá told the press that Martha Beatriz Roque, Felix Bonné and René Gómez Manzano, leaders of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society, were engaged in a "systematic, permanent and very aggressive" campaign against his Christian Liberation Movement. He said that Roque and some "minority" exile groups in Miami were trying to pressure his group into attending a May 20 gathering organized by Roque's movement, which also has invited figures like former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and former Czech President Vaclav Havel. Payá said he would not take part in the encounter. (*The Miami Herald*, 3/3/05)

March 2: In Miami, representatives of Cuban exile groups said there exist "democratic disagreements", not campaigns against the leader of the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL) Oswaldo Payá. The activists rejected the accusations made from Cuba the day before by Payá that an organization from the internal dissident movement and some "minority" groups in Miami have tried to discredit and pressure him. "There is no campaign against Payá from the exile community. Instead, what there has been are open and democratic disagreements, as it should be, regarding his strategies", said Ninoska Pérez Castellón, director of the Cuban Liberty Council. (*EFE*, 2/3/05)

March 3: Three Cuban dissidents addressed a congressional committee by telephone from Havana, praising President Bush's policies and denouncing Fidel Castro. The dissidents at the hearing endorsed Bush's approach. They were Martha Beatriz Roque, an economist, Rene Gomez, an attorney, and Bonne, an electrical engineering professor. Roque rejected suggestions by Democratic lawmakers that the United States negotiate with Castro. "He only hears what he wants to hear," she said. Roque also said visits by American tourists wouldn't help ordinary Cubans and would lead to more prostitution and drug trafficking. The hearing was aimed as much at an international audience as a domestic one. US officials have been disappointed that the European Union recently lifted a suspension on high-level contacts with Cuba that was imposed after the 2003 crackdown. (*The New York Times*, 3/3/05)

March 8: Cuba's "culture of fear" is the biggest hurdle people living under the communist government must overcome to prompt peaceful political change and a free market on the island, Cuba's best-known dissident told the press. Oswaldo Paya said he hopes to push Cubans into action with the National Dialogue, his latest effort to bring democracy to Cuba. "It's like therapy, so people will understand the origin of their fear, the origin of their status," Paya said of the project. "It's therapy where Cubans discover their dignity (...) and discover that life can be different." Unlike other regimes that have used force to control citizens, Cuba relies on people's fear of punishment -- ranging from ostracism to imprisonment -- to maintain order, Paya said. The promoter of the Varela Project said that his latest pursuit, the National Dialogue, is even more threatening to the Cuban government. It goes to the heart of the regime, he said, by prompting people to voice their concerns and complaints and actively create a blueprint for change in Cuba's centralized political and economic systems. "When Cubans are capable of saying that, beyond our fear, we want change, that hits the nucleus of power," he said. "If the people don't have fear, the regime no longer exists." (*The New York Times*, 8/3/05)

March 16: A former revolutionary commander who returned to Cuba after decades of exile to head a "moderate" dissident movement says 90 percent of Cubans do not believe in the Communist regime, which he describes as rife with corruption. The appraisal was made by

Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo, leader of Cambio Cubano (Cuban Change). "Some 90 percent of people in Cuba are reformists and don't believe in the system, not even at the highest levels," he said. Reformists "are not in the dissident movement; they are everywhere, asking for change, and have not been able to achieve it because there is no voice to speak for them," Gutierrez Menoyo said. (*EFE*, 16/3/05)

March 17: During a press conference with Cuban independent journalists and foreign media representatives the creation of the "Carlos J. Finlay" Alternative Medical Association of Cuba (AMAC) was announced. Young dissident doctor Francisco Pijuán Rodríguez, whom the government has outcast from the national public health system, said the objective of the new institution is to offer an alternative health model to the current system. (*Cubanet*, 25/3/05)

March 29: Public spats between dissidents are weakening the opposition movement and playing into the hands of the Cuban government's "repressive forces," veteran activist Vladimiro Roca said in a statement. Roca, who served a five-year prison sentence for his political activities, called on fellow dissidents on and off the island to stop fighting and unite in their shared cause to prompt political and economic change in Cuba. All opponents of the island's communist government should "impede, with resolute action, manifestations of sectarianism, intolerance and marginalization (...) to create a climate of trust and respectful debate." (*Sun Sentinel*, 29/3/05)

May 1: In observance of International Worker's Day, the Group for Social and Corporate Responsibility in Cuba (GSCRC) called on the Cuban regime and foreign investors in Cuba to respect worker's rights as outlined in the International Labor Organization's (ILO) conventions recently ratified by Cuba. "The Cuban regime has a responsibility under international law to respect the 89 conventions of the International Labor Organization it has ratified and to respect Cuban worker's basic rights as outlined in the UN's international charter on human rights," said GSCRC Director Joel Brito. "Foreign investors profit millions of dollars each year on backs of Cuban workers," said Brito. "On this anniversary of international labor day we are simply asking foreign investors to afford Cuban laborers the same basic rights their employees enjoy at home." (*USIS Press Release*, 1/5/05)

May 6: According to opposition leader Vladimiro Roca, president of the Social Democratic Party of Cuba, the member organizations of the Cuban opposition coalition "All United" held a meeting in Pinar del Río. Issues discussed included the restructuring of All United as well as the organization's future initiatives. All members were called upon to reject all manifestations of sectarianism. Cándido José Hidalgo Gato, national coordinator for the Social Democratic Party of Cuba and Director of the independent library "Manuel Moreno Fraguinals," was designated as the coalition's liaison for Pinar del Río. (*Cubanet*, 9/5/05)

May 31: With support from Miami, a group of Cuban doctors are developing a small but growing independent network that for the first time provides primary health care in some areas of the island as an alternative to similar government-regulated services. The network is comprised of several dozen doctors, nurses and collaborators who provide basic home-based health care for sick people without resources in Havana, Pinar del Río, Santiago de Cuba, Cienfuegos and Ciego de Ávila. The network is maintained with financial support, medicines and equipment donated by Miami-based organizations. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 31/5/05)

June 14: Diverging philosophies on a post-Castro future, meddling from the Cuban government, along with clashing egos among opposition leaders competing for international attention, threaten the dissident movement in Cuba and unfortunately help Fidel Castro. "The opposition has a very wide spectrum," Vladimiro Roca Antuñez said. "But we all have the same goal. Oswaldo Payá and María Beatriz Roque are against the government but in between both of them there is a very bad relationship." Payá's movement calls for negotiation with the regime and national reconciliation. Roque's Assembly is geared to defying the government and promising to seek justice in a post-Castro Cuba. "Our mission is to move forward," Payá said. "Our target is not to kill people, not to create chaos, just to ask for the rights which we are all guaranteed. If we continue to ask for these rights, to keep pressure on the government, then the regime will not have the moral force to keep it in power. We respect the right to do the assembly, but we don't trust the people who organized it." "We are not against national reconciliation," René Gómez Manzano said. "But it is the regime that exerts totalitarian control of the state and it is the regime which puts people in jail for speaking their minds and therefore it is for the regime to come forward and ask for dialogue with the people, and not for the dissidents to do so." (*The Miami Herald*, 14/6/05)

July 18: Arco Progresista, a group of moderate dissident organizations, warned that Cuban society is "reaching the point of no return for a social explosion" and called for prudence and a "national solution". "Society is boiling because Cubans are demanding change", said spokesperson Manuel Cuesta Morúa in a signed statement, in reference to protests staged in different places of the Cuban capital resulting in at least ten people being arrested, according to a human rights commission. (*AFP*, 18/7/05)

July 21: Cuban dissidents plan to hold a protest in front of the French embassy in Havana, one week after France normalized relations with Fidel Castro's regime. The Assembly for the Promotion of Civil Society (APSC) said the protest would call for the release of "all political prisoners," including six who were detained during a demonstration. But dissidents appeared to have chosen France's embassy to show their displeasure at French and European Union policies toward Castro's regime. "We will demand the liberation of the detainees and we will show to the European Union what happens with dialogue (with the Cuban government)," said Marta Beatriz Roque, head of the (APSC). (*AFP*, 21/7/05)

July 21: The Cuban oppositionist group Comité "Pro-Cambio" has launched an initiative aimed at replacing the current political system with a "modern and capitalist model based on solidarity". Angel Polanco Torrejón, president of Comité "Pro-Cambio", founded in January and considered illegal by the government said to the press that the project is supported by 43 organizations based in Cuba and five others in the US and Puerto Rico. (*EFE*, 21/7/05)

July 26: Leaders of the opposition movement on the island began plotting their next move to bring international attention to their plight. "The detentions are completely arbitrary," said prominent dissident Martha Beatriz Roque, who was released from custody without charges. "We cannot allow the government to continue to treat us this way." "There must be a response, not only from the opposition but from everybody," Roque told the press in a telephone interview, declining to reveal whether any new anti-government protests were planned in the coming days. However, she hinted they could be organized at a moment's notice. "All I can say is that opposition groups all over the island are on alert," Roque said. "They are waiting for the call to take to the streets. I see the strong possibility of civil unrest." (*The Miami Herald*, 26/7/05)

August 15: The moderate Cuban social-democratic opposition group Arco Progresista defended dialogue, rejected government-sanctioned harassment of dissidents and warned of the risk of violence on the island. "We clearly and energetically reject the premeditated acts of verbal and psychological violence orchestrated against peaceful men and women," said the group - whose name means "Progressive Spectrum" - in a communique released in Havana. "The Cuban government must not continue overestimating its ability to use coercive measures for social control or calling for the use of violence," said the communique signed by Manuel Cuesta Morua, the organization's spokesman. The Cuban government, the document added, "must seek appropriate formulas to fight in a civilized manner against Cubans' unease and democratic demands." The past few weeks have seen several "acts of patriotic reaffirmation," as the government calls the street demonstrations against dissidents in which hundreds of people have participated. (*EFE*, 15/8/05)

August 17: Two well-known Cuban opposition leaders met with Senator Arlen Specter, chairman of the United States' Senate Judiciary Committee, to brief him on recent official actions against members of Cuba's dissidence. The outlawed Assembly to Promote Civil Society (APSC) stated that Marta Beatriz Roque and Vladimiro Roca met the Republican senator from Pennsylvania at the residence of James Cason, Chief of Mission of the US Interests Section in Cuba. Roque, the APSC's principal leader, and Roca, who heads the All United movement, were both targets of recent "acts of repudiation" in front of their homes by supporters of the Cuban Government, an APSC press release stated. The press release indicated that during the meeting "both opposition leaders informed the senator about the most recent wave of repression unleashed by the government against members of Cuba's democratic opposition, of which they personally were victims." (*Netfor Cuba, AFP, Notimex*, 16/8/05)

August 30: Opposition leader Oswaldo Payá called for what he termed as "organic unity" of the dissident movement in Cuba, apologizing to any fellow countrymen that may have been "hurt" by the political discord. "We strive for organic unity, (...) that can only be achieved through dialogue," said the message of the leader of the illegal Movimiento Cristiano Liberación (MCL). He pointed out that it is necessary to consolidate unity among the dissidents' ranks and "we are ready to preserve that unity over and beyond any wounds, passions and errors that may have hurt some of our compatriots." (*AFP*, 30/8/05)

August 30: Dissidents from around the world gathered in the Polish port of Gdansk, where Lech Walesa urged them to follow the freedom-fighting example of Solidarity, the trade union he helped transform into a pro-democracy powerhouse 25 years ago this month. As part of nationwide celebrations of the first Solidarity strikes against Poland's communist regime, Mr Walesa welcomed activists from as far as Cuba, Burma and the Middle East. "The struggle for liberty employed by the brave Polish people (...) is a source of inspiration in this tragic era that we Cubans are enduring," Oscar Espinosa Chepe, an independent journalist and economist sentenced to 20 years in jail in his native Cuba, said in a message to the conference. (*Irish Times, Swissinfo*, 31/8/05)

September 6: Cuban government opponent Oswaldo Payá again called on public opinion to condemn the treatment afforded political prisoners in Cuba, as one of the dissidents jailed in the crackdown of the spring 2003 has gone on hunger strike after being transferred to a cellblock with hardened criminals. Payá, leader of the outlawed Liberation Christian Movement, or MCL, said in a communique released in Havana that Jose Daniel Ferrer García, now being

held at a prison in the eastern province of Camagüey, earlier spent 84 days in a punishment cell for protesting his placement among ordinary convicts in another penitentiary. (*EFE*, 6/9/05)

September 8: A group of Cuban dissidents led by activist Oswaldo Payá launched a project to survey fellow government opponents to determine what they have in common and where there are points of contention. A document with dozens of questions on communist Cuba's future was being distributed to more than 100 activists in Havana and other cities across the island, said Ernesto Martini, a dissident who works closely with Payá. The survey, called "Common Ground," addresses topics including freedom of expression, equal rights for Cubans and foreigners, and even the abortion debate. Those participating will indicate whether they agree with each statement, disagree, or wish to propose modifications. "The people of Cuba should know what groups within the diverse civic movements think and want for our country," a statement announcing the survey said. (*AP*, 8/9/05)

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

November 8: Cuba's most prominent dissident urged the island's Communist government to take part in a public discussion of a plan for reform that calls for dialogue and the release of political prisoners. The project is outlined in a document titled "Common Ground, a Path and Hope for Cuba," drafted over two months with contributions from dozens of dissident organizations, opposition leader Oswaldo Payá said in an interview with the press. The document calls for the "immediate and unconditional" release of political prisoners, respect for human rights, freedom of association and peaceful protest, freedom of speech, free elections and political pluralism. It also proposes a process of national reconciliation and forgiveness that averts "vengeance and settling of scores" and a model of economic freedom "grounded in humanism and social consciousness." (*EFE*, 8/11/05)

November 9: In a document sent to the United States and the European Union, Cuban opposition activist Oswaldo Payá, leader of the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL), asked them to review their policies towards Cuba and considered that it is not their prerogative to develop a "political transition program" for the island. The document was sent to the conference "Common Goals, Different Strategies? Options for a Transatlantic Agenda on Cuba," held in Brussels, which was attended by US Cuba Transition Coordinator Caleb McCarry and representatives of institutions from the EU and Spain's Department of Foreign Affairs. (*EFE*, 9/11/05)

December 4: In Santa Clara, a group of ten oppositionist women dressed in white marched along some of the city's main streets calling for the freedom of political prisoners. The women, members of the illegal Marta Abreu Feminine Movement (MFMA), gathered at the "Nuestra Señora del Buen Viaje" church, and marched to the downtown "Leoncio Vidal" park. (*Cubanet*, 7/12/05)

December 9: The illegal Cuban Liberal Movement issued a communiqué warning about the rise of repression against dissidents. The MLC condemned an incident in Gibara, province of Holguín, where two activists of this dissident organization "were brutally beaten by paramilitary elements" and later taken to the provincial prison. (*Cubanet*, 9/12/05)

December 12: Leading dissident Oswaldo Paya and his Christian Liberation Movement (Movimiento Cristiano Liberación) criticized the "silence" amongst Cuban exile organizations regarding denunciations made by the MCL of human right abuses on the island. "It is amazing that even among the Cuban exile community; the echo of our voices has been almost extinguished after many of our denunciations", Paya said in a statement distributed to the press. "This silence amongst powerful circles of the exile against our Movement and our work, especially against the Varela Project, closes more as the repression against us grows within Cuba", the statement added. (*AFP*, 12/12/05)

December 21: Cuba branded the country's best-known dissidents as US agents, using taped phone conversations, secret video footage and guilt by association during a televised broadcast to portray them as traitors. Longtime activists Oswaldo Payá, Martha Beatriz Roque and female relatives of already imprisoned government opponents, known as "The Ladies in White," bore the brunt of a 90-minute state-run television show during which official journalists used what appeared to be intelligence service materials in an attempt to discredit them. "They are a mix of parasites, habitual vagabonds, chameleons and ruffians, lacking charisma and mass support, that serve as an instrument of the empire," show moderator Randy Alonso said of the dissidents. Cuba's small opposition movement is rarely mentioned by the official and only media in the country and regularly branded by officials as in the hire of the United States. The state-run Cuban TV broadcast "The Roundtable" accused the Ladies in White of being "Pawns of the Empire," its disparaging term for the United States, and promoting activities aimed at supporting a US campaign to destabilize the Americas' only one-party communist regime. It charged that they were really "Ladies in Green" keen to snap up US greenbacks in exchange for opposing the Cuban regime. (*Reuters, AFP*, 22/12/05)

Ladies in White

February 18: In a rare display of public dissent, the wives of several Cuban dissidents -- wearing pictures of their husbands on their shirts -- marched to Revolution Plaza to demand amnesty for all political prisoners. The women delivered a letter with their demands to state offices behind the plaza's monument to independence hero Jose Marti. Loyda Valdes, whose husband Alfredo Felipe Fuentes is serving a 26-year sentence, said "the apathy of Cuban authorities" had "practically forced" her to be there. The women marched 45 minutes through Havana to reach the plaza before delivering the letter, which bore the signatures of more than 1,000 friends and relatives. Laura Pollan expressed both hope and pessimism about the government's reaction. "I think they're going to listen, that they're going to read the letter," said Pollan, whose husband Hector Maseda was sentenced to 20 years in prison. "But (...) this is an unpredictable government," she said. "It's possible that we're here and then tomorrow they send our husbands home. Or, they'll simply keep them stashed away, and there they will be for 20 years." (*The New York Times*, 19/2/05)

February 27: Someone scrawled "Christ yes, Castro no, down with Fidel" on a Havana church as wives of imprisoned dissidents attended Mass inside. "This is a provocation by state security to cause trouble for us and the church," said Gisela Delgado, wife of well known

dissident Hector Palacios and a member of the Santa Rita Church in the upscale Miramar district. Once the graffiti was found, police quickly arrived at the church and covered the large green letters on the front of the building with cardboard, then waited for the graffiti to be cleaned off. About a dozen women in white held a quiet march outside the church as police looked on, one holding the cardboard over the sign. The wives said state security agents were always posted outside the church on Sundays and it would have been impossible to vandalize the building without their noticing. (*Reuters*, 27/2/05)

March 12: The wives of jailed dissidents known as the "Women in White" because of their dress, are preparing vigils and meetings March 18-20, to mark the second anniversary of the first summary trials. Gisela Delgado, wife of Hector Palacios, sentenced to 20 years, has not lost hope after two years of "total anguish, immense sorrow." Laura Polla, wife of Hector Maseda, also serving a 20-year sentence, is convinced the government will not engage in a "mass release." "I am not political, but I have always thought you cannot keep innocent men in prison for more than two years," Polla said, urging other dissidents' wives "not to give in to despondency." (*EFE*, 12/3/05)

March 18: Nearly 30 wives of political prisoners marched to the headquarters of the government's journalists' union to demand their plight be publicized in Cuba's state-run media, marking the second anniversary of the crackdown that put their spouses behind bars. Wearing all-white clothing and sashes that said "amnesty," the women dropped off a letter to the union president that harshly criticized those working for Cuban newspapers, magazines and television stations. "Journalists for the state media keep silent. They don't see," the Cuban wives said. "They don't know what's happening in their times. They wear ear muffs, and march on the only road that the state lets them." "We are here to demand our page, our space," continued the letter from the prisoners' wives, "because although they don't like it, they can't deny our existence." The women also passed out copies of the letter to passers-by. (*AP*, 18/3/05)

March 20: Some 200 women supporters of Fidel Castro laid siege to a march by 30 female relatives of imprisoned dissidents in an attempt to intimidate them. The women, members of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) waving Cuban flags and chanting "Fidel, Fidel" and "down with the worms" intercepted the wives and other relatives as they quietly marched, dressed in white with flowers in hand, down 5th Ave., the main thoroughfare in Havana's Miramar district. Some 50 men, who appeared to be from the Communist party and security forces, stood by across the street and later were seen telling the women what to do. The dissidents' female relatives have gathered every Sunday for two years at the Santa Rita Church for Mass, then walked a few blocks outside along the avenue without incident, staging brief rallies in a nearby park. After 30 minutes of harassment from the FMC crowd, the opposition members sat on the steps of the Santa Rita church and began praying and singing. The Palm Sunday march marked exactly two years since the government ended a round up of 75 pro-democracy activists, independent journalists and others. (*Reuters*, *EFE*, 20/3/05)

March 20: Oswaldo Paya, leader of the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL), said that the incident between the FMC crowd and the "Ladies in White" "is something premeditated to quiet the voices of these women and part of a wave of repression of a fascist and abusive character on the part of the government." Marta Beatriz Roque, the only woman among the so-called "Group of 75" dissidents arrested two years ago and one of the 14 later released, told *EFE* that the counterdemonstration "is nothing more than an example of the brutal way in which the

government acts against the opposition." On March 18, 2003, Cuban authorities began arresting members of the opposition, many of them backers of Paya's Varela Project, a democratic initiative now bearing more than 25,000 signatures that was presented to Cuba's National Assembly in 2002. (*EFE*, 20/3/05)

March 21: Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister justified two incidents of public harassment of Cuba's opponents, saying they were "mercenaries" on the US payroll who deserved to be repudiated. During a press conference held in Havana, Felipe Pérez Roque said that those who demonstrate in the island, even peacefully, on behalf of dissidents should not be surprised at being hounded in the streets. "In Cuba, the streets belong to the revolutionaries (... and) it's legitimate for our people to defend their streets and to oppose those who work for the U.S. government," Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque said. "It's legitimate for the people to impede, within norms that include neither excesses nor violations of physical or moral integrity (...the) provocations (of) mercenaries," as the Cuban government calls the dissidents, he added. "Anyone who commits a provocation should know that these things happen," the foreign minister said, adding that the Saturday attack on another dissident in his own home was also justified. "If some whiner provokes his neighbors, he should know that at some point they will lose patience and respond to the provocations," Pérez Roque declared in his first press conference after returning from a trip to Europe. The central theme of the news conference was the human rights situation on the communist island. Acts of "popular repudiation" were regular and normal at the beginning of the 1980s, when demonstrations were organized against citizens who wanted to leave the country via the port of Mariel. (*The Globe and Mail*, *EFE*, 21/3/05)

March 25: Wives of imprisoned dissidents urged Fidel Castro to respect their right to peaceful protest, calling a government-sponsored interruption of their weekly march "an act of provocation." The Ladies in White delivered at government offices of the Ministry of the Interior and the National Assembly a letter addressed to Castro complaining of the lack of "tolerance" for the exercise of their demands, because "we are exercising and claiming a constitutional right." They were not allowed to deliver the letter at the Council of State office in charge of claims by the population (Oficina de Atención a la Población). In the letter, the "Ladies in White" said they will hold top members of the government responsible for any harm done to them in future standoffs. "We do not discard the possibility that our blood will shed on the streets as we peacefully fight for the freedom of our men," said the letter, signed by Laura Pollan, wife of Hector Maseda, who is serving a 20-year sentence, Dolia Leal, wife of Nelson Aguilar, sentenced to 13, and three other wives of jailed dissidents. (*The New York Times*, *EFE*, *La Jornada*, 26/3/05)

March 27: One week after being confronted by a group of pro-government counter protesters, the wives of jailed dissidents marched peacefully after Easter services to demand the release of their husbands. Some 30 wives of jailed dissidents dressed in white and carrying flowers, attended Mass at Santa Rita Church, in the Miramar neighborhood, and marched peacefully down 5th Avenue, as they have been doing every week since the spring of 2003, when 75 peaceful dissidents were given long prison sentences by the government following a crackdown on the opposition. The scene, however, was much different from last weekend, when some 200 members of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) blocked the weekly march by the so-called "Damas de Blanco" (Women in White), chanting pro-government slogans and screaming insults. Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque defended the federation's actions last week, saying that "in Cuba, the streets belong to the revolutionaries."

We are revolutionaries, because revolution means change," Marcela Sanchez, wife of dissident Marcelo Lopez, said. Marcelo Lopez was sentenced to 15 years in prison in 2003 and released last November for health reasons. The women responded to Lopez's statement with shouts of "change, change." The lack of problems "could be an attempt by the government to present this as an act of tolerance as the time for debate in Geneva nears," Gisela Delgado said, referring to the upcoming 61st annual session of the UN Human Rights Commission in the Swiss city. (*The New York Times*, *EFE*, 27/3/05)

May 8: With arm bands inscribed with the word "Amnesty," a group of wives and mothers of Cuban political prisoners known as the "Ladies in White" carried out a peaceful demonstration on Mother's Day, demanding that their loved ones be released. "We are asking that Cuban political prisoners be amnestied," Dolia Leal told the press. Her husband, Nelson Aguiar Ramírez, is one of the incarcerated oppositionists. Upon exiting the Santa Rita parish after attending mass, a group of 55 women, dressed in white and carrying gladiola, walked an 800m stretch along 5 th Avenue, in Miramar, Havana. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 9/5/05)

May 31: One of the members of Ladies in White, a group of women comprised of wives and mothers of political prisoners in Cuba, made public a letter sent to the Cuban government requesting the liberation of her husband due to poor health conditions. In a letter sent to Fidel Castro, Gisela Delgado said that her husband, Héctor Palacios, 63, is in "critical health condition". Delgado made an appeal to international organizations, watchdogs, and the Red Cross to support her request. The Cuban government sentenced Palacios to 25 years in prison, together with 74 other activists, during the repressive wave against dissidents of March 2003. (*Reuters*, 31/5/05)

June 19: Nearly 60 Ladies in White, all relatives of the 75 dissidents imprisoned two years ago in Cuba, braved inclement weather and carried out a protest walk to demand the release of their loved ones. During the walk that also marked Father's Day, the Ladies were accompanied by a dozen children, whose fathers are among the jailed oppositionists. (*EFE*, 19/6/05)

July 19: Cuba's dissident "Women in White," mostly wives and mothers of political prisoners, say they are being increasingly harassed by pro-government mobs, with police standing by while they are insulted and shoved. Berta Soler, wife of jailed democracy advocate Angel Moya, told the press of an incident, when she and six other members of the group, known for their white clothing, went to visit Isabel Ramos outside the capital. Ramos, mother of Arturo Suarez, who was sent to jail 19 years ago for his attempted hijacking of an airplane to escape the island, is on a hunger strike to press for improvement of what she says are inhumane conditions of her son's imprisonment. As the women left Ramos' home, they were surrounded by a throng of several dozen supporters of Fidel Castro who shouted insults at the dissident women and chanted pro-government slogans. "The police stood by a block away, just watching," said Soler, whose husband was sentenced to 20 years in the Spring 2003 crackdown on peaceful dissent that saw 75 people jailed. Fourteen of those prisoners have since been released, ostensibly on medical grounds. "If anything happens to any of us, it will be the responsibility of the government," said Soler. (*EFE*, 19/7/05)

September 12: Parliamentarians from the European People's Party nominated in Brussels the "Ladies in White"--the group of wives and mothers of political prisoners in Cuba--for the 2005 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought that grants the European Parliament. This is one of 10

proposals that will be presented officially in the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament. Subsequently, the three official candidates will be selected by vote. (*Notimex*, 12/9/05)

September 19: The "Ladies in White", the group of wives and relatives of political Cuban prisoners, said it is "a great honor" to be among the 10 candidates proposed for the the Sakharov Prize that awards the European Parliament. "We want the world to know that all we do is for love and for the freedom of these men", said Laura Pollán, wife of Héctor Maseda, sentenced to 20 years of jail during the trials against 75 dissidents in 2003. (*EFE*, 19/9/05)

September 25: The relatives and wives of the so-called Group of 75 Cuban dissidents thrown in prison here in 2003 sent a letter to Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero asking him to intervene on their loved ones' behalf. Some 30 women - known as the "Women in White" for the color of the clothing they wear at their protest activities - signed the letter. Miriam Leyva, the wife of Oscar Espinosa Chepe, who was released from prison earlier this year for health reasons, showed the press the letter to Zapatero she and her colleagues delivered to the Spanish Embassy in Havana. They state in the letter that their relatives "have not committed any crime, but rather attempted to exercise their right to freedom of expression, and achieve respect for human rights and democracy in Cuba." "Therefore, they must be freed immediately and unconditionally," argues the letter, which is also directed at the other heads of state and government who will participate in the Ibero-American Summit in Salamanca, Spain, in October. (*EFE*, 25/9/05)

October 6: The relatives of 75 jailed Cuban dissidents pleaded with Spanish King Juan Carlos I for help to gain from Cuba's communist regime the political prisoners' "immediate and unconditional" release. "They have committed no crime, except exercising their right to free speech," the "Women in White" said in an open letter sent to Madrid's embassy in Havana. The women's group, which wears white and includes prisoners' wives, was formed after 75 dissidents were arrested in a crackdown in March 2003. The group urged the Spanish monarch to "intervene before the highest Cuban government authority to gain the immediate and unconditional release of all 75 prisoners of conscience of Black Spring 2003." (*AFP*, 6/10/05)

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

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

October 26: A Cuban opposition movement, a Nigerian human rights lawyer and an international media organization were jointly awarded the European Union's human rights prize. The "Ladies in White" women's movement, lawyer Hauwa Ibrahim and Reporters without Borders received the 2005 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought awarded by the

European Parliament. "Ladies in White" is a group of women that has been protesting peacefully every Sunday since 2003 against the continued detention of their husbands and sons who are political dissidents in Cuba. They wear white as a symbol of peace and innocence of those imprisoned. The prize, named after a former Soviet dissident, is awarded annually to the person or group who are judged to have made a particular achievement in the field of human rights, protecting minorities, defense of international cooperation or promotion of democracy and the rule of law. (AP, 26/10/05)

October 26: The Ladies in White celebrated the EU's top human rights prize - something they hope will draw attention to their cause. "It puts the Cuban government on notice," Gisela Delgado said after finding out that she and the other "Ladies in White" will share the 2005 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought with a Nigerian human rights attorney and an international media organization. "And it affirms our fight for the liberation of our family members, who are innocent," she said. "Let me say that we're not an organization, but women, wives, mothers and sisters who united," said Gisela Delgado, whose husband Héctor Palacios is serving a 25-year sentence. "It's the first time in 47 years that women in Cuba go out to the street to protest against unjust imprisonment." Dressed in white and wearing t-shirts and buttons printed with photos of their loved ones, the "Ladies in White" gathered in the home of Laura Pollán, one of the members who is best known among diplomats and the international media. Pollán and several other women were called early Wednesday to the European Union delegation office in Havana, where they met with EU business attaché Sven Kühn von Burgsdorff and other European officials. After the meeting, Pollán said they would try to travel to Europe to receive the prize in December. "We are going to fight to the last moment to go and receive the prize," which she considered a recognition and backing for the group by the international community. (AP, IPS, The Miami Herald , 27/10/05)

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

November 30: Blanca Reyes, one of the founders of the Ladies in White (Damas de Blanco), thanked the Fundación Hispano Cubana for the award granted to this group of Cuban women who are requesting the liberation of their relatives from Cuban prisons. The Fundación granted the International Award on Human Rights to the Ladies in White, a non-partisan group of wives, mothers, and relatives of dissidents who were sent to jail by Cuban authorities in March 2003 during a crackdown on dissidents. Reyes is the wife of Cuban journalist and writer Raúl Rivero, who was liberated by Cuban authorities due to his health condition after receiving a 20-year sentence during the crackdown of 2003. In a ceremony held in Madrid, Reyes said

that the members of the Ladies in White will keep on demonstrating in Cuba in a peaceful way until their relatives are released. (*AFP*, 30/11/05)

