

**FOCAL's SUMMARY OF NEWS ITEMS  
REPORTED ON CUBA  
January-December 2006**

*This resource is a compilation of news items on Cuba listed in FOCAL's monthly Chronicle on Cuba throughout 2006*

## **TERRORISM**

### **CAMP DELTA**

**January 5:** Canadian government officials visited detained terrorism suspect Omar Khadr in December at the US Guantanamo Bay detention facility in Cuba. The "welfare visit" came in mid December, Foreign Affairs spokesman Rodney Moore said in an interview. It was the second time the Canadian government has been granted access to the lone Canadian being held at the tightly controlled American detention facility. (*The Vancouver Sun*, 5/1/06)

**January 11:** Civil rights lawyers and activists who have come to the US Naval Base in Guantanamo, Cuba, to observe the military hearings against alleged terror suspects accuse the US administration of violating international law, and say the Canadian government hasn't done enough to protect 19-year-old Omar Khadr. The Toronto-born teenager faces a pre-trial hearing on charges that include murder, for allegedly throwing a grenade that killed an American medic in Afghanistan in July 2002. But critics question the legality of the military process set up by US President George W. Bush's administration to hear cases like Khadr's, and that of Hamza Ali al-Bahlul, a 39-year-old Yemeni accused of being an Al Qaeda propagandist. They say the military hearings should have been postponed until the US Supreme Court rules on their constitutionality. (*The Toronto Star*, 11/1/06)

**January 26:** Ricardo Alarcon, president of the Cuban Parliament, denounced the torture carried out on hundreds of prisoners at the illegally occupied US Naval Base at Guantanamo, Cuba, in a debate about demilitarization in the Americas, during the 6th World Social Forum (WSF) taking place in Caracas, Venezuela. Alarcon demanded the elimination of all US military bases in Latin America and alerted that, since the US military is spread thin, Washington could hire mercenaries in the region to do its dirty work. We must do something so that the people of the United States reassume their massive anti-war campaign during the Vietnam War, said Alarcon. "That would force the Bush administration to withdraw the US troops from Iraq and prevent a similar situation in Latin America," he added. (*World Data Service*, 26/1/06)

**February 5:** Amnesty International called for closing the US Guantanamo prison for terror suspects and the release of nine British residents the rights group says are held by US authorities at the Cuban camp. Nine British citizens have been freed from the Cuban camp for terrorist suspects after pressure from the British government,

but Amnesty said another nine with ties to Britain were still being held. (*The New York Times*, 5/2/06)

**February 9:** US military officials at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, strapped hunger-striking prisoners into restraint chairs for hours to feed them through tubes and isolated them in cold cells, *The New York Times* said. A Pentagon official said there was no one immediately available to comment on the report. *The Times*, citing unnamed military officials, said tougher measures came in recent weeks after authorities concluded some of the prisoners were determined to kill themselves. The apparent result has been a sharp drop in the number of inmates refusing to eat. Only four hunger strikers remain, down from 84 at the end of December, the chief military spokesman at Guantanamo, Lt. Col. Jeremy M. Martin, told the newspaper. (*Reuters*, 9/2/06)

**February 14:** A UN investigation has concluded that the United States committed acts amounting to torture at Guantanamo Bay, including force-feeding detainees and subjecting them to prolonged solitary confinement, according to a draft report obtained by the press. US officials rejected the report, saying it was riddled with errors and treated statements from detainees' lawyers as fact. The report from five UN human rights experts also recommended the United States close Guantanamo Bay and revoke all special interrogation techniques authorized by the Department of Defense. (*CNN, AP*, 14/2/06)

**February 16:** UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said the United States should close the prison at Guantanamo Bay for terror suspects as soon as possible, backing a key conclusion of a UN-appointed independent panel. White House spokesman Scott McClellan rejected the call to shut the camp, saying the military treats all detainees humanely and that "these are dangerous terrorists that we're talking about." The report, released in Geneva, said the United States must close the detention facility "without further delay" because it is effectively a torture camp where prisoners have no access to justice. (*Toronto Star*, 17/2/06)

**February 17:** A British Cabinet member has urged the United States to close the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay and said he believed Prime Minister Tony Blair shared that view. Blair was more cautious, calling the detention center an "anomaly" during a news conference in Berlin, Germany. "I said last year that it's an anomaly, and sooner or later it has got to be dealt with," Blair told reporters after meeting German Chancellor Angela Merkel. (*CNN, AP* 17/2/06)

**February 23:** A federal judge ordered the Pentagon to release the identities of hundreds of detainees at Guantanamo Bay to the press. The move would force the government to break its secrecy and reveal the most comprehensive list yet of those who have been imprisoned there. Some of the hundreds of detainees in the war on terror being held at the U.S. military base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, have been held as long as four years. Only a handful have been officially identified. (*CNN*, 23/2/06)