December 13: The Cuban government is not allowing members of Cuba's "Ladies in White" opposition movement to travel to Strasbourg, France, to receive the European Union's top human rights prize, the women said. For two years, the women dressed in white have marched in silence every Sunday along a Havana avenue to demand the release of their husbands and sons who are political dissidents jailed by Fidel Castro's government. The Cuban women are joint winners of the 2005 Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought, which will be awarded at a ceremony in the European Parliament. "Immigration authorities have my passport and told me I would get it back on December 30 when I would know if I could leave," said Julia Núñez, wife of pro-democracy activist Adolfo Fernandez. "We will continue denouncing abuses," Nunez said. (*CMN*, 13/12/05)

December 17: The group of Cuban women known as Ladies in White sent an open letter to the Cuban National Assembly. The group of women, relatives of political prisoners sentenced to long terms in jail during the crackdown on dissidents of March 2003, requested from Cuban parliamentarians to discuss the release of their loved ones as part of their agenda for the 23rd and the 24th of December. (*Cubanet*, 27/12/05)

December 21: One of the Ladies in White, a group of women who are relatives of political prisoners, was warned by a police officer not to attend mass at the church of Santa Rita. Georgina González said that a police officer called Amed went to her house to reproach her for attending mass at Santa Rita, where the group meets every Sunday, and for visiting the house of the new chief of the US Interest Section in Havana. Georgina's house has been the target of angry demonstrations by government supporters organized by Cuban authorities. (*Cubanet*, 22/12/05)

December 25: Sakharov prize-winning wives and mothers of jailed Cuban dissidents have demanded the release of their loved ones after a Christmas mass, and lashed back at Fidel Castro's communist government. The Ladies in White group attended Christmas Mass in Havana, decked out in white to draw attention to their cause. "We ask on this Christmas Day for freedom for our political prisoners and for the Cuban people to have a better future," said Laura Pollán on behalf of the group. "It's an extremely sad day for us, because Christmas is a family holiday," explained Pollán, wife of dissident Héctor Maseda who has been sentenced to 20 years in jail. "Since our husbands are not with us, our families cannot be complete." In reference to accusations made to the group by official journalists at the TV program The Roundtable on December 21, Pollán said that, "they should get an Oscar for best performance in a comedy." Pollán said that state media may have done them a favor. "They identified us publicly, and so a lot of people who may not have known about the Ladies in White now do, thanks to the State" media, she said. "This Christmas, we are asking for peace, and love in our hearts, so that we are able not to be bitter or hate the people who are making us suffer." (*AFP*, 26/12/05)

May 20th Meeting of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba

January 23: Members of a banned Cuban dissident group have sent a letter to Fidel Castro outlining their plan to stage a meeting May 20 in Havana. The letter from the group, Assembly to Promote Civil Society, was signed by Martha Beatriz Roque, a member of the "Group of 75"

dissidents arrested in the spring of 2003. The letter, copies of which were provided to the foreign press, was also signed by prominent dissidents Felix Bonne and Rene Gomez. "We foresee delegates from the groups making up the assembly, special national and foreign guests, and support personnel, whose total number we estimate at several hundred, taking part in the referenced (event)," the letter says. The signers said they would like the meeting to take place in a "non-public" venue. (*EFE*, 23/1/05)

February 2: The representative of the Committee for Freedom and Democracy in Cuba, Maykell Barroso, asked the European Union (EU) to show its support for Cuban dissidents by attending the plenary meeting to be held on the island next May 20 under the auspices of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society, an officially unrecognized organization led by Martha Beatriz Roque. (*AFP*, 2/2/05)

February 11: South Florida's Cuban-American US representatives expressed support for an upcoming gathering of dissidents in Cuba, saying the conference will mark the beginning of the end for Castro's government. "It's important to realize that the people of Cuba are working awfully hard for their freedom," said US Representative Mario Diaz-Balart (Republican-Miami), at a news conference also attended by Republican Representatives Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, as well as members of Cuban exile groups. "The days of tyranny are numbered." The first general meeting of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society, an umbrella organization of 365 dissident organizations, is scheduled to take place in Havana on May 20, Cuba's independence day. There, dissidents plan to discuss how to re-establish civil society and democracy in Cuba. (*KRT*, 11/2/05)

February 21: Mikhail Gorbachev, former leader of the now-dismantled Soviet Union, has accepted an invitation to attend in an observer's capacity the Assembly for the Promotion of Civil society in Cuba, to be held on May 20 and organized by Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello. Other personalities attending the meeting are Elena Bonner, president of the Sakharov Foundation, Serguei Kovaliev, Irina Preskaya, Mikhail Roy, and other important figures in Russian human rights activism and politics. Lech Walesa, founder of the Polish trade union Solidarnosc; former French Prime Minister and former leader of the French Socialist Party, Laurent Fabius; Vaclav Havel; and other prominent personalities in world politics have also applied for visas at the corresponding Cuban embassies. (*Netfor Cuba*, 21/2/05)

March 11: For the first time, the Cuban American National Foundation is encouraging its directors to travel to Cuba -- to participate in a meeting of dissidents, diplomats and journalists in Havana in May. CANF is urging other Cuban exile organizations to do the same in a show of solidarity with Cuba's budding dissident movement. But its request was immediately rejected by CANF's archrival, the more conservative Cuban Liberty Council. CANF's declaration came in response to an invitation from dissidents planning the Assembly to Promote Civil Society on May 20. (*The Miami Herald*, 11/3/05)

March 14: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque referred to the Congress for Democracy in Cuba, which the Assembly to Promote Civil Society (APSC) is organizing on the island, as a "provocation". He also said that the Cuban government will "respond appropriately" to that initiative of the internal opposition. Pérez Roque accused the organizers of this meeting of receiving funds from the US government. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 14/3/05)

March 16: Arco Progresista, a coalition of Cuban dissident groups who define themselves as social-democrats, said it will not participate in the Congress convened by the Assembly to Promote Civil Society (APSC) scheduled to take place in Havana on May 20. In a communiqué signed by Arco's spokesman, Manuel Cuesta Morúa, the coalition states its decision to "not join the activities of the Assembly". (*AFP*, 16/3/05)

March 22: According to an official statement to the press, the Social Democratic Party has decided to pull out from the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba. (*Cubanet*, 29/3/05)

April 9: Some 30 Cuban exile organizations in Miami announced the creation of a promotion and support mechanism for [a meeting organized by] the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba on the island on May 20th, in Miami, Silvia Iriondo, President of MAR por Cuba, announced the creation of a Support and Information Center for the dissidents' meeting. The support network includes organizations like Plantados por la Libertad, Brigada 2506, Unidad Cubana, Consejo Nacional del Presidio Político, Movimiento 30 de Noviembre, Agenda Cuba, Comando Martiano, Presidio Político Histórico, Unidad Cubana, Guías Espirituales del Exilio, among others. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 10/4/05)

April 17: Fidel Castro claimed the dissidents in his country were only a fraction and comprised not even one percent of the population. In response to a question by a group of journalists gathered after Castro voted at municipal elections, about the planned congress of dissidents on May 20, the Cuban leader said that he has heard "nothing about this". "The only ones informed are you and the only ones concerned about this are you," he told the journalists. "It is evident that what I know is what I read in your correspondences every day and I know you artificially flatter people who do not exist," Castro added. (*ANSA*, 17/4/05)

April 20: Prominent dissidents in Cuba say they are being harassed by the government in advance of a gathering of dissident and pro-democracy forces scheduled to take place May 20 in Havana. Earlier this month, dissidents involved in planning the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba sent word that the government had embarked on an all-out effort to intimidate activists from attending the event. Three of Cuba's best-known dissident voices repeated those accusations in a telephone call to US lawmakers. "For us it is critical to receive international support because the Castro regime has focused its repressive apparatus on the leaders of the assembly at this point, so international support is critical," Martha Beatriz Roque, main promoter of the May meeting, said. Rene Gomez, another dissident leader in Havana, says they are fully prepared for additional government efforts to discourage attendance. (*VOA*, 20/4/05)

April 20: A US House of Representatives Subcommittee passed a resolution in support of the meeting of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba, which will be held on May 20 in Havana. The bipartisan resolution, introduced by Republican legislator of Cuban origin, Mario Díaz-Balart, serves as an expression of solidarity with the more than 360 organizations that make up the Assembly. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 21/4/05)

April 27: The Democratic Solidarity Party (PSD), a dissident organization of liberal leaning groups in Cuba, confirmed it will attend a congress in May organized by the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba. The PSD thus joins other groups like the Christian Liberation Movement led by Oswaldo Payá, and Arco Progresista (Progressive Coalition). (*AFP*, 27/4/05)

May 2: The government of Fidel Castro is harassing the Cuban opposition in advance of a pro-democracy gathering scheduled for May 20th in Havana. One of Cuba's best-known opposition leaders, Martha Beatriz Roque, said the Castro government is trying to intimidate prospective attendees and discredit organizers of the conference: "For us, it is critical to receive international support because the Castro regime has focused its repressive apparatus on the leaders of the assembly at this point, so international support is critical." (*VOA*, 2/5/05)

May 4: Dissident leaders Felix Bonne, René Gómez Manzano and Martha Beatriz Roque, who are organizing a national meeting of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Havana, said that they have decided to press ahead with the meeting. However, some people on their distributed list of participants said they hadn't been consulted and some 50 of the names are listed as representing two or more groups at once. The meeting meant to unify dissidents itself has led to some disputes. "The Assembly does not represent the opposition," said independent librarian Estrella Garcia, who said Roque had been "harassing" her to attend. Gay rights activist Yacel Benitez alleged that the meeting "is to collect money for her (Roque) and not to topple Castro's regime." He said it was likely to provoke a crackdown on dissidents. (*AP*, 4/5/05)

May 10: More than 40 Cuban-American organizations are celebrating New Jersey's first Cuban Heritage Month in May with a series of events to raise funds and provide moral support for the Cuban dissidents, who are planning the May 20-21 Assembly to Promote a Civil Society in Cuba. In New Jersey, Silvio Acosta, spokesman for the group, said that whether the meeting occurs or not, it is already a success, especially because human rights activists from all over the world are keeping a close eye on Cuba. "If they put them all in jail, before the eyes of the world, they will be arresting people simply for trying to attend a public meeting," Acosta said. "And if they let them hold the meeting, they will be denounced for their atrocities. It's a win-win situation." (*The Record*, 11/5/05)

May 10: A US House of Representatives resolution urged the international community to "actively oppose" any attempts by Cuba to punish participants in the "historic meeting" organized by the Assembly to Promote Civil Society, an illegal opposition organization in the island. "The House of Representatives extends its support and solidarity to the organizers and participants of the historic meeting of the Assembly to Promote the Civil Society in Cuba (...)" urges the international community to support the Assembly's mission to bring democracy to Cuba ; (...) urges the Administration and international community to actively oppose any attempts by the Castro regime to repress or punish the organizers and participants of the Assembly; and (...) shares the pro-democracy ideals of the Assembly to Promote the Civil Society in Cuba and believes that this Assembly and others will hasten the day of freedom and democracy for the people of Cuba", the resolution says. (*Reuters, US Congress Press Release*, 10, 12/5/05)

May 12: The Cuban American National Foundation won US permission to travel to Cuba for a dissident meeting on May 20, a foundation official said. Alfredo Mesa, the foundation's executive director, said he received official word from the US Treasury Department but he declined to detail what plans, if any, members have for travel to the island. "We will make the final determination on the eve of May 20th," Mesa said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 13/5/05)

May 12: A leading Cuban dissident who is preparing an unprecedented opposition meeting in an orchard outside Havana said Cuba's communist authorities were taking steps to stop some

of the 360 delegates from attending. Martha Beatriz Roque, an economist who has spent four of the last eight years in jail for criticizing Fidel Castro's policies, said the government had arrested three of her followers and was trying to obstruct the May 20 event. "The government could allow the event to take place, but undermine it by stopping people from getting here," she said in an interview. Roque said 14 delegates from Cuba's Isle of Youth have been told not to leave for the mainland, while others have been called in by police for interviews she termed "harassment." "This is the first time we have gotten this far," Roque said. (*Reuters*, 12/5/05)

May 16: Fidel Castro once again spoke to the nation criticizing growing US support for Cuba's internal opposition. In a cryptic reference to a meeting by the opposition to be held on May 20 th, Castro said that the "mercenaries" would receive "energetic and appropriate responses from the revolution." He said that "the mercenaries" have been receiving salaries by the "empire", in reference to the announcement made by the US Agency for International Development of a six million dollar donation to the Group in Support of Democracy (Grupo de Apoyo a la Democracia). Castro also referred to the meeting as "a provocation" by "unpatriotic and political annexed (to the US)". (*EFE, AP*, 16/5/05)

May 16: An outlawed Cuban political party said it won't attend a major dissident assembly because the event is partly backed by Miami-based exile groups that support violence. Cuba's Popular Republican Party is the latest group to say it will not participate in the general meeting of the Assembly for the Promotion of Civil Society in Cuba planned for May 20 th. "We consider that the assembly is affiliated with terrorist groups," Reynaldo Gantes, the party's secretary general, told international journalists. The group was among more than 300 groups on a list of participants earlier distributed by key event leader Martha Beatriz Roque, a well-known dissident leader and former political prisoner. Among organizations backing the meeting is Alpha 66, a commando type group that has favored the violent overthrow of Fidel Castro's government. "Without separating ourselves from our traditional strategy of combat, we understand the importance of recognizing and supporting all efforts of our brothers on the island," Alpha 66 wrote in a letter posted on the assembly's official Web site. (*AP*, 16/5/05)

May 17: Two Polish members of the European Parliament who planned to attend a dissident meeting in Cuba were denied entry by the island's Communist authorities and sent back to Europe, a Polish diplomat said. Boguslaw Sonik and Jacek Protasiewicz arrived in Cuba and were denied entry by immigration officials at the airport of Varadero, Cuba's top beach resort. "The legislators were traveling on private passports and had tourist visas," the Polish consul in Havana, Piotr Turzanski, said. "They were not arrested and told to re-board" the same plane they arrived on, he said. Sonik and Protasiewicz were invited to attend a meeting that opponents of Fidel Castro plan to hold in Havana on May 20 to push for a transition to democracy in Cuba. Sonik said they were ejected despite their status as diplomats. "Despite the fact that we showed our diplomatic passports, they ejected us out of Cuba where we went to as tourists to take part in a meeting of Havana citizens," he told the press in Warsaw. (*EUObserver, Reuters*, 18/5/05)

May 18: The Democratic Party 30 of November "Frank País" ratified its withdrawal from the national meeting of the Assembly to Promote the Civil Society in Cuba, on May 20th. The Party's National Executive made this decision after consulting with all their delegates and activists, who ratified the withdrawal from the Assembly by a majority of votes. The Party publicly declared that a so-called delegation in Sancti Spiritus openly supporting the Assembly, does not exist. (*Puente Informativo*, 18/5/05)

May 19: Cuban exiles' groups in Spain expressed their concern at the fact that the Spanish government has decided, for the time being, not to send any representatives to the first Congress for Democracy in Cuba, which is due to begin tomorrow on the outskirts of Havana. No MPs or prominent members of the main Spanish political parties have confirmed their attendance, either. The congress is organized by the Assembly to Promote Civil Society, an organization led by Marta Beatriz Roque, Rene Gomez Manzano and Felix Bonne Carcasses, three Cuban former political prisoners. (*La Razón*, 19/5/05)

May 19: Half a dozen Polish journalists were detained in Cuba, following the expulsion of two Polish deputies from the European Parliament. All of those detained by authorities had been planning to meet Cuban dissidents taking part in the meeting organized by the dissident organization the Assembly for the Promotion of Civil Society. Maciej Staszinski from *Gazeta Wyborca* was detained together with two Polish Euro Parliamentarians and was sent back to Poland. The Polish group was among dozens of foreign politicians and journalists invited as observers to the meeting. (*Polskie Radio*, 19/5/05)

May 19: Cuba expelled a Czech senator and a German legislator, hours before they were due to attend a meeting sponsored by opponents of Fidel Castro. Czech senator Karel Schwarzenberg was among dozens of European legislators invited to the first general meeting of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba, an umbrella organisation of small dissident groups led by economist Martha Beatriz Roque. "The police fetched me at the hotel, brought me to the airport and put me on a plane," the senator said by cellphone before boarding a flight to Europe. "This is the behaviour of totalitarian states." A German diplomat said Arnold Vaatz, deputy head of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the Bundestag, had also been taken to the airport and put on a flight for Europe on Thursday night. Schwarzenberg, former Czech President Vaclav Havel's chief of staff for two years, was also on a tourist visa, but insisted he had not broken any law. "It is very astonishing to be pushed out of a country without doing anything against the law," he said. "I was invited (to the dissidents meeting) and I would have gone. It is not against the law, even Cuban law." (*IOL, AP*, 19/5/05)

May 19: Rifts and rivalries within the Cuban opposition movement threaten to discredit the meeting organized by the Assembly to Promote Civil Society. One of the most prominent dissidents, Oswaldo Payá, who drew international attention after launching a petition drive for government reforms, issued a statement calling the assembly a fraud and accusing its organizers of working with Cuba's state security. "We are not going to attend the May 20 assembly because it is a big fraud against the opposition, facilitated by the imprisonment of the majority of the opposition leaders. The individuals who run the assembly have sabotaged every civic project, especially the Varela Project and the National Dialogue, with lies, provocations and other maneuvers", Payá said in the statement. "While over 50 of our companions are still in prison, these three individuals [opposition leaders Martha Beatriz Roque, René Gómez Manzano y Félix Bonne Carcasses] are organizing this maneuver of May 20, helping Fidel Castro's regime that wants to destroy the civic movement of the Varela Project and give this negative image of an opposition, allied to the extremists; while on the other hand our activists are being repressed all over Cuba", the statement adds. (*The Sun Sentinel, Puente Informativo*, 20/5/05)

May 20: Liberal Party MP Birgitta Ohlsson, who sits on the board of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, has been refused a visa to enter Cuba. Ohlsson was to take part in a major meeting which is being planned by the Cuban opposition. Ohlsson wants

Sweden to use international aid to force Fidel Castro to introduce increased democracy. "I think it is our moral duty and obligation," Birgitta Ohlsson said. (*BBC*, 20/5/05)

May 20: With shouts of "Freedom" and singing Cuba's national anthem some 200 dissidents opened an unprecedented meeting in Havana. "Freedom, Freedom" and "Down with Fidel Castro" were shouted by the attendants to a meeting held by the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba (APCSC), a coalition of dissident organizations. The oppositionists gathered in a fruit orchard on the outskirts of Havana as they called for democratic change in Cuba and the release of political prisoners. It was the first general meeting of APCSC, a US-backed umbrella organization that joins dozens of small dissident groups across Cuba. A handful of American and European diplomats attended the meeting. Former political prisoner, Martha Beatriz Roque, who organized the meeting, said it was the first such gathering since Castro seized power in a 1959 revolution. She said police had harassed delegates to keep them from traveling to Havana. "We are convinced that when in the future people speak of the peaceful struggle for democratic change, they will speak of before and after this Cuban Democratic Congress. Therein lies its significance," Roque said. An attempt by Castro opponents to meet in 1996 was called off after police arrested most of its leaders. (*AP, Reuters, EFE*, 20/5/05)

May 20: US President George Bush praised a dissident meeting held in Havana and for their courage in coming out of the "shadow of repression". Attendants to a meeting organized by the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba were able to listen to Bush's message in a video played from a laptop computer. Bush said his administration, which last year stepped up restrictions on travel and cash remittances to Cuba, will keep working to hasten political change on the island. "We will not rest. We will keep the pressure on until the Cuban people enjoy the same freedom in Havana that they have in America," he said. (*AP*, 20/5/05)

May 21: An unprecedented meeting of dissidents seeking political change in Communist Cuba wrapped up with the election of a panel to direct the group and a call for massive peaceful protests. The first Cuban Democratic Congress, staged in Havana by the Assembly to Promote Civil Society (APSC), ended with a call for the immediate release of all political prisoners in the island and a demand for "democratization." Some 150 representatives of different dissident groups opposed to Fidel Castro's 46-year-old Communist regime gathered in the backyard of a dissident's house in the Rio Verde neighborhood, in southwest Havana. The dissidents elected a 36-member executive secretariat headed by former political prisoners Martha Beatriz Roque, Felix Bonne and Rene Gomez Manzano, the APSC's main promoters and congress organizers. Roque read a declaration approved by delegates amid shouts of "Liberty!" and "Democracy!" calling for "freedom for political prisoners, denouncing one-party rule and demanding democratic pluralism, respect for human rights, among other issues. (*EFE, AP, Reuters*, 21/5/05)

May 21: The International Federation of Journalists protested to Fidel Castro over the arrest and expulsion of journalists from Poland and Italy and called on the country to end its long-running campaign against independent journalists which has seen dozens of reporters and jailed. The foreign journalists were trying to cover a meeting of dissidents when they were arrested and detained. The Polish journalists arrested and finally expelled from Havana were Seweryn Blumsztajn of the daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Jerzy Jurecki of the regional daily *Tygodnik Podhalanski*, and Wojciech Rogasin of *Newsweek* and who had come to cover a congress of dissidents taking place in Havana. Also held was their interpreter Maciej Sarna. The IFJ supported also the protests of its affiliate in Italy the *Federazione della Stampa*

Italiana (FNSI) over the arrest and expulsion of Francesco Battistini, the correspondent of the *Corriere della Sera*. (*IFJ Press Release*, 22/5/05)

May 22: Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos called the conference of dissidents in Cuba, opposed to the Communist regime of Fidel Castro, a positive step despite it being overshadowed by the expulsion of European lawmakers and journalists. Moratinos said the expulsions endangered relations between Cuba and the European Union. "But we have to recognize the positive side," which was an uncensored meeting taking place in Havana, "where dissidents could debate, discuss and organize," Moratinos said. (*AFP*, 22/5/05)

May 23: Several Cuban dissidents who did not participate in the May 20 th opposition meeting said they were nonetheless pleased the island's communist government allowed the event to take place. Manuel Cuesta Morúa, a government opponent who did not attend the meeting because of ideological differences with organizers, sent a statement congratulating them for putting on a successful event "without mishap." Eloy Gutiérrez-Menoyo, a moderate dissident who was not invited to the meeting, also applauded the event but said it was unfortunate that many international observers were not allowed to attend. "The point of conflict was the expulsions," said Gutiérrez-Menoyo, a former exile now living in Cuba. (*The Miami Herald*, 24/5/05)

May 24: Several press advocacy groups have condemned the Cuban government's detention and expulsion of foreign journalists who traveled to Cuba to cover a May 20 gathering of Cuban opposition activists and international observers. In a statement, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) condemned the expulsion from Cuba of five journalists from Poland and Italy who had gone to Cuba's capital city of Havana to cover the dissidents' meeting, formally called the "Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba. The Paris-based organization Reporters Without Borders said the expulsions demonstrated that "once again the Cuban authorities are trying to stifle all dissent by violating press freedom in the most crude and brutal fashion," adding: "This time they have targeted foreign journalists, although they had permission to come to Cuba. We firmly condemn these repressive methods." The Miami-based Inter-American Press Association said it "emphatically opposes and considers the expulsion of five European journalists from Cuba, who were covering the meeting of the political opposition, as another example of the lack of tolerance" for press freedom by the regime of Fidel Castro. (*Washington File*, 24/5/05)

May 26: The first public meeting of Fidel Castro's critics in Cuba has deepened splits between hardline and moderate dissidents over how close they should align themselves with his archenemy, the United States. Some opposition leaders believe Castro allowed the May 20-21 meeting by a US-backed dissident group to paint a divided opposition as Washington agents and sideline moderates like Oswaldo Paya, Cuba's leading dissident. Paya said the meeting was a set-up to counter his Christian Democrat movement and accused its organizer, economist Martha Beatriz Roque, of being in cahoots with the secret police, the latest in tit-for-tat accusations between the two sides. Dissidents who were not invited to the meeting feared Roque's links to the United States could unleash a new wave of repression against Cuba's weak opposition movement, still reeling from a March 2003 crackdown that landed 75 in jail. Oscar Espinosa Chepe a former diplomat turned dissident said showing Bush's video message only helped paint all of Castro's opponents as American agents. "This is a great service to the the government's efforts to slander us," he said. "Her (meeting organizer Roque's) unbridled relationship with the United States is counterproductive and can only

contribute to the government's siege mentality," said Manuel Cuesta Morua, head of Arco Progresista, a Social Democratic group. (*Reuters*, 26/5/05)

August 5: Key opposition figure Oswaldo Paya, one of the island's highest-profile democracy advocates, denounced what he called an unprecedented "wave of repression" against members of his organization. Over the past year, and especially since January, "the repressive campaign against the members of the MCL and its collaborators has reached a level never before seen," said Paya in a communique released in Havana. He referred to his organization, the Christian Liberation Movement, known by its Spanish acronym MCL. The repression, he added, was being directed at the signers of the Varela Project - a constitutional reform initiative pushed by Paya and signed by about 25,000 people - participants in the National Dialogue, an MCL dialogue process, and the "spring prisoners in Cuba," which is how the MCL leader refers to the dissidents convicted in March 2003. Paya also complained about threats against and the "blackmail" of MCL members, and he said he regretted the deterioration of prison conditions for the dozens of dissidents still being held by the regime. (*EFE*, 5/8/05)

August 19: The Cuban government has confiscated the land where an unprecedented gathering of Cuban dissidents took place earlier this year, an activist said. Felix Bonne and his wife, who hosted the gathering on a lot next to their home, received a letter signed by an official from the agriculture ministry, said Martha Beatriz Roque, who also helped organize the gathering. The letter said the land was not being used sufficiently, Roque said. "We feel even more repressed, more crushed, than usual," Roque told the press. "But we are not going to back off, not one millimeter." According to Roque, Bonne's family will be allowed to continue living in their house next to the lot. (*The New York Times*, 19/8/05)

Political Prisoners, Prison Conditions, Repression and Protests

January 4: Prisoner of conscience Randy Cabrera Mayor was subjected to attacks by the chief of the re-education division, at "Combinado de Guantánamo" prison. Cabrera Mayor was also subjected to physical abuses for refusing to wear the prison's uniform. The prisoner assumed the position of "plantado" more than 14 months ago, refusing to wear the prison's uniform and also any method of prison re education since the beginning of his incarceration. Cabrera Mayor was sentenced to 26 years, in 1999, for refusing to enlist in the Cuban Military Service, a counter revolutionary crime according to Cuban laws. He was also sentenced for attempting to escape from prison and to exit the country illegally. (*Puente Informativo*, 4/1/05)

January 11: Imprisoned independent Cuban journalist Normando Hernandez has been hospitalized for serious health problems, a dissident leader told the press. National Reconciliation and Human Rights Commission (CDHRN) chief Elizardo Sanchez said that Hernandez was in "very delicate health (...) and was admitted at the beginning of the month to the prisoners' unit at the Pinar del Rio provincial hospital" some 150 kilometers (93 miles) from Havana. Sanchez said that family members of Hernandez, who is serving a 25-year prison sentence for dissident activities, had claimed that "the results of the Mantu test, which is used to detect tuberculosis, were altered" when they were given to him. "Normando Hernandez's state of health is rather delicate, given that he also suffers from other ailments, including gastrointestinal problems and hypertension, among other things," Sánchez told the press. (*EFE*, 11/1/05)

January 11: Reporters Without Borders said it holds the Cuban government responsible for the state of health of imprisoned journalist Normando Hernández González, who appears to have contracted tuberculosis in prison, and it reiterated its call for his immediate release. "We call on the Cuban authorities to give him all the treatment he needs in order to recover quickly," the organisation said, adding that it also called on the European Union to maintain pressure on the government to obtain the release of all the journalists imprisoned in Cuba. (*RWB Press Release*, 11/1/05)

January 13: Leading Cuban dissident Raúl Rivero and two others recently freed from prison hope to leave the island soon to at least temporarily escape Havana's tight security controls, friends said. Rivero, an internationally recognized poet and journalist, plans to move his family to Spain and return to Havana after a year, said Ricardo Trotti, a friend and director of the Free Press Department of the Miami-based Inter American Press Association. Two other freed dissidents, Manuel Vázquez Portal and Jorge Olivera, also are expected to leave soon and several others are mulling over the option, according to fellow dissidents on the island interviewed by phone. Trotti said he had spoken to Rivero. "He is optimistic (...) that he will be allowed to leave Cuba at the beginning of February, I think under the condition that he return after one year," he told the press. (*The Miami Herald*, 13/1/05)

January 19: Shortly after the press conference where the Civil Initiative on Human Rights in Cuba 2004 was explained, independent journalist and leader of Corriente Martiana Moisés Leonardo Rodríguez Valdés was arrested and taken to a police station. Corriente Martiana, a Cuban civil society organization, revealed before national and foreign press correspondents details of the Civil Initiative on Human Rights in Cuba 2004, a summary review of confirmed major violations of citizens' rights perpetrated last year. (*Cubanet*, 19/1/05)

January 25: An independent journalist jailed in Cuba needs six months of treatment for tuberculosis, Reporters Without Borders said. Normando Hernandez, sentenced to 25 years in prison after a crackdown on Cuban dissidents in March of 2003, was reportedly transferred from prison to a hospital in the western province of Pinar del Rio for his condition earlier this month. Hernandez's wife, Yarai Reyes Marin, was allowed to visit him at the hospital, where she was told he needed the treatment, Hernandez's mother, Blanca Gonzalez, told Reporters Without Borders. But according to a news release from the Paris-based advocacy group, Reyes told Gonzalez the prisoner was not getting the special diet he requires. (*AP*, 25/1/05)

January 27: Laura Pollán Toledo, wife of political prisoner Héctor Maseda, said that she was harassed by Cuban State Security agents during her last visit to the prison where her husband is kept. "Lieutenant Colonel Luis Mariano asked to me, what was happening to my husband, and I replied that he was forced to undress and perform squats", Pollán said to the press. " In regards to Maseda, it all depends on you, collaborate with us so that he can be transferred to Havana", the agent said, according to Laura. This "collaboration" consisted in her standing outside La Pendiente Prison in Santa Clara and letting her husband know that she would not leave until he accepts the visit and the food. "I refuse to do that, for they want to use me to break his will", Laura Pollán said. (*Puente Informativo*, 27/1/05)

February 2: China jails more journalists than any other country and, along with Cuba, Eritrea and Myanmar, accounts for more than three quarters of journalists imprisoned around the world, a new report showed. The Committee to Protect Journalists said its annual snapshot of the situation on December 31, 2004, had found 122 journalists imprisoned in 20 countries for

practicing their profession, 16 fewer than at the same time a year earlier. For the sixth year in a row, China was the leading jailer of journalists, with 42 imprisoned, followed by Cuba with 23, Eritrea with 17 and Myanmar with 11 behind bars. "These four countries operate outside the international mainstream," said Ann Cooper, the group's executive director. (*Reuters*, 3/2/05)

February 5: The Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN), an illegal Cuban opposition organization, warned that at least 16 of the 75 oppositionists incarcerated in 2003 are showing "alarming health deterioration symptoms." (*Europa Press*, 5/2/05)

February 12: As he was writing a document in the prisoner's ward of the "Celestino Hernández Rumbau" Hospital in Santa Clara, political prisoner Jorge Luis García Pérez, "Antúnez," was attacked from behind by a supposedly mentally incapacitated inmate. The individual had arrived an hour earlier claiming he had been transferred from the Manacas prison. According to his family, this is not the first time "Antúnez" has been attacked. (*Cubanet*, 13/2/05)

February 14: Independent journalist and political prisoner Héctor Maseda told his wife Laura Pollán that he would be transferred to a cell in the Higher Security Wing. Maseda has been confined in the maximum security prison since January 28. "The transfer took place after I spoke with officials from the State Council and the Ministry of the Interior to denounce and protest arbitrary measures taken against my husband. He and another inmate were the only ones made to strip in front of all the other inmates during a visual search of his block," said Pollán. (*Cubanet*, 17/2/05)

February 15: Cuban State Security agents warned independent journalist Iván García to "stop writing (...), or else." García, a frequent contributor to the online magazine "Encuentro en la Red," was summoned to a police station where he had a two-hour "meeting" with two State Security officers. "They told me they were under orders to have me and other independent journalists stop writing, particularly for 'Encuentro.' They claimed to have information that 'Encuentro' is funded by the CIA and the US government..." explained García. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 15/2/05)

February 15: Dissenters of the Castro regime in the island continue to be removed from their jobs by members of the State Security as part of their usual tactics to restrain the internal opposition. Joenny Alonso Saiz, dissident and member the Democratic Party 30 of November "Frank País", told the press that after agents of the political police visited the cafeteria where he used to work, both managers fired him for no reason. They simply said they did not want any trouble with the government. Later on, two police officers cited him to appear at a local police station where he was threatened with a 20 year sanction if he continued his activities in the opposition. In Camaguey, Yolanda Martínez Vargas told the press that she was denied a position as secretary in a military committee in her area because she is affiliated to an opposition party. (*Lux Info Press*, 15/2/05)

February 16: Recently released dissident Julio Antonio Valdés Guevara, one of the 75 oppositionists incarcerated during the 2003 crackdown, is awaiting authorization from the Cuban authorities to emigrate. Following his release, Valdés was admitted into several Havana

hospitals for treatment of a severe kidney condition. The rest of Valdés's family has already been authorized to leave the country. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 16/2/05)

February 16: Political prisoner Héctor Palacios Ruiz was hospitalized at the Combinado del Este hospital, according to his wife, Gisela Delgado Sablón. Gisela told the press that her husband is suffering from different illnesses, as reported by doctors at the prison's health facility. Palacios received a 25-years sentence during the crackdown on dissidents in 2003. (*Cubanet*, 16/2/05)

February 16: Cuba and Venezuela are not respecting international norms regarding freedom of expression and human rights, says a global coalition of press freedom advocacy groups. The coalition - known as the Global Coordinating Committee of Press Freedom Organizations - issued resolutions on the state of press freedom for Cuba and Venezuela, as well as a resolution on Haiti. The Global Committee is composed of the Miami-based Inter-American Press Association, which is a watchdog organization for press freedom in the Western Hemisphere; the Paris-based World Association of Newspapers; the North American Broadcasters Association, with headquarters in Toronto; and several other groups. The committee issued the resolutions on Cuba, Venezuela and Haiti when it met in Geneva. In its resolution regarding Cuba, the committee said the recent release from prison of several journalists by the regime of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro "is not sufficient, since 26 colleagues" of the freed journalists "still remain behind bars under the pretext of having committed a crime for the mere act of expressing their ideas or criticizing" Castro's government. The Global Committee said it will "keep vigilant and work with governments and international organizations until achieving the release of all journalists and dissidents in Cuba." (*Washington File*, 28/2/05)

February 17: Dolia Leal, wife of Cuban dissident Nelson Aguiar Ramírez, one of the 75 oppositionists incarcerated in 2003, sent a letter to Fidel Castro petitioning for her husband to be granted an "extra penal license." Aguiar Ramírez, 59, is in the hospital wing of the "Combinado del Este" prison in Havana, where he underwent epigastric hernia surgery last December. (*EFE*, 17/2/05)

February 24: Cuban political prisoner and independent journalist Mario Enrique Mayo Hernández recently underwent surgery at the hospital wing of the "Combinado del Este" prison, where he was visited by his wife Maidelín Guerra Álvarez. Mayo has three brain nodules and suffers from glaucoma. (*Cubanet*, 24/2/05)

March 3: Reporters Without Borders applauded the release of independent journalist Carlos Brizuela from a Cuban prison after serving a three-year sentence. Brizuela Yera, who was released the day before, according to the group, worked at an independent news agency in the eastern city of Camagüey before his arrest. He was sentenced to three years in prison in April of 2002 for disobedience and irreverence toward Fidel Castro. (*AP*, 3/3/05)

March 8: The administration of Pharmacy #674 of the Boyeros municipality, in Havana, fired from his job the human rights activist Dalgi Salgado Gomes, a member of the Pro Human Rights Party of Cuba. "They fired me after 12 years of working at the pharmacy, alleging I did not fulfill the requisites for the job", Salgado said. "A few days later, an employee revealed that the firing took place due to express orders of the State Security," she added. (*Puente Informativo*, 8/3/05)

March 9: More than 30 dissidents in Cuba have been sent to jail in the last year, according to the illegal Cuban Foundation for Human Rights. The Foundation released a "Report of Human Rights Violations in Cuba in 2004" in which it criticizes the "worrying" prison conditions and the "political repression, terror and misinformation" on the island. (*EFE*, 9/3/05)

March 14: The Committee to Protect Journalists issued its annual report, *Attacks on the Press 2004*. Most of the journalists jailed were locked up on vague "anti-state" charges, such as sedition, subversion and working against the interests of the state, the CPJ says. According to the report, Cuba accounts for 23 of the 122 journalists imprisoned around the world. (*The New York Times*, 14/3/05)

March 14: The Inter American Press Association concluded its midyear meeting with a statement that censured Venezuela for "restricting" freedom of expression and urged Cuba to free 25 journalists now behind bars on the Communist-ruled island. The imprisoned Cuban journalists, according to the IAPA, are suffering from harassment and cruelty, are being held under unhealthy conditions, are receiving awful food and many of them are in punishment cells and are "intimidated by repressive measures against their families." (*IAPA Press Release*, 14/3/05)

March 15: Human rights activists Antonio and Enrique García Morejón were released from prison after serving their sentences. The García Morejón brothers had been sentenced to 3 1/2 years in prison under alleged charges of contempt of Fidel Castro, resisting arrest, disobedience and public disturbances. (*Cubanet*, 17/3/05)

March 16: More than 100 prominent writers, editors, and reporters throughout Latin America joined the Committee to Protect Journalists in calling on Fidel Castro to immediately release 23 jailed journalists, saying the two-year-long imprisonments violate "the most basic norms of international law" and represent "an affront to human dignity." The demand, made in a letter sent to Castro and signed by 108 writers from 18 countries, comes nearly two years to the day that Cuban authorities swept up dozens of independent journalists and dissidents in a massive effort to silence political criticism. Signatories of today's letter include Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes, Argentine author Tomás Eloy Martínez, Brazilian journalist Geraldinho Vieira, and Venezuelan editor Teodoro Petkoff. (*CPJ News*, 16/3/05)

March 18: The limitation of freedom of expression, association and assembly are serious human rights violations. They must stop immediately, said Amnesty International as it published a report on prisoners of conscience in Cuba on the 2nd anniversary of the 2003 crackdown. Amnesty International currently recognizes 71 prisoners of conscience imprisoned across the island for peacefully expressing their beliefs and opinions and calls on the Cuban government to immediately and unconditionally release all of them. (*AI Press Release*, 18/3/05)

March 19: A mob attacked the home of dissident doctor, Darci Ferrer, after he placed photos and posters of imprisoned Castro opponents in front of his house. Ferrer was slightly injured and his protest trashed. "This could be the start of a new wave of political repression by the government using all means at its disposal, including these brigades, which typically are connected to security forces. I know, they attacked me four or five times," said veteran human rights activist, Elizardo Sanchez, head of the illegal but tolerated Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation. (*Reuters*, 19/3/05)

March 23: Political prisoner Angel Moya Acosta, sentenced to 20 years in prison during the 2003 crackdown, sent a letter from prison in reply to Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque's statements at the Human Rights Commission in Geneva. In the letter, Moya reminds the Minister of the disappeared passengers aboard the "13 de Marzo" tugboat which was sunk by government agents, and of the 20 children among them. He also recounts the humiliation he was subjected to when he was transferred, naked and handcuffed, to a punishment cell. Moya criticizes the abuses against his relatives in Pedro Betancourt, province of Matanzas, from government supporters who threw lit torches and eggs and yelled insults at them in an act of condemnation. (*Cubanet*, 24/3/05)

March 29: Reporters without Borders (RSF) said that independent Cuban journalist Oscar Mario Gonzalez was being persecuted by the government. "A Cuban journalist is yet again being harassed by the political police for the sole reason that he refuses to conform to the 'code of conduct' imposed by the government," RSF said in a statement. According to the group, Gonzalez was summoned and questioned for two hours by state security agents in Havana who threatened him for criticizing the government too much. "They told me I criticized the government too much and that they would not allow this to continue," Gonzalez told Reporters Without Borders. (*EFE*, 29/3/05)

March 31: Cuban dissident Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva has declared himself on a hunger strike, along with several other activists. Gonzalez Leiva is protesting the arrest of members of his family by the Cuban political police. Gonzalez Leiva's cousin, Santiago Santoyo Gonzalez, member of the Cuban Foundation for Human Rights, was arrested for possessing a DVD donated to the Foundation by the US Interest Section in Havana. State Security refused to acknowledge the papers presented by Gonzalez Leiva, which proved the DVD's lawful origin. Andres Gonzalez Leiva, brother of Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva, was removed from his home and arrested because he had a radio provided by the US Interest Section in Havana. The arrests took place after a meeting of the Human Rights Foundation at Gonzalez Leiva's home. Gonzalez Leiva has refused to accept the unlawful arrest of his family members and declared himself on a hunger strike in front of the Central Police Station in Ciego de Avila. (*Netfor Cuba*, 31/3/05)

April 1: One of Cuba's highest-profile dissidents and its premier contemporary poet arrived in Spain to take up residence four months after being released from jail. Raúl Rivero, who was released from prison for health reasons in November, had been sentenced to 20 years behind bars in 2003. The 60-year-old poet arrived in Madrid in the company of his wife, Blanca Reyes, his 11-year-old daughter and his mother. The Rivero family was greeted at the airport by Foreign Affairs Secretary Bernardino Leon, the ruling Socialist Party's foreign relations secretary, Trinidad Jimenez, and journalist Pablo Diaz Espí, a friend of Rivero's. "I left on a temporary permit. At the last moment, I was told I had a two-year period in which to return if I wanted to. I always want to return, but I think my return does not depend on me but on the Cuban government". (*EFE*, 1/4/05)

April 11: Dissident Jorge Olivera is waiting for an exit permit from the Cuban government to leave to the US. The independent journalist managed to get a visa to the United States in 2002, and was preparing to head north when he was picked up in a government crackdown on political activists in March 2003. After serving 21 months, Olivera was released from prison in December for medical reasons. He has been ready to leave the country ever since but is still waiting on an exit permit from the Cuban government. "It's like I'm still jailed," Olivera told

journalists. "Here I am still, deprived of my rights." Olivera's wife and two sons are also ready to leave the island, and started the necessary paperwork last fall. But they couldn't get exit permits because Olivera was still in prison. All Cuban citizens need permission from their government to leave their homeland. Olivera, 43, said immigration officials told him on January 6 the exit permits would be ready in no more than 45 days. The maximum period passed more than seven weeks ago. (*AP*, 11/4/05)

April 13: Cuban Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto, said in Madrid that dissident Raúl Rivero was convicted "not for thinking differently, but for collaborating with a foreign power which has declared war on Cuba." Prieto added that "there are no crimes of opinion in Cuba," in reply to questions from journalists at the International Press Club. Prieto also said that there has never been "any case of extrajudicial execution, or torture or mistreatment of prisoners" on the island." (*EFE*, 13/4/05)

April 18: Cuban dissident Oscar Espinosa Chepe, released from prison on health grounds, asked Brazil's President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, for his support of the release of the other 61 of the Group of 75 oppositionists who are still in jail. (*EFE*, 19/4/05)

April 18: Cuba's opposition faces a new crackdown, the wife of a former dissident prisoner said, a day after Fidel Castro slammed EU support for a UN human rights resolution last week. "Cuban dissidents foresee a massive wave of repression in the immediate future," said Miriam Leiva, the wife of Oscar Espinosa Chepe, a political activist released from prison two months ago after nearly two years of detention. Chepe was one of 75 opponents of the Castro regime detained in 2003, of which 13 have been released for health reasons. In a written statement to the press, Leiva noted that the government has mostly rebuffed European overtures to resume a political dialogue on Cuba, refusing to free any of the other Cuban prisoners of conscience. (*AFP*, 18/4/05)

April 22: Two years after his arrest, dissident Rafael Millet Leyva still hasn't been tried. Millet Leyva, 39, is confined in the maximum security prison of "El Guayabo", Isle of Pines. "In September of 2004, I filed a complaint to the General Prosecutor of the Republic because they keep him in jail without due process", María de los Ángeles Cruz Batista, Millet's wife said. Rafael Millet Leyva, president of the Martin Luther King Civic Resistance Movement, was arrested on March 24, 2003, during the wave of repression unleashed against the dissidents in the island. He has been charged of placing signs in buildings against the government. Amnesty International has considered Millet Leyva a prisoner of conscience and has demanded the Cuban government for his release. (*Lux Info Press*, 22/4/05)

May 6: One of the 75 Cuban dissidents jailed in the spring of 2003 is on hunger strike in protest against the mistreatment to which he is subjected in prison, the most prominent opposition figure on the Communist-ruled island, Oswaldo Paya, said. Paya told the press that Jose Daniel Ferrer Garcia went on hunger strike nine days ago to protest the abuse he and other political prisoners are forced to endure at Camaguey's Kilo 8 prison, where Ferrer is serving a 25-year sentence. When he was arrested, Ferrer, 32, was helping organize and promote the Varela Project, a democratic initiative spearheaded by Paya. (*EFE*, 6/5/05)

May 16: The Christian Democratic Organization of America (ODCA) has launched a "campaign of solidarity" with Cuban political prisoners aiming at securing their release. According to the organization's executive secretary Francisco Javier Lara, representatives of 32 parties affiliated

with ODCA will participate in the effort. He added that the initiative was developed in behalf of 65 Cuban dissidents incarcerated in March 2003, as well as another 9 detainees, classified as prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International. (*EFE*, 17/5/05)

May 19: Former Spanish president José María Aznar and the leader of the Liberal Front Party of Brazil, Jorge Bornhausen are hosting in Rio de Janeiro a meeting of the Executive Council of the International Center Democrat (IDC) association. Prior to this event, a seminar entitled "A Democratic Future for Cuba" was also conducted in Brazil, featuring discussions on the lack of freedoms on the island. Cuban opposition leaders and activists participated in the seminar. (*AmericaEconomica.Com*, 19/5/05)

May 23: Bárbara Rojo Arias told international reporters that her husband, independent journalist and prisoner of conscience Omar Moisés Ruiz Hernández, was put in solitary confinement for refusing to salute a prison guard while walking in the yard of the Canaleta prison in Ciego de Ávila. (*Cubanet*, 25/5/05)

May 24: The Republican Alternative Movement, a human rights organization inside Cuba, denounced degrading treatment perpetrated against political prisoner Orlando Zapata Tamayo, in the Prison Taco Taco, in the western province of Pinar del Río. Two officers from the prison dragged Zapata Tamayo along seven meters because the prisoner refused to be searched. (*Puente Informativo*, 24/5/05)

May 26: According to the wife of independent journalist and political prisoner Héctor Maseda Gutiérrez, who has been confined for months in a maximum security prison in Villa Clara, her husband's living conditions have deteriorated. Laura Pollán informed that Maseda was transferred to a poorly-ventilated, mosquito-infested cell with no light. To make matters worse, his new living quarters get flooded when the rest of the prisoners shower and his new cellmate is a dangerous offender. (*Cubanet*, 26/5/05)

June 1: An exhibition of photographs presenting the life of mothers and wives of Cuban dissidents imprisoned by Fidel Castro's regime opened in the Prague House in Brussels, organised by the Czech Republic's People in Need association. The photographs document the courage and suffering of the women persecuted by secret police, authorities and sometimes even by fellow citizens. Cuban poet Raúl Rivero attended the exhibition opening ceremony with his wife Blanca Reyes, who, along with other women, has struggled for the dissident prisoners' release. Both Rivero and his wife are currently living in Spain, after Rivero's release from prison by Cuban authorities. (*CTK*, 1/6/05)

June 3: Independent journalist Fabio Prieto Llorente, locked inside a special cell in the Prison Kilo 8 in the province of Camaguey, is forced to live with common prisoners, denounced a relative of the political prisoner. Clara Lourdes Prieto Llorente, sister of the jailed reporter, pointed out to the press that the independent journalist suffers from pulmonary emphysema and pains in his back. Fabio Prieto Llorente is a member of the group of the 75 opponents and independent journalists sanctioned to long prison sentences during the wave of repression unleashed by the Castro regime in the Spring of 2003. (*Lux Info Press*, 3/6/05)

June 3: Opponent Juan Ramón Rivero Despaigne was arrested and will be tried in Havana for the alleged crime of "social dangerousness". At the time of his arrest, Despaigne was only carrying a backpack with copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Despaigne is

the president in function of the Republican Alternative Movement, and member of the Assembly to Promote the Civil Society in Cuba. He participated in the congress of the Assembly celebrated in Havana on May 20th. (*Lux Info Press*, 3/6/05)

June 8: The health condition of imprisoned dissident Hector Palacios has deteriorated significantly. According to reports from his wife, in recent weeks he has suffered from six episodes of cerebral ischemia, an insufficient supply of blood to the brain that could potentially lead to a stroke. At age 63, Hector Palacios is serving a 25 year sentence. Mr. Palacios' health problems have only been aggravated by harsh prison conditions. In March 2003, Mr. Palacios became one of 75 human rights advocates, independent journalists and librarians who were arrested, tried, and sentenced to up to 28 years in prison. (*NotiCuba Internacional*, 8/6/05)

June 16: Osvaldo Alfonso's fight for democracy in Cuba has cost him his freedom, his country and, in the final indignity, his marriage. One of 75 Cuban pro-democracy advocates, poets, librarians and independent journalists to be arrested on March 18, 2003, the gangly intellectual buckled under pressure. During his summary trial, he was the only one to "confess." In a statement later cited by Cuban officials in a nationally televised news conference, he said the dissidents had "responded in one way or another to the interests of the US" -- words he immediately regretted. Now Mr. Alfonso, 40, is out of jail and is persona non grata in Cuba, in the Liberal Democratic opposition party and in his marriage. His wife, Claudia Marquez, divorced him and went into exile in Florida, taking their eight-year-old son, Cristian, with her. The United States rejected Mr. Alfonso's asylum bid. "Everyone considers me an enemy," Mr. Alfonso said, his eyes bloodshot. "We are an example of a family totally destroyed by the system." Mr. Alfonso blamed the psychological torture he endured for making a jailhouse confession. "I was deprived of sleep and the lights were kept on in my cell for 24 hours. They threatened to imprison my wife and said our son would end up in an orphanage," he said. He was released last November, along with 13 others, after he attempted suicide twice and will leave this summer for Sweden, where he has been accepted as a refugee. (*Globe & Mail*, 16/6/05)

June 17: Activists and members of Democratic Party 30 of November "Frank País" stood in protest outside the Combinado del Este prison, in Havana, demanding that Rafael Ibarra Roque be released. Ibarra Roque, president of this illegal opposition party, has already been in jail for 11 of a 29 year-sentence. "We stood outside the prison from 8 in the morning to 12 in the afternoon, demanding the unconditional release without exile for our president", said Anaika Paneca Román, of the Democratic Party 30 of November. She further said that, "agents of the Cuban State Security threatened and forced the oppositionists to turn off a cellular telephone, where several news agencies abroad called covering the protest". (*Puente Informativo*, 17/6/05)

July 5: Cuba's communist government has jailed 13 more political opponents this year, most on charges of "dangerousness," a veteran rights activist reported. The report released by the Havana-based Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation said the total number of political prisoners as of June 30 was 306. The charges against those jailed highlight the government's practice of making ambiguous accusations against its opponents, said Elizardo Sanchez, the activist who runs the non-governmental commission, which releases reports every six months. The list includes most of the 75 dissidents arrested in a roundup on the opposition in March 2003, even though 14 of those were freed on parole last year. Of those 14, two of them were taken off the list because they left Cuba after their release. Sanchez said

the other 12 remained on the list because they could be returned to custody if they violate parole. (*AP*, 5/7/05)

July 11: The Committee to Protect Journalists is very concerned about the deteriorating health of several imprisoned Cuban journalists who have been jailed for more than two years, and it renews its call for the immediate and unconditional release of the 23 writers and editors unjustly jailed for reporting and commenting on the news. In a series of interviews with relatives of the jailed writers and editors, CPJ has found that several journalists who were ill before being jailed have seen their health worsen in prison, while others have contracted new illnesses behind bars. (*CPJ Press Release*, 11/7/05)

July 13: Several dozen dissidents commemorating a deadly 1994 tugboat sinking clashed with a larger group of government supporters who shoved and shouted them down. Nine dissidents were detained after the run-in near La Punta. No major injuries were reported. The midday incident occurred after the dissidents chanting "Justice, liberty!" commemorated the 11th anniversary of the sinking of the 41 would-be immigrants who drowned 11 years ago in a tugboat sinking in Havana Bay, by tossing white flowers into the sea and carrying posters with photos of the dead that proclaimed, "These are the victims of a cruel tyrant who claims to defend women and children." The dissidents were walking inland along Prado, a major boulevard in central Havana, when government supporters began shouting revolutionary slogans at them. Several dissidents were shoved, but no one was reported hurt. The dissidents carried signs with photographs of people who died in the tugboat sinking, which opponents blame on the government and which authorities maintain was an accident. A second protest took place close to "Hermanos Ameijeiras Hospital" by a group of individuals who shouted slogans against Castro and the Cuban government. A group of workers armed with pipes and sticks contested the protesters. A few of the protesters were hurt in the head. (*Sun Sentinel*, *BBC*, *La Jornada*, *Reuters*, *AP*, 13/7/05)

July 13: A group of more than 200 pro-government demonstrators assembled near a park where two dissidents had declared a hunger strike to protest their alleged eviction from a friend's home by government officials. Moisés Leonardo Rodríguez and Roberto Guerras, members of the dissident organization Corriente Martiana, had said that they would remain in the park indefinitely. Government supporters, who arrived in buses and trucks, shouted angrily, "This street belongs to Fidel! Viva Fidel! Down with the mercenaries!" and unfurled a Cuban flag. After one man was surrounded and pushed into a police car that sped away, the group quickly dispersed. Several government supporters refused to answer questions about their demonstration. (*Sun Sentinel*, *BBC*, *La Jornada*, *La Hora*, 13/7/05)

July 13: Some 5,000 students, civil servants and state workers massed in the center of Havana in a show of support for Fidel Castro, in reaction to the two dissident protests of La Punta and Hermanos Ameijeiras Hospital. Waving pro-Castro banners and yelling pro-government slogans, the regime supporters stayed for more than an hour. "The counter-revolutionaries (...) the anti-patriotic ones, must know that we will be organized," shouted Hassan Perez, an official from Cuba's Young Communists Union, as politburo member Pedro Saez looked on. "We will not be provoked," Perez yelled. "This street belongs to Fidel," shouted a group of hospital workers, who also chanted "We're here for you, Fidel, for whatever is needed." (*AFP*, 13/7/05)

July 14: At least 11 protesters who participated in demonstrations in Havana commemorating a deadly 1994 tugboat sinking remained in custody, according to a human rights activist on the island. Elizardo Sánchez, head of the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation in Havana, said his organization confirmed the detention of 11 people, including two women, but have reports of as many as 20 arrests. "There are no charges against them and they remain incommunicado from family members," Sánchez told the press. Sánchez said the repressive actions -- veiled as counter-protests -- were carried out in four separate incidents, three of them along the Malecón and a fourth near the Plaza de la Revolución that involved "punching and kicking" by rapid-response brigades. Sánchez believes that "tempers are flaring" as the country continues to struggle with extended blackouts and a shortage of food, made worse by Hurricane Dennis, and used as examples a few incidents in different provinces regarding the throwing of stones and bottles against government facilities. Cuban media has maintained silence about the protests. (*The Miami Herald, La Jornada, Netfor Cuba*, 14,15/7/05)

July 14: Cuban Foreign Affairs minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, defended government supporters who launched a counter-protest against several dozen dissidents commemorating a 1994 tugboat sinking in Havana Bay, in which 41 would-be immigrants drowned. The United States "pays, stimulates, organizes and directs these provocations, which of course prompt the due reaction of our people, who are the owners of their streets," Pérez Roque said. The foreign minister said he didn't know if any of the activists were detained. International reporters, including an Associated Press Television News team, witnessed two dissidents being detained after the run-in, and human rights activist Elizardo Sanchez said at least 10 activists were detained, based on reports by family members and witnesses. (*AP*, 14/7/05)

July 14: Maidelín Guerra, wife of political prisoner Mario Enrique Mayo, told the press that her husband began a hunger strike demanding his immediate release from prison. Mayo, 40, a lawyer and independent journalist, was imprisoned on March 2003 and sentenced to 20 years in prison for allegedly "committing acts against the independence and the territorial integrity of the State". He directed an independent press agency in Camagüey to denounce violations of human rights in Cuba. Amnesty International recognized Mayo as a prisoner of conscience on July 2003. He is serving his term in Kilo-7 prison, Camagüey. (*ADC, Press release*, 15/7/05)

July 17: Matilde Gerez Guevara, sister of dissident Julio Antonio Valdés Guevara, one of the "Group of 75" oppositionists who was released from prison, demanded the Cuban government to let him leave the country and expressed concerns over his health. Valdés Guevara, 53, a human rights activist, leader of the "Golfo de Guacanayabo" opposition group, and one of the promoters of the "Varela Project" has fulfilled all the formalities to emigrate to the US, however he still needs an exit permit from the Cuban government to be able to travel, said his sister. "I ask the government to let my brother leave", she added. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 17/7/05)

July 18: Reporters Without Borders deplored the use of violence by State Security and National Revolutionary Police on the Isle of Youth against Lamasiel Gutiérrez Romero, an independent journalist of the Nueva Prensa Cubana news agency, who was roughed up, held for seven hours and fined for resisting the authorities as she was about to travel to the Cuban mainland on 14 July. (*RSF Press Release*, 18/7/05)

July 19: Three Cuban dissidents, including one who was released from jail in November after 15 months behind bars, were rounded up and jailed, a rights organization said. Marcelo Lopez

Banobre, vice president of the outlawed Cuban Committee for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, was being held at a police station in Centro Habana, his colleague and the group's president, Elizardo Sanchez, told the press. Sanchez said that even as Lopez Banobre was detained, two other dissidents, Anaika Paneca and Luis Angel Medina, also were arrested in Havana. Lopez, 41, was one of the 75 dissidents jailed in a roundup that started in March 2003 and then sentenced to lengthy prison terms. Lopez was the first of the dissidents jailed after that major sweep to be let out on parole and now rearrested. Sanchez said the government recently had boosted its repressive operations. "There is an unprecedented police deployment, both uniformed and plainclothes, and there are thousands of them," Sanchez said. (AFP, 19/7/05)

July 20: Three Cuban dissidents have been released from jail after being rounded up by authorities, who held them for several hours and warned one of them specifically against protesting the government, a prominent government opponent said. Marcelo Lopez Banobre, vice president of the outlawed Cuban Committee for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, was held at a police station in Havana, as were dissidents Anaika Paneca and Luis Angel Medina, the group's president, Elizardo Sanchez, told the press. Sanchez said that Paneca, who was arrested at her home in the town of San Miguel del Padron, was arrested explicitly for taking part in the protests involving dozens of dissidents in Havana on July 13. (AFP, 20/7/05)

July 21: Cuba launched a massive civil monitoring operation in response to a series of opponents' protests in Havana a few days prior to the July 26 celebrations, [of the 1953] armed attack that marks the start of the revolution led by Fidel Castro. The so-called "National Security Watch" ("Ejercicio Nacional de Vigilancia") is being led by the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), an organization created by the government in the 1960s to curb actions against the communist government on the island. (Reuters, 21/7/05)

July 22: A small protest was staged outside the French Embassy urging the release of those arrested during the demonstrations of July 13, while at least four other opposition activists were arrested in other parts of the [Havana] city. A small gathering of some 15 people protested outside the French diplomatic mission, in the residential neighbourhood of Miramar, without authorities' intervention. The Assembly to Promote Civil Society (APSC) called for the protest. (La Jornada, 22/7/05)

July 22: Officials of the Inter-American Press Association agreed at their quarterly review of press freedom in the hemisphere that countries warranting special attention are the United States, Mexico, Cuba and Venezuela. On Communist Cuba, IAPA said that "official censorship has increased" along with discrimination against independent journalists. The organization also publicly asked the Cuban government to release 24 imprisoned journalists, 12 of whom have serious health problems or have contracted illnesses in prison and are being denied access to adequate medical attention. (EFE, 22/7/05)

July 22: Cuban dissident leader Marta Beatriz Roque and more than a dozen other activists were arrested in a new crackdown on the Cuban opposition by Fidel Castro's regime, dissidents and relatives said. Roque, a 59-year-old economist, is president of the Assembly for the Promotion of Civil Society, which had organized a protest in front of the French Embassy in Havana to demand the release of political prisoners from Cuban jails. Many of those detained were leading figures in the group. "She was detained by state security agents shortly after

leaving her home. About 20 dissidents have been arrested," said Elizardo Sanchez, president of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation. (*AFP, BBC, 22/7/05*)

July 22: Cuban police released dissident leader Martha Beatriz Roque and two other women but continued holding other opponents of Fidel Castro detained in a roundup, a human rights group said. Roque, a 59-year-old economist who has been jailed twice since 1997 for criticizing communist rule in Cuba, was freed without charges, said veteran activist Elizardo Sanchez of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights. Roque and her driver were seized as police rounded up members of her opposition movement prior to a demonstration they had called outside the French Embassy in Havana to demand the release of political prisoners in Cuba. "They were detained arbitrarily, with no warrants, without charges and not allowed to make telephone calls to their families who did not know where they were," Sanchez said. He said that at least 22 people were detained and that most were still being held including Roque's top two political associates, lawyer Rene Gomez Manzano and engineer Felix Bonne. (*AP, 22/7/05*)