**March 4:** The United States defence department has at last released the names and nationalities of hundreds of the inmates detained at its Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba. The names, which are buried within 6,000 pages of documents posted on the Pentagon's website, have been made public after a Freedom of Information Act request filed by the Associated Press. (*Scotsman.Com, AP*, 4/3/06)

**April 19:** The US government released the first list of detainees held at the Guantanamo Bay prison -- the most extensive accounting yet of the hundreds of people held there, nearly all of them labeled enemy combatants. In all, 558 people were named in the list provided by the Pentagon in response to a Freedom of Information lawsuit by The Associated Press. They were among the first swept up in the US global war on terrorism for suspected links to al Qaeda or the Taliban. Those named are from Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and 39 other countries. Many have been held at the US prison at Guantanamo Bay for more than four years. Only a handful have faced formal charges. (*CNN*, 20/4/06)

**May 20:** An important United Nations panel roundly criticized the United States for its treatment of terrorism suspects, and called for shutting down the detention camp at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The panel's criticism came as military officials at Guantánamo disclosed the most serious disturbances by prisoners there since the camp opened four years ago, and reported new suicide attempts that had left two detainees hospitalized and unconscious. Military officials said the prisoners' actions were apparently aimed at raising political pressure on the Bush administration over its detention policy. Pressure was also ratcheted up by the report issued in Geneva by the United Nations Committee Against Torture. (*The New York Times*, 20/5/06)

**May 29:** Seventy-five prisoners at the US naval base in Guantanamo were on a hunger strike, joining a few who have refused food and been force-fed since August, a military official said. Cmdr. Robert Durand, a spokesman for the Guantanamo detention operation, called the hunger strike an attempt by the prisoners to gain media attention and pressure the United States to release about 460 men held there as enemy combatants. Hunger strikes have flared periodically since the first suspected al Qaeda and Taliban prisoners were taken to the US base in southeast Cuba in 2002. (*Reuters*, 29/5/06)

**June 4:** Baltasar Garzón, Spain's most prominent investigative magistrate, has called on the United States to immediately close the detention center at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. "A model like Guantánamo is an insult to countries that respect laws," Judge Garzón said in an interview during a counterterrorism conference in Florence in late May. "It delegitimizes us. It is a place that needs to disappear immediately." As the war in Iraq drags on, criticism in Europe of the Bush administration's prison for terrorist suspects as well as its secret transport of terrorist suspects to third countries has steadily mounted. (*AP*, 4/6/06)

**June 13:** The International Committee of the Red Cross is to visit the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, following the deaths of three men held at the prison camp there. Military authorities at the camp have also announced a review of its procedures. The Red Cross is the only outside agency that has regular access to the prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay. (*The New York Times*, 13/6/06)

**June 24:** Fourteen Saudi Arabians were released from the detention center at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and transferred to their home country, the Pentagon said. One was released because US officials determined the prisoner was no longer an enemy combatant. The releases bring to 310 the number of detainees who have departed Guantanamo to other governments, including Albania, Afghanistan, Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Kuwait, Morocco, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden and Uganda. (*CNN*, 26/6/06)

**June 26:** The head of Cuba's legislature said that not only should the US naval base at Guantanamo be closed but it should also be returned to Cuba. "What needs to be asked for, of course, is that they close the torture center; even (US President George W.) Bush has said that he's in favor of closing it. But the most important thing is that they return it," said the head of the communist island's National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcon. He commented to journalists in response to a question about the European Parliament's resolutions in favor of closing the detention center at the base. The members of the EU body feel that maintaining the detention center for people Washington says are Al Qaeda members or terrorism suspects is a violation of international law and of human rights standards. Alarcon said that "if there has been torture and if (the base) has been turned into what it's been turned into, unfortunately it's because that piece of our national territory has been usurped for more than a century." "So, let them close the installation and return what doesn't belong to the United States or to Europe," he added. (*EFE*, 26/6/06)

**September 20:** The Red Cross expects to meet for the first time 14 high-level terrorism suspects who were recently transferred from CIA secret prisons to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, at a visit to the camp, a spokeswoman said. Antonella Notari, chief spokeswoman for the International Committee of the Red Cross, said officials will arrive at Guantanamo for a scheduled two-week visit. The ICRC is the only neutral agency with full access to Guantanamo detainees. (*AP*, 20/9/06)

**October 12:** For the first time, the International Red Cross met with 14 suspected al Qaeda operatives being held in Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba, including the reputed mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, according to knowledgeable sources. Suspected mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Ramzi Binalshibh, an alleged would-be September 11 hijacker, were among the 14 prisoners to meet with Red Cross officials. (*CNN*, 12/10/06)