July 23: Cuban dissident Martha Beatriz Roque, who was arrested for calling a demonstration in Havana, said upon her release that she will continue to protest and demand freedom for all dissidents. Roque, 59, heads the outlawed Assembly to Promote Civil Society or APSC, along with Rene Gomez Manzano and Felix Bonne Carcasses, who were arrested along with 20 other activists from the group when they organized a rally in front of the French Embassy in Havana. "I declare myself totally responsible for what happened. I convened the rally to call for the release of those arrested on July 13, because we cannot continue piling up prisoners," the economist told the press after her release. According to her estimate, 22 members of the Assembly were arrested and 16 remain behind bars. As the arrests were taking place, hundreds of pro-government demonstrators engaged in "acts of patriotic reaffirmation" in front of the homes of dissidents, preventing them from leaving. (*EFE, 23/7/05*)

July 25: Reporters Without Borders roundly condemned the arrest of independent journalist Oscar Mario González of the Grupo de Trabajo Decoro news agency, who was detained at the same time as at least 15 other dissidents on the morning of 22 July. Referring to the 21 other journalists already being held in dreadful conditions in prisons throughout the island since 18 March 2003, the organisation said González had become "the 22nd example of the deplorable state of press freedom in Cuba." (*RWB, Press Release, Canadian News Wire, 25, 28/7/05*)

July 25: Cuban authorities have freed 23 dissidents, a leading human rights activist said. In all 33 people were detained on July 22. The dissidents had planned to attend a protest that day outside the French Embassy to press European nations to lobby for the island's political prisoners. Cuba's government has not commented on the roundup of dissidents. (*The New York Times, 25/7/05*)

July 26: Communist Cuba marked the 52nd anniversary of the start of Fidel Castro's revolution without a traditional outdoor mass rally. In the darkest, bluntest warning to Cuban dissidents yet, Fidel Castro said that "acts of treason" would not be tolerated and warned that attempts to destabilize would be confronted by the population "whenever traitors and mercenaries go one millimeter beyond what the revolutionary people (...) are willing to permit." Castro again accused government opponents of being paid US mercenaries playing a dangerous "game." "The much-publicized dissidence, or alleged opposition in Cuba, exists only in the fevered minds of the Cuban-American mafia and the bureaucrats in the White

House," Castro said to resounding applause. But even as Castro tried to minimize the relevance of dissidents, the 78-year-old ruler acknowledged that a lengthy drought, a crippling energy crunch and devastation from Hurricane Dennis has made life more difficult on the island, and he asked the Cubans to be patient. (*The Miami Herald*, 27/7/05)

July 27: Members of the Cuban opposition expressed their concern about the possible use of repressive special legislation known as the "Gag Law" - which establishes prison terms of up to 20 years - against at least three recently-arrested dissidents. Special Law 88, approved in 1999, was used for the first time against most of the 75 opposition members sentenced to prison terms of up to 28 years in spring 2003, the largest wave of repression against dissidents on the communist island in decades. The Cuban Committee for Human Rights announced that the police had told relatives of dissidents René Gómez Manzano, Oscar Mario González and Julio César López - all of whom were arrested in July 22 - that the trio would be prosecuted under the "Law for Protection of the National Independence and Economy of Cuba," as the measure's full title reads. (*EFE*, 27/7/05)

July 28: A group of dissidents from Villa Clara who tried to leave Cuba via Guantánamo Bay have been transported to a prison, although leaving the country without an exit visa is not a punishable crime. Luis Enrique Junquera García, Juan Carlos Alpizar Rodas, Aleixis Sotolongo Díaz, Didier Arencibia Pérez and Orlando Rodríguez Salazar, all members of the Liberal Party of Cuba, tried to leave June 25. Alexis Lázaro Pérez Bernal, a relative of one of the men, said he had been advised that the group was being held at the Aguadores prison in Santiago de Cuba. (*Cubanet*, 28/7/05)

August 2: Relatives of Cuban dissident René Gómez Manzano, who was arrested after demanding the release of the regime's political prisoners, expressed their concern that he will be charged under a "gag law" carrying penalties of up to 20 years in prison. Jorge Gómez Manzano, René's brother, told the press that the police officer overseeing the case confirmed to him that "the accusation will be in accord with Law 88" or the Law for Protection of National Independence and the Economy, approved by Cuba's rubber-stamp parliament in 1999. If convicted under the provisions of Law 88, Gómez, 61, a lawyer and one of the leaders of the outlawed Assembly to Promote Civil Society, could be sentenced to 20 years behind bars. (*EFE*, 2/8/05)

August 2: A large security operation was implemented in Santa Clara during the visit of the Secretary for Human Rights and Political Affairs of the European Union's Embassy in Havana to the residence of a member of the opposition. Ms. Silvia Benamu arrived in Santa Clara to meet with a group of opposition leaders while several hundreds of paramilitaries were deployed in the area. Nine human rights activists were intercepted by the paramilitaries while still at home as well as on their way to the meeting. Ms. Benamu told her hosts that she "had not seen such a disproportionate security deployment" in the course of her trip. "I counted no less than four hundred persons and I could photograph some of them," she said. (*Cubanet*, 2/8/05)

August 3: Three dissidents detained in a police roundup last month will be tried on charges of working to undermine Cuba's communist government, a veteran activist said. Dissident attorney René Gómez Manzano, independent journalist Oscar Mario González and political activist Julio César López will face the Law for the Protection of Cuba's National Independence, said Elizardo Sánchez of the non-governmental Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation. The three men told relatives they were informed of the charges by Cuban

authorities. It was not clear when their trials would begin. The law, enacted in 1999 to rein in the political opposition, carries sentences of up to 20 years. It's the same law that was applied to most of the 75 opponents arrested in a highly publicized crackdown in March 2003. (*AP*, 3/8/05)

August 5: The European Union's stated commitment to increasing dialogue with all sectors of Cuban society was put to the test in Havana, and the appearance of a pro-Castro crowd outside the bloc's mission prompted EU diplomats to cancel a meeting with relatives of political prisoners. EU officials in Havana said the encounter was called off to avoid any attempts to garner some kind of "political use" from the meeting. Relatives of several dissidents arrested on July 22 came to the EU office in Havana's Miramar neighborhood accompanied by opposition figures Marta Beatriz Roque and Felix Bonne, the leaders of the illegal "Assembly to Promote Civil Society." Minutes later, government supporters also arrived at the doors of the European delegation to insult the dissidents and shout revolutionary slogans. The European officials then decided not to hold the meeting and released a communique in which they expressed their "regret" over what had happened and announced that the visits of arrested dissidents' relatives scheduled for Friday had been cancelled. Several demonstrations by pro-Castro mobs against dissidents also were reported in the cities of Placetas and Santa Clara, in the center of the island. (*EFE, El Nuevo Herald*, 6/8/05)

August 6: The blind lawyer and president of the Cuban Foundation for Human Rights, Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva, was arrested and taken to a police station in the city of Florida, province of Camaguey. González Leiva was taking part of a gathering of 50 activists who were celebrating an assembly to elect the board members of the Foundation. A repressive force comprised of approximately fifty policemen and State Security agents suddenly appeared at the farm where the meeting was taking place. The activist remained under arrest during six hours, and was later transferred to and released in Ciego de Avila. He was accused of committing illegal acts, and was handed an official document forbidding him to ever set foot again in Florida. (*Cubanet, Martinoticias*, 8,9/8/05)

August 10: Amnesty International expressed its deep concern about the possibility that fifteen people, who remain in detention following a recent government crackdown on dissidence in Cuba, may be "subjected to harsh or disproportionate prison sentences solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression, association and assembly." In a statement, AI condemns the detentions, and demands from Cuban authorities the release of all political prisoners. (*Europa Press*, 10/8/05)

August 10: As librarians from around the world gather in Oslo for the opening of the conference of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), a new "cold war" controversy is erupting over Eastern European demands for a resolution condemning the persecution of independent librarians in Cuba. The mood of revolt was expressed in a statement by the Estonian Library Association, which declared its support of the independent library movement in Cuba, and protested against the persecution and repression of independent librarians by the "anti-democratic [Castro] regime." Officials from the Polish Librarian's Association have said they will introduce a resolution regarding human rights violations in Cuba. For more than a year the Cuban issue has ignited a controversy within the normally placid world of librarians, where Cuban delegates to IFLA have said that previous IFLA statements condemning the suppression of intellectual freedom in Cuba were lies inspired by CIA-paid Western librarians. (*Friends of Cuban Librarians*, 10/8/05)

August 11: Independent journalist Lamasiel Gutiérrez Romero was given a seven-month in prison sentence by a municipal tribunal in the Isle of Pines. Gutierrez Romero had been arrested during July's opposition demonstrations. She was convicted of crimes of resistance and disobedience. During the trial, the independent journalist denounced the violence perpetrated against her by the police on July 14th, and reiterated that she had the right to denounce the abuses she had been subjected to. When the verdict was read, the tribunal pointed out that Gutierrez Romero didn't participate in any of the activities of the revolutionary organizations in the island. The trial took place under a heavy police operative. (*Puente Informativo*, 12/8/05)

August 11: A mob organized by Cuban authorities congregated in front of the home of oppositionist leader Martha Beatriz Roque to impede a meeting of leaders of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba. The mob, comprised of mostly the same individuals that gathered days before in front of the home of Humberto Guerra Perruguria, repeatedly pushed Felix Bonne Carcasses so as to impede his entry into the aisle that leads to Martha's apartment. They also impeded the entry to Jacqueline Montes De Oca, not even allowing her to pick up some clothes she had left in the apartment. Cuban political police officials delivered lunch and refreshments to the mob, that for hours yelled out obscenities, many of which were personally offensive, against the dissidents. (*Europa Press*, 11/8/05)

August 12: Supporters of Fidel Castro staged angry demonstrations outside the homes of two dissidents in response to the Cuban leader's call to block opposition activity. About 100 people chanted "Fidel, Fidel" outside the home of leading dissident Vladimiro Roca and prevented members of his Todos Unidos (All United) opposition group from entering the house for a meeting. The angry crowd accused Roca of being a "mercenary" on the payroll of the US government and shouted "lackey" and "worm," frequent epithets for opponents of Cuba's Communist government. "The only meeting here is ours," Juan Laguna, a 70-year-old Communist Party militant. Speakers heckled Roca from a microphone and speaker set up across the street for the rally, which was organized by party officials using walkie-talkies. (*Reuters*, 12/8/05)

August 12: More than 100 people or so railed against government opponents outside the building where Leon Padron and Gisela Padron, wife of jailed dissident Hector Palacios, both live. The demonstrators insulted the democracy advocates with shouts of "sellout," "worm" and other pejoratives. They also sang the praises of Fidel Castro, who has governed for the past 46 years, on the eve of his 79th birthday. Also, Elizardo Sanchez, leader of the illegal Human Rights Commission, said he could not attend a meeting at Vladimiro Roca's house because the mob wouldn't let him through. Sanchez said political repression is increasing in Cuba. "It's the government's way of trying to intimidate not only those of us citizens who have the dignity to say what we think and express our opinions. It's a message of intimidation to the entire population in response to the crisis the country is undergoing," Delgado said. (*EFE, Reuters*, 12/8/05)

August 13: A mob organized by Cuban authorities congregated in front of the home of oppositionist leader Martha Beatriz Roque to celebrate Fidel Castro's birthday. The mob, comprised of mostly the same individuals that gathered two days before in front of Roque's house to prevent a meeting, sang "happy birthday" to Castro and yelled out obscenities to Roque. A woman friend of Roque and her two-years old son were prevented to get to Roque's house by the participants in the demonstration. (*Cubanet*, 14/8/05)

August 15: Mobs organized by Cuban authorities demonstrated in front of the houses of at least five members of the dissident Democratic Party 30 of November "Frank País". Shouting to the dissidents in a threatening and offensive way, the groups blocked off the entrance to the houses, not allowing anybody to enter or leave their homes. Anaika Paneca Román, vice president of the dissident Party, said that a young man arrived in a show of solidarity to her place and was brutally beaten by the mob and arrested by the police. Anaika has a seven-years old daughter who didn't stop crying during the counterdemonstration by Fidel Castro's followers. According to Anaika, parallel pogroms were being held in front of the homes of Raiza Martínez Llerena, Reinel Sánchez Calvo, Antonio Batista, Idalmis Balbuena Santos and Mirta Villanueva Almeida, all members of the Democratic Party 30 of November "Frank País". (*Puente Informativo*, 15/8/05)

August 17: Cuban dissident Julio Valdes Guevara, the first to be released among the 75 dissidents jailed in a March 2003 crackdown, is asking for international help in convincing Cuban authorities to allow him to emigrate to the United States, his sister said. He has been attempting to emigrate for 13 months. "We are asking for the international community's assistance and solidarity to help us convince the Cuban authorities to allow Julio to leave," his sister, Matilde Jerez Guevara, told reporters. Valdes, 52, was sentenced to 20 years in prison but was the first of a group of 14 dissidents to be released for health reasons on April 15, 2004. According to his sister, Valdes has chronic kidney problems and has been hospitalized twice since his release in the city of Manzanillo, in eastern Cuba, where he lives. (*AFP*, 17/8/05)

August 17: Lawyer René Gómez Manzano, one of 15 oppositionists arrested in July who remain in prison, began a "hunger and thirst strike" in protest for official regulations to family visits, reported opposition leader Marta Beatriz Roque. Roque said that Gómez Manzano's actions were in response to severe restrictions enforced during his conversation with his brother Jorge while the latter was visiting him in prison. (*Notimex*, 17/8/05)

August 24: Esther Germán Valdés, wife of political prisoner René Montes de Oca Martija, told the press that Housing Institute authorities ordered her to leave the house where she and her family have resided for more than ten years. A resolution was delivered to Esther stipulating that her Mazorra neighborhood residence would have to be vacated immediately. Esther and her brother had built this house without government assistance on a lot donated by a neighbor. According to Esther, the paperwork for the legalization of her house had already been initiated with the approval of the Housing Institute. (*NetforCuba*, 24/8/05)

August 24: The Committee to Protect Journalists is deeply worried about the health of imprisoned journalist Adolfo Fernández Saínz, who began a hunger strike to protest the mistreatment of another imprisoned dissident. Fernandez Saínz began the strike on August 19, after learning that imprisoned dissident Arnaldo Ramos Lauzurique had been beaten by a prison officer two days before and later placed in a punishment cell, according to his daughter, Joana Fernández Nuñez. He will continue his hunger strike until Ramos Lauzurique is taken out of the punishment cell, she said. Fernández Saínz, 57, one of 24 independent Cuban journalists now imprisoned, is currently at the Holguín Provincial Prison in eastern Holguín Province, hundreds of miles from his home in Havana. (*CPJ Press Release*, 24/8/05)

August 25: The Committee to Protect Journalists released a statement denouncing that the Cuban government jailed a second independent journalist who covered an unprecedented

opposition meeting in May. Albert Santiago Du Bouchet Hernandez was arrested on 6 August, tried three days later and handed a one-year jail term without the knowledge of his family, who found out about his detention only after he smuggled a note out of prison. He joins 24 independent Cuban journalists jailed for their work. He is director of the independent news agency Havana Press, which sends reports to the Miami-based website Nueva Prensa Cubana. (*BBC*, 25/8/05)

September 1: The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reports that authorities arrested Albert Santiago Du Bouchet Hernández, director of the independent Havana Press agency, and sentenced him to a year in prison. His August 6 arrest became public recently, adding to the 24 other independent, Cuban journalists in jail. Both Du Bouchet and Oscar Mario González, who has been held without trial since July 22, were apparently punished for covering a congress organized by the Cuban opposition in May. The congress gathered more than 100 activists, who discussed strategies to create a democratic society in their country. (*CPJ Press Release*, 1/9/05)

September 1: Blind human rights activist, Juan Carlos González Leiva, denounced that he was the victim of an angry demonstration in front of his house by mobs organized by Cuban authorities. Forces of State Security and the Cuban Police used the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution to lead a mob of over 200 people that shouted obscenities and governmental slogans. They banged the doors and windows of Leiva's home and threatened him. Leiva denounced that since August 6 he has suffered more than 15 demonstrations, and other acts of repression like detainments, fines, and citations. He also said that his telephone is interrupted continually, for entire days and nights. (*Netfor Cuba*, 11/9/05)

September 5: According to Lisandra Lafitta, wife of physician and political prisoner, Dr. Luis Milán Fernández, her husband has been arbitrarily confined since February 18, 2005, to a psychiatric ward of the Boniato Prison Hospital in Santiago de Cuba. Dr. Milán Fernández is a man free of mental ailments. Sentenced to a 13-year prison term, he is forced to share a cell with patients suffering a variety of mental disorders, two or three of them sleep in Dr. Milan's prison cell. Some of these patients, due to their aggressiveness have annoyed and provoked him. Upon the complaints presented by Dr. Milan and his wife for this imprisonment in a psychiatric ward with mental patients, the authorities at the Boniato Prison said that, "it's the ward with the best conditions, spacious, and where he is able to remain alone for a period of time." (*NetforCuba*, 5/9/05)

September 12: A group headed by well-known opposition leader Martha Beatriz Roque accused Cuban authorities of confiscating medicine and cash intended for a jailed dissident's family. The Assembly for the Promotion of Civil Society said in a statement sent to international media that state security agents seized the medicine and local currency worth about \$296 (euro240) earlier in the day when they detained and questioned Carlos Jimenez. Jimenez, an assembly member, had been on his way to deliver the items to the family of imprisoned dissident Rene Gomez Manzano. "Every day, the Cuban government becomes more fascist," the assembly said, accusing island authorities of "not allowing humanitarian aid to be given to prisoners." There was no immediate response from the Cuban government. (*AP*, 12/9/05)

September 12: Reporters Without Borders voiced great concern about the plight of Cuban journalist Oscar Mario González Pérez of the Grupo de Trabajo Decoro independent news

agency, who is still awaiting trial more than 50 days after his arrest on 22 July in Havana. "González has been held in four different police stations since his arrest and still does not know what will become of him," the press freedom organisation said. "Is this a new method the Cuban authorities are using to break a dissident? It is just as absurd as arrest without good reason and constitutes harassment, especially as the victim is a 61-year-old man in frail health." (*RWB Press Release*, 12/9/05)

September 15: The independent journalist and political prisoner Victor Rolando Arroyo Carmona has been held incommunicado for four months in the prison Combinado de Guantánamo. "I have not been able to see my husband for the past four months; I am very concerned because Arroyo is suffering from high blood pressure that is out of control and at the present time has blisters all over his body". "According to relatives of other prisoners my husband's physical deterioration is alarming," said Elsa Gonzales. His isolation extends to denying him access to all mail, no telephone calls and most importantly, not allowing his wife to pass the medications he needs. (*Puente Informativo*, 15/9/05)

September 20: Former political prisoner Miguel Sigler Amaya, his wife Josefa Lopez Peña, and their two children, were all arrested as they were boarding the plane that was to take them into exile. As they were boarding a plane at Havana's International Airport, Sigler Amaya and his family were taken to a police office close to the airport. Sigler Amaya had been arrested on March 18, 2003, and condemned to 26 months in prison, but was released due to severe health conditions. His wife, Josefa Lopez Peña participated in demonstrations carried out by the "Ladies In White" (Damas de Blanco), a group of women comprised political prisoners' relatives who peacefully and publicly pray and demand the freedom of their loved ones. Josefa also practiced independent journalism and her articles were widely published in media web pages such as Payolibre and, most recently, in *Bitácora Cubana*. (*Bitacora Cubana News Release*, 20/9/05)

September 22: An imprisoned Cuban activist rounded up in a crackdown on dissidents two years ago has been hospitalized after 14 days of a hunger strike, his wife said. Víctor Rolando Arroyo, 55, stopped eating on September 8 to protest mistreatment at the prison in eastern Cuba where he is serving a 26-year-sentence, Elsa González said in a telephone interview with the press. González was waiting to visit her husband, whom she said she has not seen for four months. The hunger strike was confirmed to her by Cuban authorities, she said. Another political prisoner, Felix Navarro, joined the hunger strike in support of Arroyo and has not eaten for nine days, Navarro's daughter said. "We are very worried," said Sayli Navarro. "These men are not young, and they have made clear that they will maintain this until the end." Another political prisoner, José Daniel Ferrer García, has gone also on hunger strike for 15 days to protest bad conditions in jail. Ferrer, a member of the Christian Liberation Movement in Cuba, received a 25-years sentence in March 2003. (*The New York Times*, *El Nuevo Herald*, 22/9/05)

September 23: The Committee to Protect Journalists is concerned about the health of jailed independent journalist Víctor Rolando Arroyo who went on hunger strike for two weeks and is now in the prison hospital, his sister Blanca Arroyo told CPJ. Arroyo refused food to protest mistreatment at the Guantánamo Provincial Prison, in eastern Cuba, where he is serving a 26-year sentence. He is one of 24 independent journalists behind bars in Cuba. (*CPJ Press Release*, 23/9/05)

September 24: The Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) held Cuban authorities responsible for the deterioration of Víctor Rolando Arroyo's health, who is on a hunger strike in the provincial prison of Guantánamo. Arroyo, sentenced to 26 years in prison on April 4, 2003, went on a hunger strike in this southeastern prison, where 25 independent journalists serve their sentences. "On top of sentencing a journalist to over 20 years in prison for the crime of writing, we regret prison guards add their abuse to the injustice of the government's sentence", said the IAPA in a press release. (*AP*, 24/9/05)

September 27: Reporters Without Borders voiced deep shock at the public beating which a pro-government group gave Guillermo Fariñas, the editor of the independent Cubanacán Press agency, in the central city of Santa Clara, after he took part in a protest against the arrest of a dissident. "This extremely violent attack on Fariñas shows that Cuban independent journalists are not just under threat from the government but also from ultra-revolutionaries, who in this case vented their anger on Fariñas as the political police looked on," the press freedom organisation said. The attack came after Fariñas and some 15 other government opponents demonstrated outside a police station to demand the release of Noelia Pedraza Jiménez, a fellow dissident who had just been arrested. (*RWB Press Release*, 27/9/05)

September 28: Josefa López Peña, wife of former political prisoner Miguel Sigler Amaya, was beaten on the street five days after she and her husband were taken off a plane bound for the United States. López Peña, a founder of the Ladies in White movement, said she was going to the Havana home of another member, Aida Valdés, when a young man got off his bicycle and started to beat her on the back of her head with an object he had in his hand. "Who are you? Why are you hitting?" she said she asked her assailant. "This is a warning that we've wanted to give you for a long time," the man replied. López Peña received medical attention at a nearby hospital. She reported the incident the following day to police. "I fear for our lives in Cuba," she said. "We hold State Security responsible for anything that might happen to us in the future." (*Cubanet*, 28/9/05)

September 30: According to Elsa González, the wife of political prisoner Victor Rolando Arroyo who has been on a hunger strike for over 20 days, the degenerative process of Arroyo's system has accelerated, and a renal shut down is expected at any moment. Arroyo's wife said that, he was sleeping when she came closer to his bed, "and woke up as soon as I spoke to him; he did not let anyone touch him but with a quick movement the doctor was able to take his pulse, he had tachycardia". "His eyes were very hollow and he had no saliva in his mouth"- affirmed Elsa González, who is torn for she knows that they are leaving her husband to die. (*Puente Informativo*, 30/9/05)

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

Daniel Ferrer, another member of the "Group of 75," abandoned a hunger strike after refusing food for 18 days. (*EFE*, 3/10/05)

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 10: Dozens of pro-government sympathizers prevented the leader of a center-left Cuban dissident group from attending a meeting in Havana, resorting at one point to shoving him as he tried to join his colleagues in their home. The pro-regime mob gathered in front of

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 19: The health of political prisoner Omar Pernet Hernández who has been on a hunger strike since October 10 in Santa Clara's Old Hospital took a turn for the worse. According to some relatives, the prisoner is suffering from diarrhea and refuses intravenous feeding. On October 10 of 2004, Pernet Hernández was involved in an automobile accident, while he was being transferred from the prison Las Mangas, in the eastern province of Bayamo, to another prison in Las Villas province, in the center of the island. In the accident,

the prisoner suffered fractures to his clavicle and his right leg. Pernet Hernández, 60, is serving a 25-year sentence since April 2003. (*Puente Informativo*, 19/10/05)

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

November 3: Non-violent opposition organizations delivered an open letter to the Provincial Court of Villa Clara demanding the cessation of acts of harassment against dissidents in the city of Santa Clara. More than twenty civil society organizations endorsed the demand. (*Cubanet*, 3/11/05)

November 9: Health condition of political prisoners get worse, a dissident human rights organization said, and called for their immediate release. In a document issued to the press, the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN) mentioned the cases of Héctor Palacios, 64, Nelson Aguilar, 60, and Omar Pernet 60, sentenced to 13-25-years in jail and who have been recently hospitalized for long periods of time. Others, like Ricardo González, 35, José Luis García, 40, Julio César Gálvez, 60, and Francisco Chaviano, 52, have remained in the hospital of the Combinado del Este prison, in the outskirts of Havana. (*AFP*, 9/11/05)

November 14: International concern is being raised about the health of Cuban journalist Roberto de Jesús Guerra Pérez, who has been imprisoned in a Cuban jail since July 13. He began a second hunger strike protesting his detention on November 3. In a November 10 statement, Paris-based press freedom advocacy group Reporters Without Borders said Guerra is a contributor to the US-government-run Radio Marti and to the U.S.-based Web sites Payolibre and Nueva Prensa Cubana. In demanding Guerra's "immediate release" from jail, Reporters Without Borders said: "We are all the more concerned about this second hunger strike as he had only called off the preceding one a few days before and he was still very weak. There are no serious grounds for holding him [in jail] as all he did was describe what life is really like for Cubans." Guerra was arrested in July while staging a fast, along with a dozen other dissidents, in protest against the harassment he has undergone as an independent journalist and representative of a movement called the "Corriente Martiana". (*US Fed News*, 14/11/05)

November 15: Elsa Morejón, the wife of political prisoner Dr Elías Biscet, reported to the press that the director of Combinado del Este Prison in Havana, Lieutenant Colonel Miguel Azcuy, informed her and Biscet's relatives that he is currently in "Maximum Severity System: Phase 1" and that as long as he refuses to put on the uniform of common prisoner, he will not receive any privileges; his situation in prison could get even worse. The prison director confirmed that due to a new administration at Combinado del Este Penitentiary, the situation of the Cuban doctor changed after August, 2005. Dr. Biscet, who suffers from hypertension, chronic gastritis, and high cholesterol, has not been able to receive the food items his family brings him. The number of family visits has been reduced, and instead of being every 45 days,

the visits will now be every four months (two hours long), during which time Dr. Biscet will be able to receive his items of personal hygiene and some food. (*Puente Informativo*, 15/11/05)

November 15: Political prisoner Jorge Luis García Pérez (Antúnez) began a hunger strike, reported his sister, Bertha. Antúnez is confined along with dangerous inmates, in overcrowded conditions of that propitiate violence. He's demanding a cell transfer and his right to family telephone calls. Antúnez has been in prison for 15 years. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 17/11/05)

November 18: For the 9th time in less than three months, the house of non-violent opposition activist Alberto Moreno Fonseca, in Manzanillo, was stoned by Fidel Castro supporters with the tacit approval of on-looking local police. The demonstrators shouted slogans like, "Down with human rights!", "Down with the worm nest!", and "Long live Fidel Castro!" (*Cubamet*, 18/11/05)

November 24: A rabble organized by the State Security Service, the Cuban secret police, foiled a meeting of non-violent opposition activists in the house of Martha Beatriz Roque, the president of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba. More than 20 people surrounded Roque's residence and prevented several visitors from entering the premises. (*Puente Informativo*, 24/11/05)

November 29: The State Security Police confiscated "counterrevolutionary" material, after conducting a search in the house of an independent journalist in in Isle of Pines. Carlos Serpa, an independent journalist and director of Lux Info Press, reported that the police was looking for publications issued by the Information Bridge Cuba-Miami Independent Press Bureau. "The search -conducted under a heavy military operative- lasted three hours and they confiscated two radio recorders, documents of the independent press bureau, "The New Herald" newspapers, and Lux-Info- Press Magazines as well as "Cartas de Cuba" Magazines. Pictures were taken of the confiscated material in front of two witnesses. The police told Serpa he was "following the steps of Favio Prieto Llorente", an independent journalist sentenced to 20 years in prison in 2003. (*Puente Informativo*, 29/11/05)

November 30: Amid a surging wave of repression by the Cuban government, Cuba's political prisoners increasingly are resorting to "acts of desperation" - including hunger strikes, suicide attempts, and self-mutilation - in a cry for international recognition and solidarity, and to advance the cause of the island's liberation. "The prisoners are pleading to the world to pay attention as they work for liberty," said one of Cuba's leading prodemocracy activists, Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello. Late last month, Mario Enrique Mayo, a lawyer and independent journalist, locked away for more than two years in the Kilo 7 prison in Camaguey, demanded freedom from his jailers by taking a knife to his face and body. Mr. Mayo was one of 75 dissidents rounded up by the Castro regime in March 2003. In another act of self-mutilation, a prisoner of conscience in the Canaleta prison in Cuba's Ciego de Avila province, Manuel Fiallo, cut himself to protest prisoners' lack of medical care, according to a Cuban prison diary published in recent days on a Miami-based Cuban pro-democracy site, Payolibre.com. The leader of Cuba's Damas de blanco movement, Laura Pollan Toledo, told the press that other recent examples of those who carried out self-mutilation included Juan Carlos Herrera and Prospero Gainza Aguero, two of the 75 imprisoned in 2003. Mr. Herrera, Ms. Pollan said, has beaten himself repeatedly in prison to protest the horrible conditions suffered by detainees. Mr. Gainza, she said, sewed his mouth closed in an act of protest, rendering himself unable to speak or eat. (*The New York Sun*, 30/11/05)

December 1: One of 75 dissidents arrested in a spring 2003 crackdown was released for health reasons, bringing to 15 the number of those since freed on medical parole. Mario Enrique Mayo Hernández, an activist from the central-eastern province of Camaguey, walked free, his sister Marilú Mayo Hernández told the press. While in prison, the Cuban dissident, as a desperate prison protest, took a knife to his face and body carving into his forehead the letters "I," for "inocente" ("innocent"), and "L," for "libertad" ("liberty"). Mayo Hernández is the only member of the original group to be freed this year. The other 14 were freed last year, half of them in December 2004. The sister said Mayo Hernández, a 41-year-old attorney, got a one-year medical parole for his high blood pressure and emotional problems. The other 14 also were freed early for medical reasons. (*CNN, The Washington Sun, 1/12/05*)

December 1: Cuban pro-democracy activist, Martha Beatriz Roque, said to the press on the release of Cuban dissident Mario Enrique Mayo that the regime was probably concerned about the consequences of his dying in jail. Mr. Mayo's health was deteriorating which, according to the international free-speech organization Reporters Without Borders, included "glaucoma in the left eye, high blood pressure, pulmonary emphysema and prostate inflammation, as well as acute depression." Ms. Roque, who was rounded up during the March 2003 crackdown and is free under the same conditional release terms as Mr. Mayo, cautioned that her fellow democracy activist had not been granted total freedom. She also called for the release of other prisoners of conscience unjustly detained by Mr. Castro. "There are many, many more," Ms. Roque said, citing the 60 remaining prisoners from the March 2003 crackdown in addition to "the hundreds of political prisoners in our jails." The Ladies in White (Damas de Blanco) also expressed their satisfaction for the release of Mayo and called for the release of all the other political prisoners. "We are very happy that Mayo was released under health parole, although he and our relatives deserve an unconditional release," Miriam Leiva said. (*AFP, The Washington Sun, 1/12/05*)

December 1: The police detained social-democratic dissident Manuel Cuesta Morúa and two of his collaborators for several hours, after being the subject of an "act of repudiation" by supporters of the regime. The detention took place after the dissidents called the police for protection, since they were being attacked opposite to the head office of the opposition digital magazine "Consensus", in Havana. "As we arrived at the police station, suddenly we were arrested. When they released us they had written a report against us for public disturbance and gave us a fine", said Cuesta Morúa. (*Encuentro en la Red, 5/12/05*)

December 2: The relatives of political prisoner Víctor Rolando Arroyo denounced that after his long hunger strike less than two months ago Arroyo has not received any more medical attention. The relatives informed that they have sent four letters to the Council of State denouncing this situation but have not received any response. (*Cubanet, 2/12/05*)

December 5: The secretary for international relations of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), Trinidad Jiménez, condemned the political persecution of the social-democratic opposition in Cuba. Jiménez decried the so-called "acts of repudiation" against social democrat leader Manuel Cuesta Morúa, spokesman of the illegal Progressive Arch. (*EFE, 5/12/05*)

December 6: Fidel Castro charged again at Europe and warned the Spanish Socialists, without mentioning names, after a recent criticism from Trinidad Jiménez on the harassment of dissident Manuel Cuesta Morúa. Castro referred to Jiménez as "one who calls herself an official of a supposedly socialist or social-democratic party". "(...) let them know that we are

keeping a watchful eye and that we have a good collection of information in the backpack", he said. (EFE, 6/12/05)

December 7: The secretary for international relations of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), Trinidad Jiménez, reaffirmed her condemnation of the aggression against Cuban dissident Manuel Cuesta Morúa. Jiménez stressed that in 25 years of political career she has never received "warning nor threats from anybody". "I follow political instructions from my secretary general, who is the President of the Government. Those, and the dictates of my own convictions, are the only ones that I attend to". "I would repeat these statements when a social-democratic leader of a country, whoever may be, in any place, is the victim of some form of aggression (...) the Spanish socialist party has the ethical and political obligation to stand up in their defence", said Jiménez. (EFE, 7/12/05)

December 7: A Cuban journalist detained without charge for nearly five months has lost 30 pounds (13.5 kilograms) in prison and is suffering from serious health problems his wife told the Committee to Protect Journalists. Oscar Mario González, a journalist with the independent news agency, Grupo de Trabajo Decoro, was arrested on July 22. His wife, Mirta Wong Sio, said she was worried about his worsening health. González, 61, suffers from osteoarthritis in his neck and back pain. He has problems sleeping and needs sleep medication, Wong said. González' lawyer hasn't been allowed to see the official documentation regarding the charges against her defendant. *CPJ News Release*, 7/12/05)

December 12: Alida Viso Bello, wife of independent journalist Ricardo González, one of 75 dissidents imprisoned in the spring of 2003 in Cuba, made an international appeal in favour of the release from prison of her spouse given "his serious health condition". The communiqué was addressed to the democratic governments, prominent individuals and non-governmental organizations of the world. (AFP, 13/12/05)

December 14: China, Cuba, Eritrea and Ethiopia jail more journalists than any other country. The top four countries accounted for two-thirds of the 125 imprisoned editors, writers and photojournalists as of December 1, according to the report by the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists. China topped the list for the seventh year in the row, with 32 imprisoned, of which 15 were Internet journalists. Cuba is holding 24 reporters, most of them jailed after a March 2003 crackdown on dissidents and independent media, the CPJ said. (Reuters, 14/12/05)

December 14: The Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) joined an international appeal for the release from prison of independent Cuban journalist Ricardo González Alfonso, serving a 20-year sentence and whose health has deteriorated. González Alfonso was arrested in March 2003 during "the crackdown against independent journalists and political dissidents by Cuban authorities", said the IAPA. (EFE, 14/12/05)

December 16: Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas, coordinator of the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL), asked bishops, priests, religious persons and non-believers, to defend the victims of the acts of repudiation against the internal opposition, "to avoid injustices and confrontation". "We urge you (...) to defend from your pulpits the victims of these abuses, to defend the people of Cuba", said the dissident leader. (*Cubaencuentro*, 16/12/05)

December 19: Gisela Delgado, wife of Cuban dissident Héctor Palacio, in prison since March 2003, delivered to the Embassy of the United Kingdom in Havana a letter asking the international community to intercede for the release of her husband. In the letter, Delgado says that her 64-year-old husband has been hospitalized for 22 months due to cardiovascular problems and chronic hypertension. The United Kingdom currently holds the presidency of the European Union. The letter is also addressed to Pope Benedict XVI, the UN Secretary General, and to the Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation. (*Cubamet*, 19/12/05)

December 20: The Cuban catholic priest José Conrado called "shameful" and "scandalous" the acts of repudiation against "defenceless persons", in reference to the attacks against a dissident family in Palmarito de Cauto, Santiago de Cuba. Conrado considered it a "real cowardice to attack defenceless persons, who would not even raise an arm to defend themselves from the blows". "The government must take responsibility and forbid publicly this kind of activities," said the priest. (*CubaEncuentro*, 20/12/05)

December 21: Yves Bur, vice-president of the French National Assembly, condemned the attacks "orchestrated by Cuban authorities" against relatives of the Cuban political prisoners José Daniel and Luis Enrique Ferrer García. The prisoners' wives, children and sister were attacked "while exercising one of their few opportunities to visit Luis Enrique Ferrer García", said Bur, an MP from the ruling conservative party UMP. Bur said he was "outraged about these violent acts of intimidation against the families of dissidents" and, in particular, the harassment "children are subjected to". (*EFE*, 21/12/05)

December 26: Cuban dissident María de los Ángeles Borrego Mir, vice president of the illegal organization Hijos de la Virgen de Regla (Daughters of Virgin Regla), received a four-year sentence under the accusation of "potential danger" to society. The trial was held at Regla's municipal tribunal, in north eastern Havana, and only relatives were allowed to attend. Borrego Mir is the first woman dissident convicted in Cuba under the alleged crime of "potential dangerousness". (*Cubamet*, 27/12/05)

EDUCATION

January 17: Efforts aimed at raising educational standards on the island became the focus of discussions during the Plenary Meeting of the Communist Party's Provincial Committee, held in Havana. Party leaders said that the primary goal remains to meet the growing demand for teachers to guarantee that the principles of individualized student assistance are observed in elementary and secondary education. To that effect, broad efforts are underway to bring retired or inactive teachers back into the classrooms and to persuade young people to pursue teaching careers. (*Granma*, 17/1/05)

January 31: More than 5,000 delegates from 46 countries are attending the 9th International Pedagogy Congress 2005 and the 1st World Literacy Congress, inaugurated by the Cuban Minister of Education in Havana. (*EFE*, 31/1/05)

February 15: A microwave signal transfer system signals started operating in Cuba's central province of Ciego de Avila, 262 miles from this capital, in order to improve the reception of TV broadcast images in the area, the National Information Agency reported. About 4,000 students of all education levels will benefit from this new 100 watt powered technology as they will now

be able to receive their lessons through one of the island's two educational channels. Director of the Radio Cuba in Ciego de Avila, Idalberto Moreira, explained the project was carried out in this particular area because geographical features prevented straight line TV signals from being received. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/2/05)

February 17: Cuba is hosting for the first time a meeting of Education Ministers of the Andres Bello Agreement in Havana. The Andres Bello Agreement is an international intergovernmental organization that favors the strengthening of integration processes, configuration and development of a common cultural ground. It embodies Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Spain, Panama, Paraguay, Peru Venezuela and Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/2/05)

May 12: In the municipality of Cienfuegos, several groups of high school students were forced to miss school due to a shortage of teachers. Low salaries, lack of resources and the prevailing teaching methodology are being cited among the reasons driving educators away from their chosen profession. (*Cubanet*, 12/5/05)

June 30: University rectors and student leaders from seven countries are attending the 75th session of the Central American Higher Education Council (CSUCA) underway in Havana. The Confederation's management chief, Anibal Martinez, said the Havana meeting would allow a closer look at the Cuban Higher Education Ministry in order to strengthen cooperation and draw up guidelines for regional universities. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 30/6/05)

July 15: With one teacher for every 36 people in the country, Cuba is an example to follow for other nations in the world, asserted Luis Ignacio Gómez, Cuba's Education Minister. The Cuban expert compared the Cuban rate to that of developed countries which usually have one teacher for every 50 to 80 people. Speaking at a graduation ceremony in Matanzas, Gomez said there are no limits on the training of teachers in Cuba. (*Ahora.cu*, 15/7/05)

August 8: With Fidel Castro officiating, 505 students from 49 nations became the first graduating class of the International School of Physical Education and Sports (EIEFD), the only one of its kind in the world. The noteworthy event was held at Havana's Convention Palace, attended by families of the graduates, diplomats, officials and members of the Cuban Baseball team, gold medal winners at the Athens '04 Olympics. The students from all over the world began studying at EIEFD in September 2000, although the school was officially inaugurated on February 23, 2000. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/8/05)

August 20: Fidel Castro met with more than 20 leaders and high-ranking dignitaries from Latin America, the Caribbean community and other guests to the first graduation of students at the Latin American School of Medicine. Castro welcomed Hugo Chávez Frías, president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; the Prime Ministers of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Ralph Gonzalvez; Antigua and Barbuda, Baldwin Spencer; St. Kitts and Nevis, Denzil Douglas; Dominica, Roosevelt Skerrit; Alejandro Serrano, vice president of Ecuador; and ministers from Barbados, the Bahamas, Guyana, Belize, the Dominican Republic, St. Lucia, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guatemala and Surinam. The guests also included Daniel Ortega, former Nicaraguan president; Shafik Handal, the former presidential candidate of El Salvador; and Lucius Walker, director of Pastors for Peace. (*Granma International*, 20/8/05)

August 20: A Latin American medical school created as a regional initiative in 1998 after two hurricanes devastated Caribbean and Central American nations graduated its first class.

Students at the school come from Latin American, Africa and the United States. Most come from low-income families and receive a free education on the condition they return home to serve their communities after graduation. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro handed out diplomas to several of the 1,500 graduates. "This graduation was just a dream nearly seven years ago," Castro said at the ceremony. "Today is proof of the capacity of human beings to reach the most lofty goals." Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, Panamanian President Martin Torrijos, Ecuadorian Vice President Alejandro Serrano and the prime ministers of St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Dominica, and Antigua and Barbuda, were present at the ceremony. (*The New York Times, EFE, 21/8/05*)

September 13: Cuban authorities and parents are shifting their attention from universal primary education to the quality of education received by Cuban schoolchildren. Cuba already has achieved the UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG) set in 2000 that all children receive primary education. "The question now is no longer quantity, but rather quality. Many families have begun to pay for private tutors to ensure that their children are learning what they need to learn, and that didn't happen 10 years ago," said Aurelio Castellanos, a 43-year-old teacher. A month of private classes in Spanish or mathematics can cost around 40 Cuban pesos or two dollars, a high price in a country where the average monthly salary is roughly 300 pesos. During the worst years of the economic crisis in the 1990s, the shortage of teachers was solved by the introduction of intensive, short-term training courses to prepare recent secondary school graduates to teach in primary schools. This made it possible to ensure a maximum class size of 20 students at the primary level. However, it also means that of the 38,881 teachers in the Cuban school system today, 12,553 are young and relatively inexperienced graduates of these intensive training courses. Fidel Castro acknowledged July 24 that despite all the advances made in the school system, the country is "still a long way from achieving all of the educational results" that could be hoped for. (*IPS, 13/9/05*)

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

December 1: The Documentation and Scientific-Technical Information Center of Las Villas Central University opened links to 12 world scientific databases. The new service is part of the Center's development of its computing systems. (*Prensa Latina, 1/12/05*)

December 17: The Cuban Higher Council of Social and Humanistic Sciences (CSCSH) announced it would reenergize the Scientific Humanities Forum to encourage research and cooperation among domestic entities. CSCSH Executive Secretary Dr. Juan Luis Martin said harmonization of research and higher education centers, schools, and groups of researchers based on a definite agenda would be one of their actions. We seek greater exchange among people researching social problems such as indiscipline and corruption, said Martin. (*Prensa Latina, 17/12/05*)

ELECTIONS

January 31: Over 78,500 people are engaged in the updating of voter registration rolls for upcoming municipal elections to take place across the island. The high level of activism was described as "typical in Cuban elections, by the president of the National Electoral Commission, Roberto Díaz Sotolongo. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 31/1/05)

February 14: A public audience on the electoral system and democracy in Cuba took place at Havana's International Conference Center in view of the district elections on April 17. Participating experts discussed the historical record of elections since the country ended an institutionalization process in 1976 that also included the promulgation of the Socialist Constitution. Cuban officials analyzed the national legislation regarding the electoral process and compared it with elections in Latin America. Discussions focused on the US government's plans against Cuba. At the audience, Cuban Parliamentary President Ricardo Alarcón said that the island's electoral system is totally transparent and far ahead of so-called "representative democracy" in the United States. (*Radio Habana Cuba, Prensa Latina*, 14/2/05)

February 15: The primary electoral registers for April elections were published in public places throughout the island until March 17. These lists are one of the conditions for citizens' right to vote or be elected to the Peoples' Power municipal assemblies, government bodies renewed every two and a half years. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/2/05)

February 25: The President of the Cuban Parliament Ricardo Alarcón, termed the Cuban election process "an exceptional privilege" given the current world situation. In an interview published in Cuba's Granma newspaper, Alarcón stressed that the capacity and legal authority of the Cuban people to directly nominate and elect candidates rather than depending on machine politics is a unique opportunity, which should be used with great wisdom, making sure that the right person is elected in each constituency. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 25/2/05)

March 10: Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá responded to statements by the head of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón, who had said dissidents were allowed to become candidates in the April elections. Payá noted that Alarcón's statements were not published in Cuba, but rather reported in the international media. "Mr. Alarcón should say so here and in a clear way so that all citizens will believe him", said the dissident who also added his fellow countrymen live in fear of losing their privileges or employment if they express their opinions. Payá also requested airtime on Cuban television to express his opinions. (*El Tiempo*, 10/3/05)

March 18: The month-long period during which Cuban election voter lists have been open for public review concluded. The electoral rolls have been on public display in neighborhoods across the country since February 15 so that all Cuban citizens with the right to vote could check their individual information for any mistakes, and request correction if necessary. The final voter registration lists will be made public on April 6. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 18/3/05)

March 29: The President of the National Assembly of People's Power or Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcon, highlighted the genuinely democratic nature of elections in Cuba, following his participation in an internet debate on the issue. For two hours the top Cuban lawmaker directly answered 47 questions by people from all over the world in a debate entitled Democracy and Elections in Cuba, sponsored by the Cuban Foreign Ministry website on the internet. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 29/3/05)

March 30: A top Cuban election official charged that "anti-Cuba international press

campaigns" are meant to distort the democratic nature of the island's electoral system. The president of Cuba's National Election Commission, Roberto Diaz Sotolongo, told the press in the eastern city of Camaguey, that many people abroad are unaware that Cuba holds elections. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 30/3/05)

April 17: Millions of Cubans elected municipal assemblies in local elections Fidel Castro defended as "the most democratic in the world." After voting at a Havana school, Castro told journalists that Cuban elections are impartial and free of fraud. "This election is the most democratic in the world, there is no doubt," Castro said. "No other country has a system like this." Cubans were electing 169 municipal assemblies across the island in elections that take place every 2 1/2 years. Preliminary results showed that 8,168, 253 Cubans, 96.27 percent, exercised their right to vote in the municipal elections. (*Sun Sentinel, Prensa Latina*, 18/4/05)

April 18: Cuban officials said that nearly 97 percent of registered voters in the country participated in municipal elections over the weekend. Justice Minister Roberto Diaz Sotolongo, who presides over the National Electoral Commission, said nearly 8.2 million Cubans, or 96.66 percent of those registered, went to the polls to elect 169 municipal assemblies across the island of 11 million. (*The New York Times*, 18/4/05)

April 24: Some 1 075 275 (93.35% of those called to vote) turned out to vote on the second round of the Cuban municipal elections in 1174 constituencies, according to the National Electoral Commission. Under the current electoral law, the second round of the municipal elections takes place when two or more candidates end tied in the first round. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/4/05)

April 26: The National Electoral Commission decided to hold the third round of municipal elections in the only Cuban constituency that has yet to elect a delegate to represent its citizens in the People's Power Municipal Assemblies (local government). Candidates in Constituency 24 in the Cueto municipality, in the eastern province of Holguin, remain tied after two polling rounds. (*Prensa Latina*, 26/4/05)

ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES

(See also, Economy/ Corruption)

Drugs

January 16: Cuban authorities seized 589.32 kg of marihuana found bundled in 18 large bales amid a coastal mangrove. Widely regarded as a logical illegal drug transshipment corridor into Europe and the US because of its geographical location, Cuba has implemented an ongoing nation-wide anti-narcotics initiative called "Ach  III". (*AP*, 16/1/05)

January 17: A new book written by two Spanish journalists aims to show the links between Cuba and international drug trafficking. Santiago Botello and Mauricio Angulo spent a year undercover within drug trafficking gangs on the island gathering information for "Conexion Habana" (Havana Connection), in which they seek to demonstrate that "Cuba does not export drugs, but it allows (drug) trafficking" to occur via its national territory, according to Botello. (*EFE*, 17/1/05)

January 20: International drug traffickers coming through Cuba have become more sophisticated in the way they transport cocaine and marijuana, customs officials said. The drugs are showing up in shoes, toothpaste and electronic goods in the country's airports and ports, Jose Otaño, the second-in-command of Cuba's customs agency, told reporters. Suitcases made of cocaine and thin travelers whose figures have been filled out with packets of drugs have also become more common, he said. "We don't want drugs here in small or in large quantities," Otaño said while giving a tour of a cruise ship terminal and training facility. Since 2000, the customs agency has seized some 350 pounds of drugs, foiled 82 trafficking plans and halted 706 attempts to bring in personal doses of drugs to the island, Otaño said. The number of people detained in these operations was not provided. The efforts are part of a larger campaign called "People Shield," or "Coraza Popular," launched in January 2003. Since the campaign was launched, and through the end of July 2004, Cuba has seized more than 8 tons of drugs, primarily cocaine and marijuana. (*Boston Herald*, 21/1/05)

February 3: A significant reduction in illegal drugs in Cuba was recorded in 2004, thanks to energetic measures taken to stem the trafficking of illegal substances. Recent Cuban Interior Ministry statistics confirm a significant reduction in illegal drug activity off Cuban coasts, with the lowest figures of suspicious activities reported since 1996. In 2004, sixteen planes and 15 boats were reported approaching the island, presumably involved in air drops of illegal drugs for pick up and transfer to the United States via speed boats. Last year, Cuban authorities confirmed 50 such drug drops on the island's coasts, though this was well below the figure of 330 recorded in 2003. Stepped-up use of helicopters and even the Cuban armed forces have contributed to this reduction. (*Granma, Notimex*, 3/2/05)

February 14: Cuba's top anti-drug agent and European officials launched a course on drug interdiction in the Caribbean, marking one of the first renewed programs since diplomatic relations between Havana and the EU were restored last month. John Dew, the British ambassador to Cuba, said he was enthusiastic about the weeklong course, as well as recent improvements in political relations with Cuba. "This is a positive time, and there will be more of this kind of cooperation, especially on drugs," Dew said. The course, which also involves France, brings together dozens of anti-narcotics agents from countries including Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Belize and Curacao to receive training. (*The New York Times*, 14/2/05)

February 18: A Cuban court sentenced 13 people to prison sentences ranging from 6 to 25 years for their involvement in drug trafficking, according to radio reports. The accused, most of whom had prior criminal records, were part of a drug-trafficking network and confessed during their trial in the eastern Cuban province of Holguín. (*EFE*, 20/2/05)

February 22: Cuban officials declared their fight against drugs a national security issue after destroying 25 sacks of marijuana recently seized with US Coast Guard backup by tossing them into a boiling-hot cauldron. Authorities burned the drug at a steel factory in eastern Cuba, later telling international reporters they were determined to keep the island as drug-free as possible. The Cuban Government invited the media to fly to Holguín province, 457 miles east of Havana and smack in the middle of the most common drug routes according to Lt. Col. Miguel Guilarte, the Cuban border guard's anti-drug czar. "This is the region of Cuba most affected by drug trafficking." The marijuana was seized in the seas and along Cuba's northern coast in a bust that also netted three suspected Jamaican smugglers in a speedboat. "For us, drugs represent an issue of national security," said Lt. Col. Miguel Guilarte, the coast guard's

anti-drug chief. The Cuban revolution's advances "will disintegrate if our citizenry doesn't fight against (...) this phenomenon that corrupts society." (*AP, CBS, 24/2/05*)

March 27: As relations between the US and Cuba sink to the lowest point in years, the two countries are cooperating in one key area of mutual interest: anti-narcotics operations. Despite increasing hostility and a lack of formal diplomatic ties, Cuba's top anti-narcotics officials regularly share information with the US Coast Guard on drug traffickers passing near Cuba en route to the Bahamas and the United States, according to US officials and a new State Department report. "There are opportunities for good communications on drug shipments, and there is evidence they will notify us and incidents where they are helpful," Asa Hutchinson said in an interview just before his retirement as Homeland Security undersecretary. "But overall, it is fairly limited in terms of the resource capability of Cuba and because of the lack of formal channels and relations between the two nations," said Hutchinson, who was previously director of the US Drug Enforcement Administration. (*Chicago Tribune, 27/3/05*)

April 22: Cuba reasserted its commitment to adopt measures against organized transnational crime at the 11th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice taking place in Bangkok. Dr. Carlos Zaragoza, president of the Criminal Court in the Supreme Court of Cuba, stressed at the meeting the reasons causing crime, as well as criticized the Cuban Adjustment Act, applied by the US to encourage illegal immigration of Cubans to that northern country. Among the international topics of the event are drug trafficking, people smuggling, money laundering and sale of weapons and explosives. (*Prensa Latina, 22/4/05*)

May 14: The jailed "military chief" of the now-defunct Medellin drug cartel said the criminal outfit had dealings with Cuba during the 1980s and that its "direct contact" in the Havana regime was Raul Castro, brother of the island's leader. John Jairo Velasquez, better known as "Popeye," made the claims in a telephone interview with Television Española from Combita prison in central Colombia. "Popeye" was reputedly the chief enforcer for the late Pablo Escobar, the ruthless cartel boss killed by police in 1993. In the interview, Velasquez said his knowledge about the link with Raul Castro came from a conversation he witnessed between Escobar and Cuban army Capt. Jorge Martinez Valdes, adjutant to Gen. Arnaldo Ochoa. Both officers were among four people executed by firing squad in 1989 for drug trafficking. (*EFE, 14/5/05*)

May 15: Former colleagues and investigators describe drug trafficker, John Jairo Velasquez, alias Popeye, as a clown. Popeye has recently attached Raul Castro - brother of Fidel Castro and head of the Cuban military - to drug trafficking. In high-powered revelations to Colombian and Spanish media from his jail cell just north of Bogota, Velasquez fingered Castro and the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua for facilitating drug shipments to the United States in the 1980s. Velasquez was also a close confidant of Colombian drug kingpin Pablo Escobar. Just how close will help determine the veracity of Velasquez's explosive claim on Television Espanola that Raul Castro was "the direct contact" of Cuban officer Captain Jorge Martinez Valdez, who Velasquez said traveled frequently to Colombia to meet with Escobar and discuss using the island as a transshipment point for drugs and a safe haven for the traffickers. Fidel Castro's government executed Martinez Valdés, along with three other Cuban officers in 1989, after a long military trial - some of which included dramatic public confessions on television. (*Knight Ridder Newspapers, 15/5/05*)

June 23: Cuba's success in the fight against drug consumption and international drug trafficking were praised during the 3rd Conference on Drug Control in the Caribbean held in Havana. "Drug use has been reduced in Cuba and we are continuing to work to bring down its effects," said Roberto Diaz Sotolongo, Minister of Justice, at the opening of the conference. Last year only, Cuban courts sentenced over 3,400 individuals for drug trafficking, most of them with sentences of over six-years in prison. Sotolongo, said. Almost 1,472 lawsuits tried in Cuban courts decided the confiscation of assets belonging to over 300 Cubans involved in these activities. (*AIN, AFP, 23/6/05*)

August 14: A book coming out in Colombia about Pablo Escobar, based on revelations by his erstwhile lieutenant, says the slain king of cocaine enjoyed the collaboration of Cuba's Fidel Castro in the shipment of tons of drugs to the United States. John Jairo Velasquez Vasquez, known as "Popeye" and considered "the man closest to" Escobar, says the links between the late drug kingpin and the Cuban leader were forged in the 1980s in Sandinista-ruled Nicaragua. The former leader of the Medellin cartel "always looks for ways to get his drugs on U.S. streets, by way of non-allied governments or enemies of the United States," according to excerpts from the book published in the magazine "Semana". In Cuba, an agreement was reached allowing Escobar to move large quantities of cocaine over two years from the Colombian port of Buenaventura to the Mexican coast. Once in Cuba, the shipments were placed under the control of the Cuban military. Army General Arnaldo Ochoa and Interior Ministry Colonel Tony La Guardia were responsible for the operation on the Cuban end. Velasquez said that after the Cuba route was discovered by US authorities, who seized a large shipment of cocaine, Castro ordered "a farse of an investigation" of Ochoa and several others. After a show trial on corruption and drug trafficking charges, Ochoa and La Guardia, along with two others, were executed by firing squad in 1989. (*EFE, 14/8/05*)

November 19: A Cuban court sentenced three Jamaican men caught smuggling 1,340 pounds (610 kg) of marijuana to prison terms of up to 20 years, the ruling Communist Party newspaper Granama reported. Rudolph Allen Black, Malson Cambell and Robert Wallace were arrested last November after their speedboat ran out of fuel and was drifting near a key off Cuba's northeastern coast. Cuban officials said the men had thrown the bales of marijuana overboard. The drugs were recovered and later incinerated by Cuban officials. Cambell was sentenced to 20 years in prison, Black to 18 years and Wallace 17 years, Granma reported. (*Reuters, 19/11/05*)

November 24: Cuba called for the exchange of information on drug trafficking among the Caribbean nations as an effective way to fight this scourge. "We consider, and it is how we conduct affairs in this regard, that the collaboration between our countries, and among all nations in the region, must contemplate the exchange of information, and of course with the rest of the world," said the Deputy Director of the National Anti-Narcotics Department, colonel José Ruiz, in closing a Caribbean seminar on "Commercial Marine Traffic Control," organized with the cooperation of the French Police. (*AFP, 24/11/05*)

December 13: Mexican police at the international airport in Cancun seized a shipment of 22 pounds (10 kilograms) of cocaine found in a suitcase that arrived aboard a flight from Cuba, authorities reported. The drugs were packed into a suitcase that was being shipped from the Cuban resort of Varadero, and was apparently destined for Brussels, Belgium, the Public Safety Department said in a statement. Police sniffer dogs detected the drugs during a routine

inspection of incoming luggage. No arrests were immediately reported in the case. (AP, 13/12/05)

December 21: A Cuban court has imposed prison terms of between eight and 20 years on 10 citizens convicted of drug trafficking, the Cuban press reported. Receiving the longest sentences were Roberto Jiménez Benítez and Héctor Arias Biritan, who were handed 20 and 18 years behind bars, respectively, according to the official daily Granma. Two women found a 32-kilogram package of cocaine on the shore near the western town of Blanca Arena and contacted Benítez and Arias to try and resell the drug in Havana. Another defendant, Lázaro Omar Alvarez, was sentenced to 12 years in prison, and the rest of the accused received jail terms of 8-10 years. (EFE, 21/12/05)

December 27: Cuban authorities discovered an abandoned boat containing more than a ton of marijuana in Cuba's biggest drug seizure of the year, the official daily newspaper said. The Communist Party newspaper Granma said the Cuban coast guard found the drug cache aboard a vessel surrounded by sharks and floating off Camaguey province's northern coast, about 300 miles east of Havana. The newspaper quoted Coast Guard Lt. Colonel Guillermo Guzman as saying the find was Cuba's biggest drug haul in 2005. No crew-members were found aboard, prompting authorities to speculate that they could have been swept overboard. (AP, 27/12/05)

General

January 30: Long lambasted as a capitalist vice associated with the mob-run casinos of pre-revolutionary Cuba, *bolita*, which translates as "little ball" --an underground Cuban lottery based on the Florida Lottery's winning numbers--, has been illegal for decades. But gamblers say their beloved game endures because it's the only way for average workers who don't receive dollar remittances or hard-currency benefits to boost their paltry salaries overnight. Retirees play a few pesos of their minuscule pensions, encouraged by another's good fortune. Others look upon *bolita* as a sort of illicit stock market. They track the numbers obsessively, playing combinations that haven't hit in weeks or months. According to Cuba's penal code, bankers, collectors and humble *listeros* (those who make the lists of players) can be jailed for up to three years or fined. If the conviction involves corrupting a minor, the sentence can jump to eight years. (Sun Sentinel, 30/1/05)

June 26: In an effort to revert a growing trend in vehicular theft, Cuban police issued an appeal to the general population to be more vigilant. According to the daily Juventud Rebelde, over 300 vehicles were reported stolen between January and April, averaging more than two cases per day, 30% of which have been solved, resulting in 176 vehicles being returned to their owners. The newspaper appealed to vehicle owners to refrain from buying in the black market, where the stolen property ends up after being stripped for spare parts. (La Jornada, 27/6/05)

November 7: The municipalities of Centro Habana and Habana Vieja are experiencing a wave of arrests by the police and other bodies of the Cuban Ministry of the Interior. Most of those arrested are young Cubans who are residents in other provinces and have been sent back to their places of origin. An activist of human rights said the arrests may respond to recent aggressions perpetrated against foreign tourists. (Cubanet, 7/11/05)

November 23: Dozens of young men and women were arrested in The Güinera neighborhood, in the Arroyo Naranjo municipality of Havana, during a large raid launched by the National Police. The detainees filled four trucks that were taken to a police station in the Capri neighborhood. Apparently, the police operation was directed against individuals who neither worked nor studied, engaging instead in business activities deemed illegal by the authorities. (*Cubanet*, 23/11/05)

November 25: The National Revolutionary Police (PNR) announced that it will place close to 200 newly graduated additional agents in the densely populated municipalities of Centro Habana and Plaza de la Revolución, in the Cuban capital. More than 153 police officers and 26 patrol car drivers have been hastily put through police training courses. (*World Data Service*, 25/11/05)