**October 12:** The US Southern Command has been told to investigate possible abuse at the Guantanamo Bay prison after a Marine officer said she overheard guards boasting about abusing detainees, the Pentagon's Inspector General's office said. Marine Lt. Col. Colby Vokey, who represents a detainee at the US naval base in eastern Cuba, filed the "hotline" complaint, attaching a sworn statement from his paralegal, Sgt. Heather Cerveny, 23. In it, Cerveny described comments made by several guards in a bar at Guantanamo Bay. Several of them bragged about beating detainees and described it as common practice. "Other ones of them were talking about how when they get annoyed with the detainees, about how they hit them, or they punched them in the face," Cerveny told the press in a telephone interview. (*AP*, 13/10/06)

**October 14:** A paralegal and a military lawyer who brought forward allegations about prisoner abuse at the Guantanamo Bay detention center have been ordered not to speak with the press, lawyers and a military spokeswoman said. Marine Lt. Col. Colby Vokey, who represents a detainee at the US naval base in eastern Cuba, filed a complaint with the Pentagon alleging that abuse was ongoing at the prison. He attached a sworn statement from his paralegal, Sgt. Heather Cerveny, in which she said several Guantanamo guards bragged in a bar about beating detainees, describing it as common practice. Muneer Ahmad, a civilian defense lawyer for Omar Khadr, a Canadian detainee whose military counsel is Vokey, said that Vokey and Cerveny were ordered by the US Marines not to speak with the press. A spokeswoman for the Marines confirmed the order, saying Vokey's supervisor — Col.

Carol Joyce, the Marines' chief defense counsel — had directed him not to communicate with the media "pending her review of the facts." (*AP*, 15/10/06)

**December 7:** The US military transferred the first group of detainees to a new maximum-security prison at Guantanamo Bay designed to restrict contact among the prisoners and prevent attacks on guards. More than 40 detainees were brought to the \$37 million prison perched on a plateau overlooking the Caribbean Sea from another maximum-security facility at the US naval base in eastern Cuba, said Navy Commander Robert Durand. The 178-cell prison, constructed beside another maximum-security prison built in 2004, will allow the base to phase out an older facility, Durand said. UN human rights investigators and foreign governments have called on the United States to close the entire detention centre. (*AP*, 8/12/06)

**December 8:** In an abrupt about-face, the Pentagon has scrapped plans to invoke emergency authority to fast-track construction of a controversial \$100 million legal compound at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. Instead, Defense Department officials will seek permission from Congress for any new major buildings in which to stage the first war-crimes trials since World War II. California Senator Dianne Feinstein, a key Democrat on the Senate's military construction and armed services committees, announced the Defense Department's change of course in a news release -- after members of Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, had protested the move. (*The Miami Herald*, 10/12/06)

## GENERAL

**May 31:** At a UN Security Council meeting, Cuba denounced the high cost of innumerable terrorist actions undertaken against the island over the last 47 years, mostly organized from the United States. Speaking at a meeting on threats caused by terrorism, Cuban alternate Ambassador to the UN, Ileana Nuñez recalled the 3,478 deaths and 2,099 wounded and/or permanently physically impaired caused by these actions, as well as enormous economic losses, Prensa Latina news agency reported. (*Granma International*, 30/5/06)

**June 4:** There are many issues dividing Cuba and the United States, but few have been as explosive in recent years as the charge that each nation is harboring the other's terrorists. The US has designated Cuba a state sponsor of terrorism, placing it alongside such nations as Iran, Syria and North Korea. One reason for this distinction is 56-year-old Charlie Hill, an Illinois native who 35 years ago, as a member of a black separatist group, allegedly killed a New Mexico state trooper, hijacked an airliner and fled to Cuba, where Fidel Castro gave refuge to Hill and other fugitives from American justice. Meanwhile, Castro demands that US authorities extradite Luis Posada Carriles, a militant Cuban exile accused of blowing up a Cuban airliner in 1976, killing all 73 aboard. Posada Carriles remains in US custody after an immigration judge ruled that he cannot be deported to Cuba or Venezuela, where the downed plane originated, because he could be tortured there. Cuba also has asked the US to return three Cuban-Americans allegedly implicated in the airline bombing and a separate plot to kill Castro, according to the US State Department's 2005 Country Reports on Terrorism released this April. (*Chicago Tribune*, 4/6/06)

**September 12:** Converging on Fidel Castro's communist Cuba for a summit this week, members of the Non Aligned Movement complain of a double standard: powerful nations like the United States and Israel decide for the world who the terrorists are, but face no punishment for their own acts of aggression. A Cuban official said sarcastically that the US could one day accuse the entire Non Aligned Movement of supporting terrorism. "Reading some news reports (...) I'm left to believe that the axis of evil is growing," said Abelardo Moreno, Cuba's vice foreign minister. "Soon, the (axis of evil) will be made up of 118 countries." NAM's final draft could be muted during the debate. A North African diplomat described the section on terrorism as "alphabet soup," because it tries to include all members' perspectives. Debate is expected to get particularly lively after the arrival of outspoken anti-American leaders including presidents Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, Bashar Assad of Syria, and Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. North Korea is sending its No. 2 leader, Kim Yong Nam. (*AP*, 12/9/06)