MIGRATION

(See also, Foreign Affairs, and US-Cuba Relations/ Migration)

January 13: Cuban authorities have agreed to let two children of a Cuban refugee couple join their parents in the Czech Republic 18 months after being separated, their father Liuver Saborit said. "Yancarlos and Ivana received permission from the Cuban government to leave immediately (...) they will arrive at Prague airport on January 22," said Saborit to the press. Saborit, 29, and his wife Mayda Arguelles, 32, obtained political asylum in the Czech Republic after arriving in Prague on a tourist visa in July 2003. Since then they have tried in vain to be reunited with their children, now aged nine and two, who remained in the care of their grandparents in Cuba after being refused a tourist visa. (*AP*, 13/1/05)

January 19: The Honduran government announced that it was working with Cuba to halt a wave of migrants who have been leaving the communist-ruled island and arriving on Honduran shores. Immigration official Carlos Sanchez said the talks with Cuba began five months ago, although he didn't give details. Nearly 500 Cubans have arrived in Honduras in the past two years. Most ask for temporary asylum so they can later travel north to the United States. Honduras re-established diplomatic ties with Cuba in January 2001, 42 years after both countries broke off contact. Honduras still hasn't designated an ambassador to the island nation, however. (*Sun Sentinel*, 19/1/05)

January 27: Eight Cuban refugees have reached Honduras' Atlantic coast, officials said, continuing a flow of migrants that has caused growing concern in Tegucigalpa. Jeovanny Ochoa, chief of the merchant marine for Guanaja island, said the six men and two women set out in a 19-foot boat from the town of Santa Cruz del Sur, on Cuba's southeastern coast. They were picked up by a fishing boat near Guanaja. (*Orlando Sentinel*, 27/1/05)

January 30: The Dominican Navy has announced the arrest of three Cubans and a Dominican citizen attempting to cross illegally into Puerto Rican territory. The illegal migrants were cheated out of their money by human smugglers who dropped them off on Dominican shores, telling them that they had reached their intended destination. All four detainees are part of an initial group of 15 who attempted the crossing. (*Europa Press*, 30/1/05)

February 3: A Mexican Secretariat of Public Safety press release informed that the Mexican Federal Preventive Police arrested in Campeche 16 illegal Cuban migrants and two alleged human smugglers, one of which was also Cuban. According to the Mexican National Migration

Institute, out of 10,089 illegal immigrants "detained, repatriated or turned back" between January and December 2004, 141 were Cuban. (*AFP*, 3/2/05)

February 15: In light of the growing exodus of Cubans through the southern coasts of the Cuban territory, the Cayman Islands authorities have implemented new restrictions aimed at discouraging the arrival of illegal immigrants. Under the new guidelines, in effect since last January 11, no migrant encountered on territorial waters or who come ashore on any of the three islands that make up the Caribbean country, will obtain authorization to remain there and will only receive humanitarian aid to prevent loss of life in the event of their vessel becoming disabled or in distress. "Any Cuban rescued (at sea) will be repatriated," says the declaration. Hundreds of Cuban migrants have used the Cayman Islands territory to replenish their food and water provisions as well as to repair their vessels before continuing on to Honduras or Costa Rica, where they seek temporary refuge until they are able to reach US soil. During 2004, nearly 400 Cuban nationals arrived in the Cayman Islands. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 15/2/05)

February 23: Three Cuban skaters, two of them members of the national team, defected from their training camps in two cities of the Yucatan Peninsula and their whereabouts remain unknown. According to Tamara Campos Medina, president of the Yucatan Rollerblading Association (APSRY), the two Cuban National Team members are Adaly Pérez and Rolando Bravo. Neither athlete has been heard from since February 20. Another unidentified Cuban skater also defected in Cancun. (*Notimex*, 23/2/05)

March 3: A Cuban swimming coach who fled his homeland will be tried on immigration charges for allegedly trying to sneak his Cuban wife into El Salvador, officials said. Jose Guillermo Herrera, 36, was hired as a swimming coach by El Salvador's National Institute of Sports in 1999, but announced three years later he was staying in San Salvador for good and instead of returning to his homeland. Investigators say that Herrera's wife Yusmara Alvarez, 32, flew from Cuba to the northern city of San Pedro Sula in neighboring Honduras and joined a group of Salvadoran swimmers in town for a one-day event. Herrera is accused of dressing his wife in athletes' clothing and placing her on a Salvadoran sports federation bus with other swimmers as a means of sneaking her into this country. (*The New York Times*, 3/3/05)

March 9: Sixteen Cuban rafters rescued at sea by Yucatán fishermen were sent to Mexico City to initiate their repatriation to Cuba, said Yucatán's head of immigration, Guibaldo Vargas Madrazo. The stowaways had left from the port of Camagüey aboard a 23-foot-long boat. (*Notimex*, 9/3/05)

March 15: The Bahamas government repatriated 29 illegal Cuban migrants, three months after they rioted at a detention center, officials said. The men were flown to Cuba without incident, Immigration Minister Vincent Peet said. The migrants had been held in a prison after a riot at Carmichael Road Detention Center in Nassau in December. The riot left 20 people injured, including 11 immigration officers. (*Latin American and Caribbean Briefs*, 16/3/05)

April 5: Fourteen Cubans were rescued near the *Isla Mujeres* coast, in the Mexican Caribbean waters, after their fragile wooden boat went adrift, according to official sources. The migrants—ten men and four women—were rescued 12.8 km from the Mexican coast. (*EFE*, 5/4/05)

May 2: A total of 66 illegal Cuban immigrants held by the authorities in the Mexican state of Veracruz have gone on a 3-day hunger strike in an effort to avert their repatriation. On makeshift signs made out of pieces of cardboard boxes that they showed from the windows of the National Immigration Institute (INM), the Cubans wrote "Do not deport us back to Cuba!! We would rather die here!!" (*EFE*, 2/5/05)

May 9: Four Cubans that were allegedly trying to reach the US were detained at the Nicaraguan border with Honduras, said Nicaragua's top Immigration official, Avil Ramírez. The Cubans were arrested at the border checkpoint in Las Manos when they attempted to use Costa Rican passports. The official said that the passports presented by the Cubans had been issued in Costa Rica and that the detainees had claimed to have obtained the documents in Asunción, Paraguay. (*AFP*, 10/5/05)

May 10: Four members of the Cuban musical ensemble Vocalité, on tour in Mexico, were deported back to Cuba following a failed attempt to reach the US border and request political asylum in that country. However, one of the group's vocalists and his wife did manage to cross from Tijuana into US territory and currently remain in an immigration detention centre, awaiting legal proceedings. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 11/5/05)

May 15: Cuban "balseros" detained in Veracruz have requested their fellow countrymen from Miami to assist them in realizing their goal to reach the US and therefore forestall their deportation back to Cuba. The leader of a group of 69 individuals, an English teacher by the name of Elíxander Valladares Quintana, said that none of them intends to remain in México. The illegal immigrants' spokesperson, who has remained in custody for nearly two months, also begged the Mexican government to expedite any legal proceedings pertaining to their immigration status and allow them to continue on to the US so they can be reunited with their relatives. (*EFE*, 15/5/05)

May 21: Mexican authorities rescued 16 Cuban "rafters" off the Caribbean coast of the state of Quintana Roo, state Public Safety Secretary Pedro Flota said. The Cubans were discovered on a flimsy boat off the port of Majahual, used by luxury ships, and turned over to the local office of the National Migration Institute, or INM. The passengers - 12 men, two women and two children - were treated by physicians and the rescue team after they displayed signs of dehydration and malnutrition, though they were otherwise in good health, Flota said. The Cubans said they left a town in Pinar del Rio province, Cuba, on April 30, and sailed in the direction of Miami, Florida, but ocean currents pushed them very close to the Belize border. According to the INM, this year 120 undocumented immigrants have been intercepted off Quintana Roo alone. (*EFE*, 21/5/05)

June 5: The Cuban-Mexican Civic Association, a non-governmental organization, accused the Mexican government of treating Cuban illegal immigrants like "5 th class citizens." According to the organization, at least 16 Cuban *balseros* (illegal migrants who brave the ocean on homemade rafts) were deported back to Cuba, while another 50 were transferred from Veracruz to Mexico City for the same purpose. (*EFE*, 5/6/05)

June 6: Cuban volleyball player Javier González requested political asylum in Italy, where the Cuban national team was competing in the Men's World League. Gonzalez is the 10 th volleyball player to defect in the last 3 years. (*EFE*, 6/6/05)

June 20: Seven Cubans and two Dominicans who attempted to reach Puerto Rico illegally by boat are missing, the Dominican Navy reported. A Navy spokesperson said that relatives of the illegal migrants had reported them missing, and added that they had passed themselves off as tourists before setting out for Puerto Rico. (*AP*, 20/6/05)

June 27: Cubans continue risking their lives at sea to reach the United States-and they are taking more perilous routes to do so. Many of them set off from Santa Cruz del Sur, where its picturesque bay has become a popular launch point for Cubans trying to avoid the stepped-up US and Cuban patrols in the Florida Straits. Honduras' lenient immigration policy has made it the temporary destination of choice among many Cuban migrants, who then make their way north to the US. Like most Cuban rafters, those fleeing Santa Cruz del Sur are primarily men in their 20s or 30s who leave behind mothers, wives and children relieved at the word of a successful voyage but shattered by grief if no word arrives at all. In the squat homes that line the city's dirt streets, desperate women push frayed photographs of loved ones lost at sea into the hands of strangers in the hope they can bring news of survival. Cuban officials blame the stream of rafters on the 4-decade-old US economic embargo, which they say has crippled the island's economy. They also criticize America's "wet-foot, dry-foot" policy, under which Cubans who make it to US soil can stay but those picked up at sea are sent back. But some Santa Cruz del Sur residents said Cuba's socialist system crushes economic opportunity and leads to a level of desperation that would send some on what can only be described as a suicidal voyage. (*Chicago Tribune*, 26/6/05)

August 8: Two Cuban citizens remain in custody at Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport, in Paris, after communicating to the French government their wish to request political asylum. The organization Reporters Without Borders (RSF) confirmed the identity of one of them, 42-year-old Eliécer Carlos Pereira, an oppositionist linked to the independent press inside the island. The other person detained is Arelys Souchay, who claims to be a member of the Cuban Liberal Democratic Party. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 9/8/05)

August 26: Fidel Castro made a special appearance at the TV program Round Table, in which he dealt with the tragic death of 31 people when the speed boat in which they were traveling on capsized. Castro quoted from the Mexican press that has reported on how an organization, linked to Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) and based on the state of Quintana Roo, carries out smuggling operations. Boat supply centers operate in Grand Cayman, Honduras and Port Juarez. Cubans are smuggled into the latter and placed in safe houses. Those who do not have enough money to pay are then used to sneak drugs into the US in the case of men, while the women are forced to become prostitutes in Cancun, Castro said. Castro slammed the Mexican authorities for being tolerant. He said that from 2001 to 2004 only 8 Cubans were repatriated and barely 16 in 2005 out of a total of 300 who are in custody in immigration centers in Mexico. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/8/05)

August 30: A court in Montpellier, France, over-ruled an order for the deportation of a Cuban couple in consideration of "personal safety risks to which (these two persons) are exposed" in Cuba. Walfrido Rodríguez, member of the National Civic Movement of Cuba, declared to have left the island with his wife Margarita Santana in an attempt to reach Spain via Moscow, to escape police persecution in Cuba. (*AFP*, 30/8/05)

September 29: The government of Paraguay granted asylum to two Cuban citizens, Robin Ríos Sánchez and Iván Alonso Branch. The two had been detained in possession of fake

Paraguayan passports, and refused to go back to their country. The arrests were part of an investigation on the irregular massive entry of Cubans to Paraguay, approximately 200 since January, of which only 15 left the country legally. (*AFP*, 30/9/05)

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

October 23: Eleven members of a Cuban choir vanished after a Toronto concert and are seeking political asylum. "They evaporated," said promoter Robert Missen, who brought the 40-member Coro Nacional de Cuba to Canada for a 13-city tour. Cuban baritone Ernesto Hermes Cendoya-Sotomayor, a member of the Coro Nacional who decided to stay in Canada, said to the press that 11 of the 41-member choir managed to flee the hotel between 6 p.m. and 9:30 p.m, when Digna Guerra, the choir's manager, discovered the absences. Mr. Cendoya-Sotomayor said the singers did not plan to seek asylum en masse, but instead there was a kind of "domino effect." He imagined there were government informants within the choir. And once they arrived in Canada for their two-week tour, the singers were only given \$20 a day for meals, and their performance pay was withheld, he said. All 11 who defected were taken to the homes of Cuban exiles. The President of the Cuban Canadian Foundation, Ismael Sambra, who is helping some of the defectors, in Toronto, believes that six in the group have already crossed the border and entered the United States where they have relatives. A spokesperson for the Vancouver choir said all but 11 members of the Cuban choir had arrived in British Columbia. (*The Globe and Mail*, 25, 26/10/05)

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

November 5: Twelve Cubans arrived in Honduras by boat trying to join their relatives in the United States. The group, comprised of seven men and five women, arrived at Puerto Lempira, from where he was transferred to Tegucigalpa by Honduran authorities. The Cubans said they are from Santa Cruz, south of Camagüey province. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 5/11/05)

December 16: Six illegal Cuban migrants who had arrived in Mexico on a raft, escaped from a detention centre after sawing a bar of the cell where they were being held while awaiting deportation, said the government of the state of Quintana Roo. The rafters had been detained on December 14 in Cancún after five days in high seas. (*AFP*, 19/12/05)

December 23: Alcides Lorenzo Rodríguez, chief of the National Group for Family Medical Services in Cuba has been under arrest in a migratory centre at Chetumal, Mexico. Guadalupe Lorenzo, a doctor's aunt who lives in the US, said that the Cuban doctor left the island to Peru where he was to teach a course, but decided not to go back to the island due to disagreements with Fidel Castro's regime. The Mexican National Institute for Migration (INM) said that the Cuban has been at the Chetumal detention centre since December 10. (*El Universal*, 23/12/05)

December 23: A Mexican naval vessel rescued 17 exhausted Cuban emigrants in a leaky wooden boat near Isla Mujeres off the Yucatan peninsula, authorities said. The navy said the 14 men and three women had been at sea a week since departing southwestern Cuba,

presumably hoping to reach the United States, the destination of almost all Cubans seeking to leave the Communist-ruled island. The navy communique said those rescued showed signs of exhaustion, and one needed treatment for infected cuts on his leg, so they were transferred to Cancun for medical attention at the naval base there. They were then handed over to immigration authorities. More than 400 Cuban "rafters" have reached Mexican shores this year, an increase of 25 percent over 2004. (*EFE*, 23/12/05)

POLITICAL AFFAIRS

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

January 28: The National Council of Cuba's Labor Confederation (CTC) has convened its members to participate in the organization's 19th Congress to be held in Havana in 2006. The call made by CTC General Secretary, Pedro Ross Leal, wrapped up the labor organization's annual two-day meeting, held in Cuban capital's Molecular Immunology Center. The document states that among other issues, the Congress will allow participants to assess the achievements and weakness of the CTC over the past five years, critically examine problems affecting the normal development of activities and define new work priorities for the next five-year period. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 29/1/05)

February 14: Pedro Ross, secretary general of the Cuban Workers Central Office (CTC), called for a massive participation of Cuban workers in the debates for the 19th Congress of CTC, scheduled for April 2006. These discussions should leave a mark in the Cuban working class actions to find solutions to the concrete problems of every workplace in our country, Ross pointed out in statements published by Cuban weekly *Trabajadores*. Debates of the CTC members will be centered in topics such as employment, economic efficiency and defense. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/2/05)

March 11: Cubans form a "monolithic block" that will resist attempts to push the island toward political and economic change, Cuban Defense Minister Raul Castro said. Castro, his brother's designated successor, spoke at a ceremony in eastern Cuba honoring combatants of Frank Pais Eastern Front II who died in the Cuban revolution. "In these times of growing threats and aggressive charlatanism about 'transitions' and the 'restoration of capitalism,' it is opportune to remind those staying up all night (plotting) that the People, the Army, and the Party form an invincible monolithic block," Castro said in remarks published in *Granma*, the Communist Party's daily newspaper. (*The New York Times*, 12/3/05)

March 23: The National Coordinator of the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR), Juan José Rabilero Fonseca, called upon all Cubans to fight against "all actions or situations that may jeopardize the future of the revolution" and to engage in demonstrations in support of Fidel Castro. (*BBC, Reforma*, 23/3/05)

April 13: Experts participating in the 4th International Meeting on Accounting and Finance that opened at Havana's Conference Center, are analyzing aspects of the decentralization of the accounting process in Cuban state-run companies and environmental management as an alternative for the sustainable development of tourism. Over 250 experts from eight nations are involved in discussions about internal economic control, its impact in public management, and the prevention of corruption. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/4/05)

June 14: The 4th Congress of the Cuban National Association of Physically Handicapped (ACLIFIM) concluded in Havana after the election of a new National Executive Committee. More than the fifth part of the 64,000 members of this Non-governmental organization is actively working, according to reports during the opening of the meeting. ACLIFIM Vice President Mabel Ballesteros told the press that 14,584 jobs have been created for handicapped people as part of Cuban state policy. Some 5,000 jobs were opened in the last five years mainly in handcraft workshops and similar centers. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/6/05)

July 15: The City of Havana will host festivities for the Day of National Uprising, which this year marks the 52nd anniversary of the attack on the Moncada barracks, commanded by Fidel Castro on July 26, 1953. The Cuban Communist Party's Political Bureau made the selection, in recognition of the work and efforts of the Havana population throughout the year. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/7/05)

August 23: The Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) celebrated its 45th anniversary and its important contributions to the country and the Revolution. In a message to Cuban women published by Granma daily, FMC president Vilma Espin said the Federation, with over four million members, has actively participated in defending socialism and fighting for gender equality. Espin, 75, the wife of Raul, Fidel Castro's brother and second in command in Cuba's nomenclature, has been the FMC president since its origin in 1960. (*Prensa Latina*, *AFP*, 23/8/05)

August 29: In Havana, the permanent commissions of the National Assembly of the People's Power began three days of preparatory debates prior to the ordinary parliamentary session for the next six-month period, scheduled to start on September 1st. The commissions analyze such topics as the current epidemiologic situation of the country, the island's vulnerability to natural disasters, as well as the new school year. The meetings are held in different institutions of Havana because the Cuban parliament does not have an official location, added the daily official Granma. (*AFP*, 29/8/05)

September 28: The inescapable eyes and ears of the Cuban Communist regime, the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), charged with knowing what everyone in the neighborhood is up to, celebrated their 45th anniversary with exhortations to remain vigilant against "imperialism." Raul Castro, brother and designated heir of Fidel Castro, presided over the ceremony to mark the passage of 45 years since the creation the CDRs. Castro, 79, was not present for the festivities at Havana's Karl Marx Theater, but he did send a message to the block committees, known collectively as the CDR. Raul Castro did not speak at the celebration at the capital. The Havana ceremony concluded with an address from Cuban Communist Party leader Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, who said that when confronted with "imperialist actions," the island will respond in the same way as it did in 1960, when the CDR were established as part of a system of "collective revolutionary vigilance." (*EFE*, 28/9/05)

November 29: The Cuban Communist party launched an assault two years ago on "corruption and illegalities" within its ranks and the state administration as it recentralised economic activity and control over hard currency after what it characterised as "liberal errors" in the 1990s. Bureaucratic corruption and a booming black market are nothing new in state-run economies like Cuba's, but Fidel Castro said recently that market-oriented reforms such as decentralisation, authorisation of small private initiatives and circulation of the dollar alongside the peso, among other emergency measures taken after European communism's collapse,

"increased these ills to the point where they have taken on a certain massive character (...) and inequality has grown". Oscar Espinosa, an economist recently released from prison after serving time for dissident activities, said the current campaign would simply create more hardship and more illegal activity. "What we need here is market reform, like in China or Vietnam. By returning to command economics and repression, they are simply throwing gas on the fire," he said. Raúl Castro, the defence minister and second in the Cuban hierarchy after his older brother Fidel, is reported to have told party officials 18 months ago: "Corruption will always be with us, but we must keep it at our ankles and never allow it to rise to our necks." (*Financial Times*, 29/11/05)

December 5: The Cuban Communist Party, the island's only one, asked its members to engage in "more direct and responsible" participation in party activities and to change their "methods and style" during its Havana Provincial Assembly, the official daily *Granma* reported. The publication of the party's Central Committee said that during the conference, the organization made "encouraging improvements in the performance of the party in the province," a process in which "critical evaluation predominated." The Havana Provincial Assembly was the final and most representative meeting in a series of conferences held over the past several months by the party's provincial organizations. "The report presented at the meeting shows objectively (a number of) weaknesses, among them the insufficient links of some leadership cadres to the base, which affects their ability to know about deficiencies, monitor, supervise and act in an agile and efficient manner," *Granma* wrote. The newspaper said that at the meeting the party dealt with "fundamental questions" including working methods and style, the policy governing cadres, the party's student and public organizations, the state and the government, in general, as well as "different ills associated with crime, illegalities and signs of corruption." (*EFE*, 5/12/05)

December 18: Members of the Cuban Parliament started to assess the year's development, as well as economic and social predictions for 2006, in their respective working commissions. Top government officials have been summoned by Parliament to respond to questions on key issues of national life. A full parliamentary plenary is scheduled for December 22 when deputies will discuss the country's economic and social results of 2005. Presentation of the regulations for the Economic and Social Plan and the budget proposal for 2006 is also anticipated. The legislators will also elect 273 examining magistrates who will oversee justice in the Supreme Court for the next five years. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/12/05)

December 23: The National Assembly of People's Power, a rubber-stamp parliament that includes the country's national and provincial leaders, held a remarkable end-of-the-year session that for the first time was open to diplomats and foreign journalists and dealt extensively, if delicately, with the inevitable. "In the Soviet Union, errors led to popular discontent among other reasons due to the bad performance of the economy," Francisco Soberon, chairman of the central bank who has emerged as Mr Castro's closest economic adviser, told the assembly. "To the extent that we do not achieve a steady improvement in people's standard of living and sustainable development we risk that these formidable personalities [Fidel and Raul Castro] become the only pillar on which our system rests," Mr Soberon, said. But the most extraordinary moment came when Felipe Pérez Roque, the foreign minister and a Castro protégé, took the leader's place to deliver the closing speech. It was a broad-ranging discourse and optimistic review of the international and domestic situation, highlighting the need to prepare ideologically and politically for Mr Castro's passing and new US efforts to "annex" the country. "Now we have the generation that made the revolution (...)

even the enemy knows with them there will be no deals, but it is placing its hopes in the idea that it will be able to confuse, divide, buy or intimidate those who follow," he said. Mr Roque received a standing ovation and one of Cuba's most powerful figures, assembly president Ricardo Alarcón, urged people to study his "brilliant" remarks. (*Financial Times, La Jornada*, 26/12/05)

Government of Cuba

January 12: With relatives looking on, 23 men arrested nearly three years ago in the violent occupation of the Mexican Embassy went on trial for the assault, which sparked a diplomatic crisis. A government prosecutor sought prison terms of up to 12 years for the men, who allegedly stole a bus and crashed it through the embassy gates in February 2002 amid a wave of rumors the mission was issuing visas to all Cubans who showed up. Members of the group demanded visas and refused to leave before they were arrested, within two days by specially trained Cuban police in a lightning fast pre-dawn eviction. After a full day of testimony, a second day of proceedings was scheduled, the defendants' relatives said. Two relatives per defendant were allowed into the trial at the Popular Municipal Tribunal in Havana in the 10 de Octubre neighborhood. Proceedings were closed to international media and to Mexican diplomats. (*AP, CNN, La Jornada*, 11/1/05)

January 12: Ricardo Pascoe, former Mexican Ambassador to Cuba, considered it odd that 23 Cubans are being tried in court for breaking into the Mexican Embassy in Havana in 2002. "In the first place, it was 21 individuals who did it, so I don't understand why 23 are being charged," said the then Ambassador. On the night of February 27, 2002, a group of 18 young people hijacked a transit bus and drove it through the embassy's front gate in a bid to obtain political asylum. Pascoe pointed that another three had climbed over the perimeter wall prior to the bus crashing through the gate. In his book entitled *En el filo. Historia de una crisis diplomática, Cuba 2001-2002*, Pascoe claims that those three Cubans had been "planted," implying that they had been sent by the Fidel Castro government. (*AFP*, 12/1/05)

January 13: The trial for 23 men accused of stealing a bus and crashing it through the gates of the Mexican Embassy nearly three years ago ended with a government prosecutor now seeking 20-year sentences for the two men accused of being the ringleaders. A ruling in the case is expected in about a month. The trial, which lasted just two days, was closed to international media. The prosecutor raised the recommended sentences for Pedro Plasencia Achón and Ramón Méndez Sosa, the alleged leaders of the February 2002 assault that sparked a diplomatic crisis. They were both originally facing 12-year sentences. In addition to the two men's recommended sentences, the prosecutor is seeking 12-year sentences for 10 of the defendants, 10 years for six others and five years for the remaining five. (*AP*, 13/1/05)

April 12: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said in Havana that the rhythm of the Revolution's recovery is irreversible as the result of "a historic and collective heroic feat of the many contributions of the Cuban people". The Cuban official closed the Civic Society Meeting in Defense of Cuba's Sovereignty and Human Rights, which was held in Havana. The event's final declaration strongly condemned Washington's policy toward Cuba. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 13/4/05)

April 21: Fidel Castro announced an increase in the island's minimum wage, more than doubling salaries of nearly 1.7 million Cuban workers. Farmhands, plumbers and other low-

wage workers currently making 100 Cuban pesos (about \$4.20) a month will earn 225 pesos (\$9.40) starting May 1, he said. Castro made the announcement in a televised address marking his eighth speech in the last 11 days. Castro said this would raise the average monthly wage in Cuba to 312 pesos (\$14.20) from 282 pesos (\$12.80) at a cost to the government of \$48.4 million. Cubans welcomed the raises, but said it was still too little to live on. Rent and public services are heavily subsidized in Cuba, but essential consumer goods are more expensive than in the United States. (*Reuters, AP, Prensa Latina, 22/4/05*)

April 26: A Cuban court handed down prison sentences of up to 18 years for 23 men who stormed the Mexican Embassy three years ago in a bid to flee the country, a human rights group said. Pedro Plasencia, whom prosecutors said master-minded the break-in, received the toughest sentence of 18 years, the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation said. The others got sentences ranging from three to 15 years for violating a diplomatic mission, damage to property and theft of the bus. The jail terms were called "excessive" by the head of the rights group, veteran activist Elizardo Sanchez. "The accused hurt nobody and the Mexican government made no claim for minor damages to the metal gate," Sanchez said. (*The New York Times, 26/4/05*)

May 3: Fidel Castro recently sent a team of economists on a secret mission to explore the state of poverty in Cuba, as part of his campaign to put a brake on growing poverty and social stratification in what was once one of the world's most egalitarian societies. According to a well-placed source, their verdict was 300 pesos - five times the minimum 55 pesos pension and three times the 100 pesos (\$4.80 USD) monthly minimum wage. Shortly after receiving their report, Mr Castro announced increases to the minimum monthly pension - to 150 pesos - and the minimum wage - to 225 pesos - to take effect this month. "The two measures will benefit 3,602,344 people receiving the lowest income, for which the revolution will dedicate 2,255,683,370 more pesos to the annual budget," said the official trade union weekly, *Trabajadores*. Some Cuban economists are not as enthusiastic. "There is no similar increase in domestic production to justify increasing demand. It is inflationary," a Cuban economist said. (*Reuters, 3/5/05*)

May 27: Fidel Castro praised the qualities of the pressure cooker, a basic tool for saving electricity in the country, and said authorities were making "exceptional efforts" to avoid repeated blackouts that have been affecting the Cuban population in recent days. After highlighting the issue of the state of Cuban electricity distribution system and the need to reduce consumption, in his 29th TV appearance, the 78-year-old leader addressed it again, unveiling a national plan for the promotion of practices reducing electricity consumption including the use of pressure cookers. At the end of a 2.5-hour speech in which he criticized Cubans for wasting electricity, Castro had some aides bring to the podium where he was staying two trolleys carrying some ten pressure cookers, two electric fans, one electric kettle and other household appliances. Answering a question posed by Castro, officials of Cuba's state-owned electricity monopoly said 17,000 kilometres of electric cables and 44,000 substations needed to be upgraded. (*ANSA, AP, 27/5/05*)

June 12: The unceasing struggle for the unity of the revolutionary forces, and the unifying political action of Fidel Castro as leader of the 26th of July Movement in the country were determining factors of the 1959 triumph, as ratified by the participants in the scientific workshop on the movement, closed by Castro. After two working sessions at the International Conference Center, the event ended with the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the

constitution of the 26th of July Movement, attended by original members of its leadership, combatants from the Moncada assault, the Granma landing, the struggle in the Sierra Maestra, the underground movement and internationalist missions. (*Granma International*, 12/6/05)

July 26: Fidel Castro marked the 52nd anniversary of his revolution, gathering his staunchest supporters around him amid growing public discontent aggravated by sweltering heat and breakdowns in the communist island's aging electrical system. Castro's government acknowledged that many are unhappy. "There is complete consciousness of the dissatisfactions, insufficiencies, shortages and, above all, of the challenges we must overcome ahead," Pedro Sáez, the Communist Party chieftain for Havana, said in the party's Granma newspaper. An opinion piece in the government-run Granma newspaper acknowledged: "We are living in difficult times." "There may be no paint to beautify facades, or asphalt to fill in potholes," the editorial said. "There's no transportation to go to the beach with the children and the summer TV programming is interrupted with blackouts that bother and irritate." Nevertheless, "there's a celebration in Havana," it said. "And as tense as things are now, it is the same Havana of yesterday, today and tomorrow." (*AP*, 26/7/05)

August 13: Cuba honored Fidel Castro's 79th birthday, revisiting his nearly five decades in power on the communist island with tributes in state-run newspapers and documentaries. Dozens of Cuban children danced and cut an enormous blue-and-white cake for Castro -- the world's longest-ruling head of government -- while front pages bore his photo and loving words. "We celebrate as your own, with the affection and immense admiration that children feel for the most noble, wise and brave father," a letter to the "Comandante" said on the front page of the Communist Party daily Granma. Signed "your people," the letter called the president the "dearly loved Fidel" and highlighted his "special sensitivity for others" and "guerrilla spirit of just ideals." A documentary shown in an Old Havana theater displayed some of Castro's most impassioned public speeches, from his assumption of power in early 1959, through the Cuban Missile Crisis and fall of the Berlin Wall, to more recent remarks justifying socialism against the threats of capitalist superpowers like the United States. (*Reuters*, 13/8/05)

August 25: The digital edition of the Official Gazette of the Republic reports that one of two Cuban ministers of Government, Wilfredo López Rodríguez, was "relieved from duty" by the State Council, acting upon a motion by Fidel Castro. By way of explanation for the demotion, a brief decree signed by Castro last May 4, but published this month, indicates that (Lopez Rodriguez) would go on to perform other duties. (*AFP*, 25/8/05)

September 6: Six months after Fidel Castro promised that every Cuban household would get an electric rice cooker and other appliances, most Cubans are wondering where they are. In announcing the plan earlier this year, Castro took to the stage like a television game show host touting Chinese-made rice cookers, fans, stoves, washing machines and other electric appliances that would soon be available. The goods were considered evidence of communist Cuba's recovery from the deep economic crisis the Caribbean island sank into following the demise of the Soviet Union. But so far few have been sold, though some state stores have begun offering pressure cookers made in China and Brazil, and some residents are growing impatient. The delays are being blamed on the country's decrepit electricity grid as officials fear that the onslaught of new electric appliances will cause power failures and fires.