## PEACE TALKS BETWEEN THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE ELN

**February 17:** Colombia and the country's second-largest Marxist rebel group met for a second round of exploratory peace talks that as yet have no agreed agenda. Colombian peace commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo said a first meeting held in Havana in December with commanders of the National Liberation Army, or ELN, had "unfrozen" ties and created what he termed a "precarious" trust. "There is a mutual will for peace and the important thing now is to generate confidence in the process (...) so that we can find a way to end the violence that has caused so much pain to our country," he told reporters. Cuba is hosting the talks between the Colombian government and the ELN, a 5,000-strong force that has fought a bloody insurgency since it was founded in 1964 by radical students and Roman Catholic priests inspired by Fidel Castro's revolution. (*Reuters*, 17/2/06)

**February 24:** Colombia agreed to suspend capture orders for two leaders of the country's second-largest Marxist guerrilla group in an effort to build trust in peace talks hosted by Cuba. The Cuban-inspired National Liberation Army, or ELN, which was founded in 1964 by radical students and Roman Catholic priests, said the provisional legal status given to its commanders, Antonio Garcia and Ramiro Vargas, cleared the way for formal negotiations. "Our delegation had not been recognized politically until now," Garcia, top military commander of the 5,000-strong rebel force, said at a news conference during a second round of exploratory talks in Cuba. "The talks were unstable because it was not clear whether the government was dealing with criminals or guerrillas," he said. Colombian peace commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo said the government, which considers the ELN a terrorist organization, was opening a political space for the ELN to lay down its arms. (*The New York Times*, 24/2/06)

**February 27:** Exploratory peace talks between the Colombian government and the country's second-largest Marxist guerrilla group ended with no agreement other than to meet again in April. Colombian peace commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo and leaders of the Cuban-inspired National Liberation Army, or ELN, said they would hold

a third round of preliminary talks in Havana at the beginning of April. (*Reuters*, 27/2/06)

**April 25:** Representatives of the Colombian government and the South American nation's second-largest rebel group met in Havana in a renewed attempt to hammer out an agenda for peace talks. Neither side spoke to the news media after the meeting, which took place behind closed doors at the Palco hotel in western Havana. Headed by government peace envoy Luis Carlos Restrepo and rebel leaders Francisco Galan and Antonio Garcia, the two sides hope to fashion a schedule for talks to end at least part of the ongoing violence in Colombia. It is the third time in six months that representatives of the National Liberation Army, or ELN, have met with Restrepo in Havana for exploratory talks (*La Jornada, AP*, 25/4/06)

**October 15:** A delegation from the National Liberation Army (ELN) flew to Havana from the Colombian city of Medellin for peace talks with the Colombian government, reports said. The rebel group will hold talks on October 16-19 with civil society groups, in preparation for the fourth round of peace talks with the Colombian government slated for October 20-25. The first round of talks began in December 2005, and all three previous rounds were supported by observers from Norway, Spain, France and Switzerland. The 4,500-strong ELN has indicated willingness to reach a deal with the government. (*Xinhua*, 16/10/06)

**October 21:** Representatives from the Colombian government and National Liberation Army (ELN) are holding the 4th Negotiation Round in Cuba, looking for a peace agreement, *Granma* daily reported. Luis Carlos Restrepo, the High Peace Commissioner of the Colombian Executive, is heading the governmental delegation, while Commander Antonio Garcia is doing so for the ELN. The meeting was inaugurated at a hotel in Havana, and representations of the Cuban and Venezuelan governments attended the opening session as guests. Also present in the dialogue are delegates from the governments of Spain, Switzerland and Norway, with representatives from Japan, Italy, Holland, Canada, and Sweden as observers. (*Prensa Latina*, 21/10/06)

**October 24:** Representatives of Colombia's government and its second-largest rebel group announced they are on the verge of reaching an agreement to start formal peace talks after decades of hostility. The two sides began the latest round of Havana-hosted peace discussions, and planned to continue meeting to hammer out the final details. "We have a meeting tomorrow (...) in which there will be a base agreement," Antonio Garcia, commander of the National Liberation Army, or ELN, rebel group, told journalists during a break from talks being held in a residential district of western Havana. Government peace envoy Luis Carlos Restrepo also expressed optimism about the progress of the latest conversations, part of a round of meetings that began last December in Havana. "The balance is positive from these months of exploratory talks," he said. (*AP*, 24/10/06)