Previously, the sale of electric stoves and cookers had been banned due to energy shortages. (*Reuters*, 6/9/05)

September 7: Fidel Castro returned to Havana after taking part in the Petrocaribe Summit that took place in Montego Bay, Jamaica. The head of state and his delegation were received at the José Martí international airport by Castro's brother, Raúl, and other officials. (*AFP*, 7/9/05)

September 21: Agriculture Minister Alfredo Jordán Morales, who rose from humble beginnings to hold a ministerial post and sit on the ruling politburo of Cuba's Communist Party, died from cancer, state media reported. He was 55. Jordán continued to work in his position until his death, Cuban television and the domestic National Information Agency said. Jordán had headed Cuba's Agriculture Ministry since 1993, at the height of the severe crisis known as the Special Period that followed the loss of the island's former trading partners in Eastern Europe. (*The New York Times*, 22/8/05)

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

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

November 17: Showing no visible signs of health problems and dressed in his fatigues, Fidel Castro told an audience of university students that he would not insist on remaining in power if he ever became too sick to lead the country. "If I don't feel I'm in condition, I'll call the [Communist] Party and tell them I don't feel I'm in condition (...) that please, someone take over the command," he said. But Castro also indicated such a scenario was unlikely to occur soon, saying he exercises regularly "and don't neglect myself in any way." "I could be like El Cid Campeador," Castro said, referring to the medieval Spanish warrior. "I would recommend that the [Communist] Party put me on a horse -- like Bush -- winning battles even after death." The Revolution needs the support of the people to take forward all of the measures underway at this time, not just to eliminate social inequalities, provide better living conditions and save resources like electric energy, but also to unleash a battle against crime and the breeding grounds for an infinite number of violations, Castro affirmed. Among mistakes that have been committed in the country, he criticized the erroneous idea of those who thought that they knew all about socialism, about how it is built, as if it were an exact science, pushing into the background a fundamental principle: the dialectics of materialism. (*The Miami Herald, Granma*, 17,18/11/05)

November 23: Centered on the salary, pension and social welfare increases and the new electricity rates, Fidel Castro said the moment had come to announce the measures, and that they were crucial for the future of the country. Castro spoke on "The Round Table", a nightly

TV and radio program hosted by journalist Randy Alonso. Castro expressed the urgency to adopt the conservation and salary measures before the end of the year, as part of the programs being developed by the Revolution. "This is a Socialist Revolution that seeks true equality", something Castro said has not occurred with the history of humanity over the last four or five thousand years. The Cuban president said that the country needs to openly talk about these problems, that there is no culture of economics in Cuba and that most people don't understand where money comes from. The Cuban leader said that the current problems affecting Cuban society can not be fought only by legal means, and that the extent of the problem must be met with a sizeable force of conscientious individuals, like social workers, joined by another considerable corps, that of the university students. Fidel recalled that no other society in history has advanced as quickly as Cuba in eliminating social inequalities in order to offer all its citizens equity, justice and the best possible standard of living. The Cuban leader said he trusted the values present in Cuban young people and spoke highly of the human capital developed by the island over the years, which he described as "our most valuable resource." This new offensive, designed to create a "totally new society," will never include anything that does not benefit "those who live on a salary, on a pension," Castro continued. (*Granma*, 24/11/05)

November 29: Fidel Castro is mobilising tens of thousands of young people and threatening a Cultural Revolution-style humiliation of corrupt officials in what the Cuban leader characterises as a do-or-die struggle against graft, pilfering and the "new rich". Thousands of student-age youths have taken over petrol stations and started working in refineries and riding in fuel trucks to monitor an industry where up to half of this precious resource was being stolen, according to receipts since the take-over began a month ago. Busloads of young people, armed with clipboards and energy-saving light bulbs, have appeared in some neighbourhoods as part of an energy-saving drive that includes stiff increases in prices. They hand out the bulbs while taking a census of the electrical appliances in each home, which they then characterise as well off, normal or poor - raising fears in the former that they are being classified as the "new rich". (*Financial Times*, 29/11/05)

December 1: The president of the National Assembly of Cuba, Ricardo Alarcón, indicated that Cuba is in a phase of "deepening socialism", which entails "a struggle for democracy". According to Alarcón, Fidel Castro is the leader for "fighting" this battle, together with "the young people of Cuba's student organizations". In this sense, said Alarcón, "it is about representative democracy against participatory democracy". (*EFE*, 1/12/05)

December 2: In an escalation of his campaign against corruption on the island, Fidel Castro vowed to eliminate those sectors of society that do not live off their salaries. During a long speech on the 30th anniversary of the Cuban military intervention in Angola, Castro warned that the campaign had just begun, and said to have a large number of volunteers and students to stop Cubans who live off illegalities. (*Reuters*, 2/12/05)

December 31: A government message broadcasted on national television and radio at midnight and published on the official press on January 1 saluted the people and outlined the reasons Cubans have for celebrating the 47th Anniversary of the January 1st, 1959's revolution led by Fidel Castro. The note highlighted the Gross Domestic Product growth of 11.8 percent, the highest since 1959, and the construction of 700 public works as part of the social program called Battle of Ideas. The government's communiqué said that in 2006 social workers will continue to play a key role in the war against waste, corruption and pilfering of

state resources. The message concluded with stressing that 2006 is a decisive year to reach the military invulnerability through better defense training and preparation. (*Prensa Latina*, 1/1/06)

December 31: Amid a nationwide anti-corruption campaign, Fidel Castro unexpectedly showed up at a popular gas station in Havana to celebrate the New Year with a group of social workers who were doing their night shift. Castro welcomed the New Year that marks the 47th Anniversary of the Revolution, talking with a group of social workers and university students headed by Julio Martínez, first secretary of the Young Communist League. They all sang together the National Anthem when the clock struck 12 and 21 gunshots to salute the revolutionary anniversary was heard all over the city. (*EFE, Prensa Latina*, 2/1/06)

PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH

January 3: Cuba's infant mortality, a benchmark the government uses to measure the effectiveness of its health system, fell to 5.8 per 1,000 live births in 2004, the Communist Party daily announced. The story on Granma newspaper's front page said the rate was the lowest in Latin America for the same period. Cuba's infant mortality rate for 2003 was 6.3 per 1,000 live births, the newspaper said. Infant mortality measures the number of children who die before they reach their first birthday. Worldwide, it is seen as an important measure of a nation's development. (*AP*, 3/1/05)

January 4: Cuba is undertaking large scale renovation of electro- medical technology with the installation of new equipment in hospitals and health centers throughout the island to improve specialized health services. AIN news agency reported that just a year after the process began, medical services have already improved. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 4/1/05)

January 19: Cuba is preparing to ask smokers to step outside before lighting up. Beginning on February 7, smoking will be prohibited in theaters, stores, buses, taxis and other enclosed public areas under a new resolution published in Cuba's National Gazette by the Commerce Ministry. Smoking will also be banned in indoor restaurants except in designated smoking areas. Cigarette machines will be taken down. There was no word if smoking would be allowed in bars. The resolution said the move was "taking into account the damage to human health caused by the consumption of cigarettes and cigars, with the objective of contributing to a change in the attitudes of our population." (*CNN*, 19/1/05)

February 7: Once a smoker's paradise, Cuba is banning smoking in stores, theaters, meeting halls and other public places. And longtime smokers in this island nation, one of the world's tobacco capitals, are fuming about the new rules. "They can't take this away from me. I'll kill them," said Graciela González, 80, clutching a fat stogie. "This is my life." Smoking is widely accepted in Cuba, where at least a third of the population lights up. With the new restrictions, Cuban officials hope to change people's thoughts about smoking and save lives. But it's an uphill fight in a country that sells cigarettes for as little as eight cents a pack, cheaper than anywhere else in the world. "I dread trying to make this thing work," said a security chief at La Bodeguita del Medio, a restaurant/bar in Old Havana. "Someone's going to have to tell people not to smoke. It's not going to be me." (*Dallas Morning News*, 7/2/05)

February 9: For the first time in Cuba and possibly in the world, an International Centenarians Conference took place in Havana, in which a group of men and women aged

between 100 to 124 shared their experiences and responded to geriatrists' and experts' questions on lifestyle and other factors that help to prolong life. People invited from Mexico, Chile, Spain, France, Haiti and Cuba attended the event, stated Doctor Eugenio Selman, president of the 120 Years Club, who presented diplomas to the organization's honorary members. (*Granma International, CNN, 9/2/05*)

February 14: Cuba's primary health care system and specialized services are playing a crucial role in disease prevention and treatment, according to a World Health Organization (WHO) official in Havana. Dr. Jack Chow, Assistant Director-General of WHO for HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria, described the Cuban health system as "exceptional." The expert visited a facility in Havana, where he learned of the specialized attention being provided to HIV/AIDS patients. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 14/2/05*)

February 16: Cuba will have an exceptional health system for all its citizens and those who need it worldwide, Fidel Castro affirmed when closing the 9th Congress of the National Health Workers' Union. The Cuban leader assured the island will undoubtedly become a unique health care provider in the world. "Medicine and the health of our people and that of neighboring countries and friends are perhaps the highest priorities in our Revolution," Fidel Castro stressed. In the last few years, Cuba has invested about 150 million dollars in high quality medical equipment for primary care, prevention and hospitals, thus improving specialized services, he revealed. (*Prensa Latina, 16/2/05*)

February 24: Rolando Camacho, head of the oncological program in Cuba, said in Havana that cancer could become the leading cause of death on the island. Camacho made this assertion during the public invitation to participate in the 7 th Terry Fox International Run to be simultaneously carried out in 50 countries next March 20. Over a million Cubans are expected to participate. (*EFE, 24/2/05*)

February 25: The first phase of Cuba's 44th polio vaccination campaign - this year aiming to inoculate 402,000 children against the disease – began. According to Dr. Miguel Angel Galindo, head of the National Immunization Program, all clinics in the country are prepared to provide the initial dose of the vaccine to children between the ages of one month and three years. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 25/2/05*)

March 1: A Cuban vaccine protecting children against four diseases: diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, and hepatitis B has been used for the first time, under the National Immunization Program. The highly efficient vaccine, which reduces the number of shots and visits to vaccination centers, is the result of a joint project between the Finlay Institute and the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center. Professor Miguel Galindo, head of the Public Health Ministry's National Vaccination Program, pointed out that all children born from last January on, except those whose mothers are infected with hepatitis B, will be immunize with the new vaccine. Children from mothers carrying hepatitis B will be vaccinated against the same diseases but under another plan. (*Prensa Latina, 1/3/05*)

March 3: More than ten Cuban pediatric hospitals now possess a computer science program linking them to education and research centers. The Alianza Vital software, core of the National Pediatric Surgery Network, will expand the use of computing in this speciality in the first stage, to be followed later by usage of adults. The system ensures the monitoring of hospitalized patients and collects details of operations and surgical reports. The system

enables access to statistical information, gives the opportunity to contact the leading authorities in the specialty directly, allows case discussions online and has a virtual library. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 3/3/05)

March 17: Cuba is likely to eliminate tuberculosis in the near future, according to AIN News Agency. To achieve that goal, the island will have to lower the incidence to five cases per 100,000 inhabitants. In 2004 the rate was 6.6 on the island, said Maria Josefa Llanes, an official with the National Tuberculosis Control Program of the Cuban Health Ministry. The healthcare specialist said the nations with the lowest incidence in the region are Chile, Uruguay and Cuba. In Cuba's case, over 100 of its 169 municipalities have a rate under five. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 17/3/05)

March 19: The use of acupunctural analgesia in some 60 caesarean sections and 400 cataract operations is a success in Santiago de Cuba, the pioneer province of the nation in terms of natural and traditional medicine. Carlos Falcon, promoter of that technique in the territory, told the press, that the millenary act of inserting needles into specific parts of the human body offers huge advantages, being a harmless technique without secondary effects. For such operations smaller doses are needed than other anesthetics or drugs, that is why it is convenient to use it on people with reactions to conventional methods, he said. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 19/3/05)

April 20: Cuba's Finlay Institute announced the completion of clinic trials of a vaccine for cholera at the 12th International Fair "Health for All". Specialists from the institution said the product will soon be evaluated in Africa, where the disease is endemic. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/4/05)

April 25: World Health Organization (WHO) inspector David R. Buckley praised the scientific and technological level of the Cuban pharmaceutical industry, local mass media reported. After giving a conference in the 3rd International Forum on Aseptic Processing in the Bio-pharmaceutical Industry, the expert highlighted the training of Cuban professionals and rigor of those regulations currently in force in the island for the production of medicines. The meeting was attended by experts from Spain, Italy, France, Sweden, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Australia, Argentina, Mexico and Uruguay. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/4/05)

May 18: The Cuban experience in curing leukemia to 70 percent of child patients will be presented during the 5th National Congress on Hematology, Immunology and Transfusion Medicine taking place in Havana. Dr. Jose Manuel Ballester, president of the Cuban Hematology Society, said the congress will take place at the same time as the 7th Latin American Hematology Symposium, with the attendance of 600 delegates from more than 25 countries. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/5/05)

May 30: Mozambique is to begin using an anti-cholera vaccine developed at the Finlay Institute, according to Alcinda Antonio de Abreu, minister of foreign business and cooperation for that country, who spoke with Granma International just before ending a three-day visit to Cuba. The minister explained that in the future, immunization campaigns using other products from that Cuban scientific center could be undertaken against malaria, tuberculosis and other endemic diseases. (*Granma International*, 30/5/05)

May 31: Cuba commemorated World No Tobacco Day by pushing its campaign to stop youths on the communist island from starting the habit. Some two million of Cuba's 11 million citizens are smokers. In February, the authorities put in place a resolution prohibiting the sale of cigarettes to persons under 16 years of age and the sale of tobacco products in stores and restaurants located 100 meters (yards) or less from schools. The Education Ministry is carrying out a program against tobacco use that is being taught at all grade levels and which an article in the official newspaper *Juventud Rebelde* claimed had resulted in a drop in smoking among young people. A 2001 study of 1,998 students between 13 and 15 years of age in 164 schools in Havana revealed that some 29.9 percent of them smoked. Between 33 and 38 percent of Cubans above age 16 smoke. One in every 10 smokers began the habit before their 12th birthday, according to official statistics. Tobacco use leads to 30 percent of the island's deaths from cancer, the country's second biggest killer, the government estimates. (*EFE*, 31/5/05)

June 30: After several days of intense analysis, the 14th International Scientific Congress CNIC 2005 finished in Havana, after bringing together over 800 professionals from 40 countries worldwide. Agendas included master conferences and symposiums on infectious diseases, environment, neurosciences and nano-technologies, as well as the exhibition of new products of the medical-pharmaceutical industry, dedicated this time to the 40th anniversary of the foundation of National Center for Scientific Research (CNIC). (*Prensa Latina*, 30/6/05)

July 2: Citoprot-P, a new product designed in Cuba to treat diabetic ulcers, will be introduced into treatment regimens in hospitals throughout the country. The cutting-edge drug, designed by the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center (CIGB), was produced in close collaboration with the Angiology Institute, and is the only preventative alternative to amputation of the extremities in diabetic patients presenting with these lesions. According to CIGB experts, the medication stimulates granulation and epithelization, and reduces surgical treatment thus limiting more invasive surgery due to relapses. (*Prensa Latina*, 2/7/05)

July 6: Cuba's Communist regime is conscripting members of Committees to Defend the Revolution in a campaign against the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito that transmits dengue fever, which killed 158 people on the island during a 1981 epidemic. "With the increase in the infestation index, the appearance of (...) flying adult mosquitoes, together with the current climatological situation that facilitates their reproduction, it is necessary to apply all measures in the interest of safeguarding our population from a dangerous evil," according to the most recent edition of "Tribuna de La Habana". Health authorities have not released any official information about the number of dengue fever cases detected so far this year, but the media are calling upon the public to cover water containers, eliminate standing water, change the water in flower vases and vases used for religious purposes and maintain adequate hygienic conditions in animal troughs. (*EFE*, 6/7/05)

July 12: Cuban Health Minister Jose Ramon Balaguer presided over the second graduation of the Salvador Allende Nursing School in Havana. The minister congratulated the 1,458 students graduating, of whom 819 are women, and urged them to strive to become ever better in their vocation. (*A/N*, 13/7/05)

July 24: Cuban health authorities urged Havana residents to take extra hygiene precautions as they investigate the deaths of eight children from an unknown cause. A government communique said that there had been an increase in digestive and respiratory illnesses reported in the Cuban capital coinciding with power, cooking gas and water problems, in part

caused by Hurricane Dennis, which passed a few miles east of Havana. "In this context eight deaths among minors have occurred which are being meticulously investigated," the communique, broadcast during the government's nightly television newscast, said. While children die at high rates in developing countries from various diseases, such deaths are rare in Cuba, which takes pride in a relatively well-developed and free health care system. (*Reuters, CNN, 25/7/05*)

August 23: The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria will provide Cuba with millions of dollars over the next three years to help improve quality of life and treatment for people living with HIV/AIDS and to reinforce efforts to prevent the spread of the disease. The 14.6 million dollars to be contributed by the fund between 2005 and 2008 "entails direct benefits for the community," said María Julia Fernández, a Cuban woman who has been living with HIV - the virus that causes AIDS - for almost 20 years. A specialist at the National Centre for the Prevention of Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV/AIDS, with many years of experience as a community health counsellor, Fernández now devotes all of her energies to providing support for individuals diagnosed as HIV-positive, she told IPS. The Global Fund will provide Cuba with a total of 26.1 million dollars over the 2005-2008 period, reported Raffaella Garutti of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), who is responsible for overseeing the project's execution. Garutti told the press that the Cuban initiative is considered the best "of all the projects supported by the Fund in 133 countries." (*IPS, 23/8/05*)

August 25: Free universal healthcare has long been Cuba's crowning achievement, but the system is now under fire from Cubans who complain that quality and access are suffering as they lose tens of thousands of medical workers to Venezuela in exchange for cheap oil, which this impoverished country desperately needs. The Cuban doctors program is wildly popular among Venezuela's poor. But Cubans have begun to object that the exodus of their healthcare workers is taking a toll on medical care for Cubans. A 45-year-old nurse in Camaguey province said she has worked without a doctor in her primary-care clinic for more than two years since the physician was transferred to another clinic to replace a doctor sent to Venezuela. The Ministry of Public Health and the Cuban press center did not respond to repeated requests over a three-week period for interviews and data for this story. With 66,567 doctors, Cuba boasts a ratio of 1 doctor per 170 citizens, compared with 1 doctor per 188 residents in the United States, according to the World Health Organization. The emphasis on preventive, personalized care has yielded life expectancy rates almost identical to those in the United States, and infant mortality rates even lower than its northern neighbor's, WHO data show. (*The Boston Globe, 25/8/05*)

September 13: Cuba announced it would create an organization of doctors ready for dispatch to natural disasters around the globe as it continued to wait for a response to its offer to send physicians to the United States to aid the Hurricane Katrina relief efforts. The doctors "continue training intensely at the Latin American Medical School, waiting for a response that has yet to arrive, and may never come," said a government statement on the front page of *Granma*, the Communist Party daily. The group's objective will be to "immediately cooperate (...) with any country that suffers a catastrophe [like Katrina], especially those confronting (...) hurricanes, flooding and other natural phenomenon," the *Granma* statement said. The new organization was to be formally created at a graduation ceremony of Cuban medical students. (*CNN, 13/9/05*)

September 19: The Henry Reeve International Contingent of Disaster and Epidemic Physicians, a team of 1,586 physicians, was officially inducted by Fidel Castro at the graduation ceremony for 1,903 new doctors from Cuban medical schools. If wealthy nations ever decide to collaborate in the combat against the pandemics of poor countries, they'll need professionals like those in the Henry Reeve brigade," declared Fidel Castro, citing Cuba's first world infant mortality and life expectancy stats as evidence of the island's medical success. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/9/05)

September 19: Fidel Castro said that Cuba is on the way to reduce infant mortality to less than four per thousand births and to increase the life expectancy of her people. Addressing the graduation ceremony for 1,903 physicians from Cuban medical schools, Castro stressed that, "we are going to be the first Latin American country to reach this figure, even better than that of Canada." In addition, he said, this will take place in half the time it took Switzerland and Japan to raise their life expectancies from 70 to 80 years, because today we are at 77.5 years. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/9/05)

October 3: Garlic tincture, copal wood resin syrup and a compound known as Imefasma are the three most highly sought after "phytopharmaceuticals" or plant-based medicines produced by the state-run pharmaceutical industry in Guantánamo, located some 1,000 km southeast of Havana. Although natural and traditional medicine has been incorporated into the mainstream public health care system throughout Cuba as a whole, the use of herbal remedies is particularly widespread in Guantánamo. At the same time, however, some doctors warned of the potential risks posed by this practice, given the fact that some of the plants used can have toxic effects in overly large doses. The province's herbal medicine industry encompasses three laboratories and 26 dispensaries spread throughout ten municipalities, seven of them in mountainous regions. (*IPS*, 3/10/05)

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

November 1: The absence of medical staff sparked a public disturbance in the emergency ward of a hospital in Arroyo Naranjo, Havana. Approximately 200 patients awaiting medical attention protested violently forcing the police to intervene. The mobilization of doctors towards missions in Venezuela and other countries has affected public health services in the island. (*Puente Informativo*, 1/11/05)

November 16: Delegates participating in the 5th Continental Congress on Natural Medicine sessioning in Havana will discuss the antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties of this country's Vimang medicine. Vimang is a mango-based natural product created by the Cuban Chemical Center to fight diseases such as lupus erythematosus, diabetes, lymphomas, leukemia and skin conditions. The natural medicine sold in over 20 nations is also effective against joints and muscular pains. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/11/05)

November 17: Cuba said it was considering researching a vaccine against bird flu, warning that antiviral drugs available today are barely enough to protect "the rich people in rich nations" from a pandemic. "We have taken the first steps to think about a possible vaccine for animals and humans," the deputy director of Cuba's Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, Dr. Carlos Borroto, said. "We don't want to raise expectations because we are still studying this," he told reporters. Cuba has asked the World Health Organization for strains of the virus to begin work. Borroto said only two antiviral drugs made by multinational pharmaceutical firms had proved effective for bird flu, but were not being produced in sufficient quantities. (*Reuters*, 17/11/05)

November 17: After several days of interesting analysis on the therapeutical effects of homeopathy, the 5th Continental Congress on Natural Products and Medicine is winding up at Havana's International Conference Center. Antioxidant action and the treatment of diseases produced by some virus and parasites were among the main issues tackled by experts from more than 10 countries attending the meeting. Other topics included economic benefits, security and low toxicity of natural-origin compounds. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/11/05)

November 29: The 29th Congress of the Central American and Caribbean Pharmaceutical Federation opened at Havana's International Conference Center. During the event, Cuba detailed new vaccines and clinical trials, as well as described more than 40 years of research that has allowed pharmaceutical professionals to contribute knowledge to the improvement of health in Cuba and abroad. Dr. Eneida Pérez Santana, president of the Cuban Pharmaceutical Science Society and the organizing committee of the event, said that more than 300 delegates from 17 countries, including Cuba, participated in the Congress. (*Granma International*, 29/11/05)

November 29: Traffic accidents are the first cause of death among Cuban teenagers, who accounted for 40 % of accidental fatalities in 2004, according to Department of Public Health (MINSAP) estimates. Accidents involving bicycles accounted for 57 % of the deaths, particularly among teenagers 10 to 14 years old. (*EFE*, 29/11/05)

December 1: Transgenic rice, sweet potatoes, corn and tomatoes are under study in Cuba. These products could be ready for the market in three years and its licenses would be given for free to poor countries to fight hunger, said one of the island's top scientists. Carlos Borroto, deputy director of Cuba's Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, anticipates that "in the next three or four years our transgenic crops meet all bio-safety requirements and can be commercialized." Borroto said that all the Cuban transgenic products are in a field study phase and none has yet hit the market. (*Reuters*, 1/12/05)

December 22: Known as the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, or CIGB, the institute is one of 52 government facilities dedicated to human, animal and agricultural research that have recorded a string of successes. Using more than \$1 billion in state funding, Cuban scientists have produced a hepatitis B vaccine sold in more than 30 countries and streptokinase, a potent enzyme that dissolves blood clots and improves the survival rate of heart attack victims. The country also makes recombinant interferon that strengthens the immune system of cancer patients and a meningitis B vaccine. In the pipeline are products ranging from an injection that closes ulcers and improves circulation in diabetics to vaccines against cholera and hepatitis C, according to Cuban officials. Yet the country's production of milk, beef and other foods has fallen even as its scientists embark on years-long efforts to

produce genetically modified rice, corn and other crops that are disease resistant. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/12/05)

SOCIAL ISSUES

(See also, Economy/ Centralization, Corruption, Energy/ Electricity Crisis, Natural Disasters and Environment)

General

January 24: Breakdowns affecting five water pumps in the last 20 days have caused water shortages in the municipalities of Old Havana, Downtown Havana, Cerro, Marianao, Lisa and other areas of Havana that receive their supply from the Southern Basin Water Treatment Plant. This situation is compounded by technical problems also affecting the water treatment facilities at El Gato and Ariguanabo whose causes remain unclear. (*Cubanet*, 24/1/05)

February 4: Cuban medical authorities expressed concerns over the rising numbers of Cuban teenagers who resort to an abortion as a solution to unplanned pregnancy. According to the President of the Cuban Family Development Association, although the medical procedure can be performed in Cuba legally and under stringent sanitary conditions, there are no guarantees against possible post-abortion "physical and psychological complications." In 1990, 147,530 abortions were performed on the island, which means that 45.6 per thousand women between the ages of 12 and 49 underwent the procedure. Although by 2001 the number of cases had decreased to 69,563, a ratio of 21.2 per thousand is still considered high by the specialists. (*AFP*, 4/2/05)

February 22: A video that pokes satirical fun at Cuba's feared State Security agency and hints at corruption within this institution is making the underground rounds of the communist-ruled island, prompting shock over its boldness and chuckles over its jabs. The few Cubans who have seen the 15-minute tape say its comical references to listening bugs and other usually sensitive issues have them wondering how long it will take for the government to crack down on the well-known actors. While it makes fun of State Security -- the Interior Ministry agency that focuses on repressing the domestic opposition to Fidel Castro -- the video does not carry an openly anti-Castro message. Few Cubans have seen it because it is being passed around in a DVD, and access to DVD players or personal computers capable of playing DVDs is not widespread there. The video features three well-known Cuban artists who use their own names in the credits -- Eduardo del Llano, Luis Alberto García and Néstor Jiménez. (*The Miami Herald*, 23/2/05)

March 8: Fidel Castro addressed a meeting of over 1,000 women in Havana's Convention Center in honor of International Women's Day. The Cuban leader spoke about a number of issues affecting women directly on the island today - even to the extent of discussing pressure cookers, and the provision of cooking fuel across the country. He touched on the need to preserve energy explaining, with a remarkable grasp for the technical details of the subject, the difference between cooking with electricity and cooking with gas. Electricity takes twice as much energy to produce the same amount of black bean soup, said Fidel Castro, so efforts should be made to acquire gas pressure cookers and not electric ones. During a 5 1/2-hour speech broadcast on state TV, Castro said 100,000 pressure cookers would be made available each month, an announcement that underscored the communist country's continued retreat toward greater political and economic centralism. The program could wipe out what has

become a popular, and in most cases legal, private business that uses molds to make pressure cookers from cheap aluminum. Although imported cookers are sold in stores for about \$25 -- more than the average Cuban earns in a month -- homemade ones cost about \$5.50. Distribution of the cookers is part of an offensive against "the errors, deviations and confusions" in economic planning of the more recent past, Castro said. (*Reuters, Sun Sentinel, Radio Habana Cuba, 9/3/05*)

March 19: A disturbance at a Havana prison that houses thousands of inmates was controlled by authorities hours after it broke out, according to relatives of prisoners who visited their loved ones later in the day. Elsa Morejon told the press that she learned of the disturbance when she traveled to the Combinado del Este Prison for a scheduled visit with her husband, well-known dissident physician Oscar Elias Biscet. There was no official report on the incident from Cuba's government and it was unknown how the disturbance began or if there were any injuries or deaths. (*AP, 19/3/05*)

March 31: Fidel Castro announced a 50 percent increase in pensions and social security benefits for 1.5 million Cubans in a new effort to help the most deprived of Cuba's 11 million people. In a four-hour speech, Castro read out complaints about the failings of his 45-year-old government and cited a report that painted a dismal picture of rural communities where people cook with wood or coal and have no television. The average monthly pension of 120 pesos (\$5) will increase to 179 pesos (\$7.50) on May 1, and those receiving less - as little as 55 pesos (\$2) a month - will get bigger raises, Castro said. Some 1.5 million Cubans with pensions of under 300 pesos (\$12.50) will benefit from the raise, he said. The higher pension and social security payments will cost 1.0 billion pesos (\$41.6 million), he said in a rambling speech to ruling Communist Party, military and labor officials. (*Reuters, AP, 31/3/05*)

March 31: In the fourth of a new series of weekly talks broadcast live on Cuban television, Fidel Castro dealt with complaints, from bad housing to the lack of aid in drought-stricken eastern Cuba. "Not only is there a housing shortage, we are short of many things," the 78-year-old leader said, promising that funds were arriving in the country and corrections would be made to keep Cuba's socialist system going. Castro announced that household appliances and essential furniture will soon be provided to the most vulnerable sectors of the population, including the bedridden and mothers of children with severe disabilities. Noting that corruption will not be tolerated, Castro insisted that the population and its community organizations keep a watchful eye on the delivery of energy efficient household appliances, spare parts and new food products to guarantee their correct distribution. (*Reuters, AP, Radio Habana Cuba, 31/3/05*)

April 5: Inmates in a Cuban prison set mattresses and other materials ablaze in violence that left several prisoners seriously injured. The disturbance, later controlled by Cuban authorities, was the second in less than 20 days at the Combinado del Este Prison, which houses from 4,000 to 5,000 inmates according to unofficial sources. Elizardo Sanchez, head of the Havana-based Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation, learned of the disturbance from prisoners' relatives who were contacted by authorities. Cuba's government issued no official report on the incident at the prison in Havana, and it was unknown how the disturbance was controlled. Sanchez said that the unrest was the result of excessive sentences, poor food and insufficient medical care at the prison. (*AP, El Nuevo Herald, 8/4/05*)

April 5: Low income families began receiving free TV sets donated by the Cuban government, in line with the announcement made by Fidel Castro last March 31. The distribution will start in all municipalities of the eastern province of Granma, including remote areas at the Sierra Maestra --the island highest mountains. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 5/4/05)

April 7: The Cuban National Capitol (Capitolio Nacional) is once more illuminated. Its gardens, pavements and cupola are displaying a new lighting system. Neighbors, passersby and visitors to the capital could once again enjoy, after more than 20 years, an illuminated Capitolio, fruit of the restoration plan underway for the building. The system comprises 302 lights, extending from the lantern at the highest level of the building (92 meters) on which the white cupola rests, to lights in the exterior gardens. (*Granma International*, 7/4/05)

April 11: An inmate who suffered severe burns in an uprising at Cuban prison has died, officials said. Freddy Ibanez, 35, died in a Havana hospital, badly burned when rioting prisoners doused fellow inmates with gasoline. Inmates at the Combinado del Este Prison set mattresses and materials ablaze in violence that left several prisoners seriously injured on April 5, said Elizardo Sanchez, head of the Havana-based Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation. "According to our investigations and despite the strict official silence regarding the riots of March 19 and April 5, it is very probable that several inmates died as a result of those incidents," said the communique from commission head Elizardo Sanchez. An official at a mortuary in west Havana confirmed Ibáñez's body was expected to arrive there. Sanchez said that Interior Minister Abelardo Colome Ibarra went to the prison on the occasion of the latest disturbance, accompanied by several army generals and police commanders. (*CNN, EFE, Reuters*, 11/4/05)

April 14: In a nation dominated for generations by Fidel Castro and the Communist Party, one group is emerging as a refuge for those chafing under the constraints of daily life on this Caribbean island. Widely popular before the 1959 revolution, Cuba's Masons suffered a precipitous decline in the ensuing decades, but the group has since recovered its appeal as some Cubans look for an alternative to the uniformity inherent in the nation's one-party system. Cuba's Masons say discussions about democracy, human rights, abortion, globalization, cloning and other issues of the day are common, though members refrain from talking about the island's politics inside the nation's 316 lodges, or meeting places. Some Masons say the organization has a history of promoting civil liberties and could play a role in Cuba's political future, though top Masons say their mission is to foster ethical conduct and brotherhood. The group risks getting sucked into the battle between authorities and the island's weak and divided dissident movement. Twelve of the 75 opposition figures imprisoned by Cuban authorities in 2003 are Freemasons. All but one--independent journalist Jorge Olivera--remain incarcerated. (*Chicago Tribune*, 14/4/05)

April 18: Three prisoners were dead and 25 seriously injured after a riot in the Combinado del Este prison—the largest penitentiary in Cuba—while local authorities "have yet to report the incident," said the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN). "We can confirm the deaths, as a result of burns, of inmates Javier Peralta, Alexis Tomes and Fredy Ibáñez," said the organization. The CCDHRN released an unofficial list of the 25 prisoners who were sent to hospital and deemed seriously or very seriously injured after the incident. (*AFP*, 18/4/05)

April 22: Elián González, 11, made his public speaking debut at a political rally, thanking the American people for supporting his reunion with his father in Cuba five years ago and making his "dream of being a free child come true." The former castaway read a prepared speech recalling the day US federal agents seized him from the home of Miami relatives and turned him over to his father, Juan Miguel González. "When I saw him I got very happy," Elián said. "I could hug him. I could see my little brother. That was the happiest day of my life. "I want to thank the American people for supporting our cause, which greatly contributed to my return," Elián said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 24/4/05)

May 9: Cuban police have rounded up and jailed in recent months some 400 young people who have not committed crimes but are considered by authorities to be likely to do so, a non-governmental human rights organization said in Havana. The youths were accused of "pre-crime dangerousness" and have been sentenced to prison terms of between one and four years, according to the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation. The group, headed by Elizardo Sanchez and considered illegal by the government, said the Communist regime's "Operation Containment," which began in January, is "a real and unacceptable social cleansing operation." The dissident group said the majority of the arrests were made in Havana. "Our Commission considers that all the people jailed are legally innocent since they have not committed a specific crime or been given due process, and, for that reason, we call for their immediate release," the rights group said, adding that the average age of those arrested was 18. (*EFE, La Jornada, AFP*, 9/5/05)

May 14: It was reported that Cuba's ranks of retirement-age citizens will only grow. The average Cuban is expected to live 76 years, one of the highest life expectancy rates in Latin America. Low birth rates also mean Cuba's population, much like the United States, is becoming older every year. The Cuban government imposes a mandatory retirement age for most of its citizens - 60 for men, 55 for women - to make room for younger workers in the tight job market. Some workers, however, are retiring even earlier, knowing they can make more money on the streets than in a typical government job. A middle-age newspaper vendor who wakes up early every morning to sell Cuba's official newspapers on the streets said he used to work for the government at a newsstand until he realized he could make more money on his own. One 62-year-old Havana man has a friend who sells him 100 plastic bags for 50 pesos, or about \$2. The man steals them from a Havana factory where he works. The retiree can sell each bag for 1 peso on the street, doubling his investment. "You have to go into business to survive," he said. His pension amounts to less than \$10 a month. (*AP*, 16/5/05)

June 1: International Children's Day was widely celebrated in Cuba, including a main function at Havana's National Oncology and Radiobiology Institute, where children with cancer are treated. A large array of activities were scheduled at outdoor facilities, while Cuban television channels opened their programming with shows dedicated to children. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 1/6/05)

June 2: Cuban authorities will be applying severe penalties against anyone attempting to disrupt the public transit service in Havana. The Cuban Ministry of the Interior (MININT) has issued 14 edicts that establish legal proceedings for criminal offences ranging from holding on to moving buses while riding a bicycle or a skateboard, to theft and fighting among transit users. Most alarming to the Cuban government are the incidents of rocks being thrown at buses in the downtown Havana area or the San Miguel del Padrón neighbourhood under cover

of darkness provided by the long power outages affecting the city and deficiencies in the street lighting system. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 2/6/05)

June 6: A brutal attack was perpetrated by officers of the National Police (PNR) on beachgoers who were ready to board a public bus at The Peñas Altas Public Bus Stop, beach of Guanabo, east of Havana. Police officers jumped out of 11 patrol cars and 3 police trucks with batons and began beating swimmers who were prepared to board Bus 462. The incident broke out when police officers could not control a brawl between swimmers who were trying to get on the bus. The lack of public transportation to the beaches in the Eastern part of the capital during the summer originates brawls amongst citizens wanting to get into the buses. (*Lux Info Press*, 6/6/05)

June 7: A growing number of Cubans who don't belong to dissident groups are rejecting Fidel Castro's government, says the first member of the so-called Group of 75 to arrive in the United States. "There is a strong underground social dissidence that has many ways of confronting the regime -- people who look for independent spaces (...) and whose rejection is shown in indifference to the political discourse," dissident Manuel Vazquez Portal told the press after arriving in Miami. Vazquez Portal was sentenced to 18 years in March 2003 but was among 14 prisoners released on medical parole last year (he suffers from emphysema). Vazquez Portal said there is plenty of reason to worry about Cuba. "There is a large percentage of indifference in all sectors of society," he said. "I leave behind a country that is devastated economically and spiritually, where the slow and continuous exodus of professionals and intellectuals has caused a brain drain on the island." Vazquez Portal said the arrest of the 75 opposition leaders in 2003 can be considered "a punch, but not a knockout" for Cuba's dissident movement. "Political dissidence and independent journalism have begun to absorb the punch and are coming out stronger, as the Women of White movement and the [May] meeting of the Assembly to Promote a Civil Society shows," he said. (*The Miami Herald*, 10/6/05)

June 17: The World Food Programme (WFP) has launched an emergency food aid operation for 773,000 people affected by the ongoing drought in Cuba, WFP representative Rosa Inés Antolín told the press. The operation, which will involve a total of 3.7 million dollars in assistance for three months, could go into effect in July, Antolín noted. The WFP will also be counting on support from donors, including the European Union (EU), Canada and Japan, to provide aid over subsequent months, she added. The food aid operation will be carried out in coordination with the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation (MINVEC) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (*IPS*, 19/6/05)

June 23: Cuba increased the salaries of its teachers, doctors and nurses, highlighting the importance the nation's communist government puts on its health and education sectors. Workers in these fields will receive an average of 40 to 50 additional Cuban pesos a month, or the equivalent of about US\$2. The increase was to take effect July 1. "It's very modest, and can be improved upon," Fidel Castro said in a live televised address to announce the news. The average Cuban worker earns 300 pesos a month, or the equivalent of about US\$12. Many of those to receive the new salaries also benefited from an earlier increase to the island's minimum wage, under which the salaries of nearly 1.7 million low-wage workers were doubled May 1. The positive economic news has come on the heels of new optimism based on oil prospects off Cuba's northern coast and strengthened economic ties with China and Venezuela. (*Prensa Latina*, AP, 23/6/05)

June 27: Cuban lawyers from several institutions are updating the Family Code, enacted in 1975, official sources reported. Luis Palenzuela, vice president of the Cuban Society for Civil and Family Law, said the current Code will still continue in force, but with new amendments. Among the new aims are to give more possibilities to under 18-year-old people to demand their rights and benefit people with disabilities. The Cuban official also said that together with the code, new legal proceedings and family courts should be created. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/6/05)

June 29: Cuba will adopt measures for the upcoming summer holidays (July and August) to curb the rate of traffic accidents en route to recreational areas. Lt. Col. Francisco Bruzon, head of the National Traffic Division, listed a group of measures, ranging from reinforcing traffic police with access to recreation centers and annulment of more than 1,000 driving licenses nationwide. Reports indicate a slight increase of accidents in the first four months of the year with more than 1,300, one hundred more than in 2004. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/6/05)

July 6: Glass bottles were thrown at the Provincial Traffic Control Office in Cienfuegos. The incident seemed to be part of popular protests due to discomfort generated by constant and long power cuts. Every half hour, bottles could be heard crashing against the walls of the police office while the neighbourhood was in a blackout. (*Cubanet*, 7/05)

July 14: Dozens of teenagers jailed at the Ivanov Penitentiary in Cotorro, Havana, have been on a hunger strike for several days in demand of their rights, according to a family source. The inmates, aged 16 and 17, are demanding, among others, that physical and verbal abuses stop, no more transfers to the "Combinado del Este" prison for adults as punishment, better food, and observance of family visits every 21 days. Most of the prisoners are part of some 400 young people from Havana who were sent to jail as part of the "Operación Contención", a police round up. (*Cubanet*, 14/7/05)

July 21: As Fidel Castro looked on, Elian Gonzalez, the shipwreck survivor whose custody battle morphed into a US-Cuban political wrestling match, graduated from the sixth grade in Havana. The ceremony at a Havana park, during which Castro spoke for an hour, was transmitted live on state radio and television. "His academic performance is very good," Castro said of Elian, now 11, calling him a symbol of advances in Cuban education after personally handing Elian his diploma. "He is a disciplined boy and respectful." Castro added that he's honored to be friends of Elian Gonzalez. "I have the privilege to be his friend," he said. (*AFP, EFE*, 21/7/05)

July 22: Sweltering summer heat in the 90s, blackouts of more than 12 hours and water shortages have increasingly frayed Cubans' nerves, challenging Fidel Castro's government as he prepares for July 26 th celebration marking the launch of the Cuban revolution. "Amid the miscellaneous promises and speeches of triumphs that cannot be demonstrated, Cubans are losing patience," dissident Manuel Cuesta Morua said this week. "Cuba is annoyed." While Havana residents said the situation eased somewhat - at least in the capital where the celebration is being held - Cubans worry about the rest of July and August, the year's hottest months. And they hope for good news on July 26 th, when Castro is expected to address the nation. "It won't take much more time," Castro said of the power problems when he spoke at the primary school graduation of Elian Gonzalez, who returned to Cuba from Miami five years ago after a high-profile international custody battle. "You can trust what I say," he said. (*Seattle Times*, 22/7/05)

August 8: Cuba is experiencing one of its hottest summers in the past half-century, according to the government meteorological institute, which also noted an increase in the surface temperature of the Atlantic Ocean. Last month was the fourth-hottest July since 1951, the official daily *Granma* reported, citing a report from the institute. Forecasters expect more record high temperatures in August, especially in Cuba's drought-stricken eastern provinces. This summer's combination of soaring temperatures, high humidity and light winds has led to increased discomfort for residents of the Communist-ruled island, made worse by an ongoing electricity shortage blamed for blackouts of up to 10 hours a day in Havana and other cities. (*EFE*, 8/8/05)

August 15: In Cuba, people are getting divorced for any reason: incompatible personalities, jealousy, conflicts with mothers-in-law, sex, separations due to excessive work or alcohol and even plans to marry a foreigner. This is a fact in Cuba on the threshold of the 21st century. A review of the divorce rate after 1960 shows that separations have been growing over the years. They moved from 3,472 in 1960 to 7,892 in 1964 and exceeded 20,000 in 1969. There were over 30,000 in 1982. The number curtailed until 1986, when they totaled 32,867. The highest figure (64,934) was seen in 1993, when the rate was six separations every 1,000 inhabitants. The latest figures that are available correspond to 2003, when there were 33,851 separations, according to the Cuban Population Yearbook. The island exhibits one of the highest divorce rates in Latin America, it stressed. (*SEM*, 15/8/05)

September 7: Cuba is still a country rated "high" in human development, the UN Development Program reported. The Human Development Index (HDI) the organization publishes every year is an indicator that takes into account three dimensions of human welfare: income, education and health. Cuba was ranked 52 on the HDI, the same as last year, after fellow Latin American nations Argentina, ranked 34, Chile, 37, Uruguay 46 and Costa Rica, 47. It ranked above Mexico, ranked 53, and Panama, 56, in the "high" category, with the other countries of the region placing among nations in the "medium" category. With a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) estimated at \$5,400, Cuba devotes 6.5 percent of its GDP to health and 9 percent to education. The island's economic and technological shortcomings are revealed in the section on technology, as only 64 out of 1,000 Cubans have a basic telephone line, three have cell phones and nine have Internet access, according to 2003 figures. Women occupy 16.2 percent of Cabinet-level jobs and 36 percent of seats on the National People's Power Assembly. (*EFE*, 7/9/05)

September 13: Cuban homosexual males organized the first film festival on sexual diversity, an event also intended to contribute to the fight against AIDS. The festival is an opportunity to discuss topics regarding male homosexuals and it has a preventive approach since it allows to speak "aloud" on HIV/SIDA, said Yoel Vega, a coordinator of the project "Men who Have Sex with Men" (HSH). Outside a movie theatre in Havana, young people distributed leaflets, condoms and posters to the audience. (*AP*, 13/9/05)

September 14: Of every 100 Cubans 14 years of age and older, 65 live in couple, 43 of them married and 22 in free union, according to a demographic study. The study was presented by expert Elena Benítez, of the Centre for Demographic Studies at the University of Havana, during the VI Ibero-American Conference on Family, which took place in Havana's International Conference Centre. In her presentation, Benítez indicated that the tendency of increasing consensual unions is influenced by factors that go from the economic and social

independence reached by women and the rejection of formalisms, up to material needs like the scarcity of housings and social and economic problems in Cuba. (*AFP*, 14/9/05)

September 23: About 70,000 Cubans have committed suicide by various means, all quite deadly - hanging, wrist-cutting, jumping out windows, a shot in the head. Over the last half century, a rough but realistic estimate is that some 100,000 Cubans have taken their own lives. In the early 1980s the Cuban Health Ministry announced that the suicide rate in Cuba had risen over the figure of 20 per 100,000 per year. In little over a decade, the index of deaths by suicide had doubled - in 1969 it was eight per 100,000 - and Cuba had thus gained one of the highest rates in the Western Hemisphere. More Cubans had been killing themselves than had the people of most other nations, and the phenomenon approached the suicide rates of Nordic countries such as Denmark, Finland and Sweden, or of some of Cuba's then European allies, such as Hungary, Russia and the Baltic republics. A 1990s study carried out in Miami questioned the statistics released by the World Health Organization, according to which the Cuban government had succeeded in containing this trend - at a rate of about 2,000 suicides per year. According to the study, the real rate was a good deal higher than that, but similarly high figures were also characteristic of Miami, with many more suicides than among other Hispanic communities in the United States. (*El País*, 23/9/05)

September 30: Cuban specialists discussed the challenges that an aging population entail for the island. The workshop "The Aging of the Population and its Impact on the Cuban Reality", that took place at the Association of Cuban Economists (ANEC), revealed how the aging of the population is already having an impact on all the spheres of economic and social development on the island. During the meeting, Juan Carlos Alfonso, director of the National Statistics Office (ONE) indicated that the main reasons of this situation are the low levels of population growth and fertility. In Cuba, 14.5 per cent of the population is over 60 years old. (*Juventud Rebelde*, 1/10/05)

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

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

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

November 12: Cuba is home to some 11.2 million residents, three-quarters of whom live in urban areas, according to the communist island's third census since the 1959 revolution that launched Fidel Castro to power. The census, taken three years ago, showed Cuba's population grew by almost 1.5 million since the last census in 1981, according to the Communist Party daily *Granma*. It was not clear why it took three years to report the data compiled in September 2002. The average age of Cubans is 35, though nearly 15 percent of the population is aged 60 or older, state-run newspapers reported, citing the census results. The population is split equally by gender, but Juan Carlos Alfonso, who directed the census, predicted that women will be the majority on the island within a few years, according to *Juventud Rebelde*, Cuba's communist youth newspaper. An increasing number of Cubans are of mixed ethnicities, with a quarter classified as mestizo in the survey. There is electricity in about 95 percent of all homes, while 96 percent of households have cooking facilities. The census found there are slightly more than three people per household on the island. (*AP*, 12/11/05)

December 5: Most Cubans prefer the idea of democracy to that of dictatorship and believe that their lives and that of the nation would be better if significant political change came about in the nearly 47-year-old one-party state, according to a poll carried out clandestinely on the island by a Spanish non-governmental organization. *Solidaridad Española con Cuba* (Spanish Solidarity with Cuba) presented in Madrid the results of what it called "the first scientific study of public opinion" in the Caribbean nation in more than four decades. The NGO's president, Ricardo Carreras, told reporters that pollsters talked to 541 Cubans across 13 provinces between October 8 and November 3. Respondents said that Cuba's "principal problem" is the prevailing combination of high living costs, low pay and a lack of good jobs. Second on Cubans' list of worries is food, specifically the recurring shortages of dietary staples. Eighty percent of those surveyed agreed with the statement that "several or many changes could improve the current situation" on the Communist-ruled island. The "majority of Cubans," according to the poll, support the Varela Project, which contemplates a national referendum on democratization, freeing political prisoners and allowing a significant role for private enterprise. A majority of respondents supported the idea of an amnesty for Cuba's roughly 300 political prisoners, while endorsing the right of a group of prisoners' wives known as the "Women in White" to stage peaceful protests against their husbands' incarceration. Most of those polled said they preferred democracy to dictatorship, with the latter defined in the survey as a system where "all political power is in the hands of one man." (*EFE*, 5/12/05)

December 6: A large crowd of passengers protested angrily before railroad and police authorities at the central station of Cuban Railroads in Havana when a scheduled train was cancelled. After the protest, past midnight, the travelers were asked to board a train, which after 15 minutes stopped in the outskirts of Havana where it sat till dawn. (*Cubanet*, 13/12/05)

December 20: A discussion on transexuality took place at the Parliamentary committees gathered in Havana when Mariela Castro, director of the National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX), released results of a survey on gender identity in today's Cuban society to the committees on Education, Culture, Science, Technology and the Environment, and Youth, Children and Women's Rights. Mariela Castro said that for people with a non-traditional gender identity to fully develop their potential as a member of society, it is first necessary to identify them so as to assure that they receive adequate specialized assistance. She also noted the need in Cuban society of a profound understanding of gender and sexuality. (*Granma*, 21/12/05)

December 27: As hundreds of same-sex couples in Britain are taking advantage of a new law that allows them to enter into civil partnerships with the same rights as heterosexual marriages, gays and lesbians in Cuba are still struggling to achieve a bare minimum of social acceptance. Nevertheless, the issue of respect for sexual diversity has become increasingly visible in this socialist Caribbean island nation since the early 1990s, as part of a process that now seems to be irreversible. "There are things in life that can only happen when the right conditions have been created, but once the path is cleared, there is no going back," remarked Nelson Simón, a leading figure in modern Cuban homoerotic poetry, in an interview with the press. With several published volumes of poetry to his name, the 40-year-old Simón is one of the few Cuban intellectuals to openly profess his homosexuality. "Although it continues to be a 'machista' and 'manly' country with a very phallogocentric culture, Cuban society accepts changes very easily, it is very mutable, very open and acts like a sponge when it comes to incorporating everything that comes along," he added. In 2005, gay and lesbian film festivals were held in a number of Cuban cities, Pinar del Río hosted the first sexual diversity cultural festival, and CENESEX (an official center for research on sexual matters) submitted a proposal for legislation on transsexual rights to the Cuban parliament. Nevertheless, the film "Strawberry and Chocolate" has never been shown on Cuban television. (*IPS*, 27/12/05)

Housing

January 7: Some 100,225 housing units in Cuba were damaged last year, including 5,360 that were completely destroyed, by hurricanes Charley and Ivan, which slammed into the western part of this Caribbean island nation. The tropical storms that hit Cuba every year aggravate the already chronic housing deficit, estimated at half a million units by the Housing Institute, which lacks the funding to provide solutions. Authorities and academics also agree that the state of housing units in Cuba makes them even more vulnerable to hurricanes and other storms. According to official figures, 40 percent of the country's more than three million housing units are in poor or mediocre condition - a proportion that rises to 50 percent in the country's eastern provinces. Experts with the Centre for Research on Structure and Materials (CIDEM), at the Central de las Villas University, say any reconstruction or construction strategy must keep in mind the need to reduce vulnerability to storms. (*IPS*, 7/1/05)

January 29: Cuba has started building homes using lumber created from sugarcane derivatives. Construction official Jorge Gonzalez told the press that twenty such houses were built in the central region of Cienfuegos by the end of 2004, and there were plans to construct 700 more this year. The artificial wood is created by mixing cement and sugarcane waste pulp. Plans to modernize a factory to increase the production of the lumber are in the making, Gonzalez said. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 29/1/05)

May 30: After years of decay and crippling poverty, a massive programme of restoration is under way in Havana, aimed at boosting tourist revenues and improving conditions for residents. The Historian of the City of Havana, Eusebio Leal Spengler, now employs a staggering 7,000 people involved in repairing and reviving old buildings great and small, running parador-style hotels, speciality shops and restaurants and museums in old palaces and harbour forts. Much of old Havana is in an accelerated state of decay, with building collapses recently occurring every three days. Havana's formidable conservation programme embraces not just the old city, a World Heritage Site since 1982, but extends to chic, newly restored Art Deco offices and hotels and even high-rise concrete apartment blocks. Restoration projects now embrace Deco buildings including the 1930 Bacardi building, abandoned when the famous rum baron decamped to Puerto Rico after the revolution. More modern buildings that have been restored include the Hotel Riviera, built in the 1950s by the mafioso Meyer Lansky. Current projects include the 1914 Grand Theatre, with its marble staircase by the Belgian architect Paul Belau. (*The Times*, 30/5/05)

June 27: Cuba would need to build 50,000 houses a year for a decade to overcome a massive housing deficit across the island, according to a government report. More than half a million homes are needed in Cuba, but just 15,350 houses were built last year, according to the National Housing Institute report released this week at a sustainable development conference in the capital. The housing crisis has become one of the government's most serious challenges, Parliament Speaker Ricardo Alarcon said at the event's opening. But Cuba is launching a comprehensive plan this year to repair and construct homes, particularly in the capital, Havana Mayor Juan Contino announced, without providing more details. (*AP*, 27/6/05)

June 15: According to a source with the Housing Department, in the municipality of Old Havana 19 homes were left partially destroyed in the wake of torrential rain accompanying tropical storm "Arlene." There were no fatalities reported. (*Cubanet*, 15/6/05)

July 11: Hurricane Dennis' crushing 12-hour stay in Cuba wreaked havoc on the nation's already precarious housing shortage, wiping out tens of thousands of much-needed homes, the island news media reported. According to official Cuban government estimates, some 1,800 homes were damaged in Havana alone. In Santiago de Cuba to the east, 5,241 homes were reported damaged -- 659 of those completely wrecked. Cuba's Communist Party newspaper, *Granma*, reported that 25,000 homes were partially or totally destroyed in all. And the paper acknowledged that the figure did not include the hard-hit towns of Guamá and Tercer Frente, where communication problems, swollen rivers and blocked roads have kept officials from getting a damage report. Some media reports put Dennis' damage even higher. Citing "preliminary press reports," the Agency France Press said that nearly 80,000 homes were damaged: 34,000 in Granma; 26,000 in Cienfuegos; 4,000 in Santiago de Cuba; 8,200 in Sancti Spiritus; 3,200 in Matanzas; and 1,800 in Havana. (*The Miami Herald*, 11/7/05)

August 21: Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro extolled the work of the Venezuelan army servicemen who built a community in Sandino, a community in Cuba's most western province of Pinar del Rio, for families affected by recent hurricanes. Hugo Chavez met with the young soldiers and army high ranking officers before the "Alo Presidente" television program he traditionally hosts live in Venezuela, but this time was broadcast from Sandino together with Fidel Castro. Members of the Simon Bolivar international rescue brigade and humanitarian aid built 150 houses, which had been donated by Venezuela, in collaboration with workers and people from Sandino. The delegation accompanying Chavez was composed

of ministers and top military officers, a police commissioner and the chiefs of the Army and the Navy. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/8/05)

September 1: Cuba is carrying out a far-reaching housing construction project to recover from the damage caused by hurricanes and to resolve the domestic housing shortage, according to Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage Davila. In his briefing to a special session of the National Assembly of People's Power, Lage said that 150,000 houses would be built, and 380,000 conservation and restoration works would be accomplished in late 2005 and through 2006. The Cuban vice president explained that the State, unions, social and workers' bodies would distribute houses, and financial assistance would be provided only to people with low incomes and economic difficulties. New rates will be put in effect for acquiring the houses, built by those who need them. Doctors working abroad, who will have priority in acquiring their new homes, should buy construction materials with their savings from salaries in US dollars. (*BBC, Prensa Latina*, 1/9/05)

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

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

November 4: Venezuela hopes to double business with Cuba to \$4 billion (euro 3.4 billion) next year, including investments in housing projects and two Cuban oil refineries, said a commerce official attending an annual trade fair on the island. The South American country is already Cuba's top trading partner with \$1.4 billion in commerce annually -- the vast majority in exports of Venezuelan petroleum. But Roger Figueroa, Venezuela's vice foreign commerce minister, told the press that his country plans to invest at least \$2 billion more for the new projects with Cuba, and that annual commerce could reach another \$2 billion by year's end. The \$2 billion in investments includes \$1 billion to construct housing in both countries, and the rest for the operation of oil refineries in the southern region of Cienfuegos and the northern coast of Matanzas, he said. (*AP*, 4/11/05)

SPORTS

(See also, US-Cuba Relations/ Non Governmental Relations)

January 17: Olympic champion Osleidys Menéndez was named Cuba's female Athlete of the Year in 2004 in a ceremony in the Garcia Lorca Hall of the Grand Theater in Havana. Javelin

thrower Menéndez, who won the Athens Olympic gold medal with a throw just one centimetre short of her own world record of 71.54 meters, topped the poll for the award. Boxer Mario Kindelán, the Olympic champion in the 60kg category in Athens, received the award for the male Athlete of the Year. (*Xinhua*, 19/1/05)

February 23: Hundreds of prisoners from across Cuba began fierce competitions in the nation's first Inmate Olympics, official media said. The official newspaper Juventud Rebelde (Rebel Youth) said the prisoners are representing their regions in four geographic divisions with competition heated in this sports-minded Caribbean country: in baseball, basketball, track and field, table tennis, and presumably for the older and less fit, dominoes and chess. This is the first time an Olympic-style sports competition is being held for Cuba's prisoners. Previously only match-ups in the national pastime of baseball had been held. (*AFP*, 23/2/05)

April 12: The President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Sports for All Commission, Walter Troger, expressed satisfaction over his first working visit to Cuba, according to AIN News Agency. Troger told the press in Havana, that the main objective of his visit was to review and coordinate activities for the Sports for All Conference to be held in the Cuban capital in November 2006. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/4/05)

July 7: The President of the Cuban Olympic Committee (COC), José Ramón Fernández, indicated that Havana would present its candidacy to host the 2016 Olympic Games. The Cuban capital had sought to hosting the 2012 Games, but its aspirations were cut short after being dropped by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) after the first round. (*Europa Press*, 7/7/05)

July 8: Cuba is blaming major league baseball for the sport being dropped from the 2012 Olympics. Cuba has won three of the four gold medals since baseball was first played at the Olympics - in 1992, 1996 and 2004. The United States won the gold in 2000, with Cuba getting the silver. "Those who bear most of the blame are the owners of the professional leagues who refuse to free up their ball players to compete," Cuban Baseball Federation president Carlos Rodriguez told the press. "It's a shame because this decision will disappoint millions of young people who practise and love this sport," Rodriguez added. (*Canadian Press*, 8/7/05)

July 14: Cuba's top sports official said he will work with the International Baseball Federation to ensure that the sport returns to the Olympics. "We have to reflect, look for alternatives," National Institute of Sports president Humberto Rodriguez told the press. "We cannot give up the battle as lost." Baseball and softball were dropped from the 2012 London Games after an IOC vote in Singapore. They are eligible to apply in 2009 for re-entry in 2016. (*AP*, 14/7/05)

September 17: Cuba won its eighth straight Baseball World Cup with a 3-0 shutout of South Korea. It was the 24th title for Cuba since the competition began in 1938. South Korea was the last team to beat Cuba in the World Cup, in 1982. (*Toronto Star*, 17/9/05)

November 20: With an outstanding performance of its super heavy weight Odlanier Solis, who won his third consecutive crown, Cuba recouped World Boxing title in Miangyang, China, by winning four golds, one silver and three bronzes. Under coach Sarbelio Fuentes, the Cuban boxers totalled 54 points to lead the competition, while reigning monarch Russia came behind with three gold and 41 points. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/11/05)

November 23: Fidel Castro criticized Cuban baseball players who have left the country for multimillion-dollar contracts in the major leagues, saying the island always finds better players to replace them. During a five-hour appearance on state television, Castro remarked on those players "who cannot resist the millions of the major leagues" and acknowledged that baseball "is the sport in which we have been beaten the most" when it comes to defections. Still, the 79-year-old leader insisted Cuban baseball has always survived the losses. "When one leaves, another 10 better players emerge," he said. Among those who have left are pitchers Orlando Hernández and José Ariel Contreras, who contributed to the recent World Series victory by the Chicago White Sox. (*MercuryNews.Com*, 24/11/05)

November 23: President of the British Olympic Association, Colin Moynihan, praised the Cuban sports system during his participation in the First National Meeting on Physical Education and Participatory School Sports, in Havana. Moynihan noted the development reached by the island in both making sports available to the general population and in identifying the talented athletes at an early age. (*A/N*, 23/11/05)