

## FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba January 2002

### Domestic Affairs

**January 4:** Fidel Castro inaugurates the Dora Alonso Special School for Autistic Children in the Liberty City educational complex, Havana. (Granma International, 7/1/02)

**January 8:** The Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) has awarded a top Cuban pediatrician with the distinction of "Public Health Hero of the Americas." Jose R. Jordán Rodríguez was notified of the decision by PAHO's General Director Doctor George A. O. Alleyne. (Radio Habana Cuba, 8/1/02)

**January 9:** After several U.S. senators met with a group of dissident leaders on January 7th, internal opposition leaders of rightist groups criticized the meetings. "Rightist groups in opposition to the Castro regime do not recognize this type of meeting in which the opposition to changes with Castro in power is not represented", said leaders from the Movimiento 24 de Febrero, Centro de Información sobre Democracia, Movimiento Cívico 6 de Enero, and Municipios de Cuba de Derechos Humanos. (Cuba Free Press, 8/1/02)

**January 9:** Cuba seems to have set a de facto moratorium on carrying out the death penalty, executing none of the 49 prisoners held on death row over the past year and a half, the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN) said. "This means an important and positive change in comparison with the macabre record of thousands of people executed during the first 42 years of this government," said a report sent to foreign media in Havana by Elizardo Sánchez, head of the dissident organization. This report also indicates that the number of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in Cuba has decreased slowly over the last six months. Cuban prisons currently hold 210 prisoners that have been convicted or are awaiting trial for political reasons, CCDHRN announced in its bi-annual report adding that it has not received updated information on 31 other cases. "During the last half of the year the slow decline in the number of prisoners has continued, a trend that has been constant during the last decade." (Reuters, EFE, 9, 17/1/02)

**January 13:** Gregorio Fuentes, the former captain of U.S. novelist Ernest Hemingway's boat in Cuba and his inspiration for *The Old Man And The Sea*, died at the age of 104 in the fishing village of Cojímar. (Reuters, 14/1/02)

**January 15:** During a meeting at the headquarters of the Communist Party's provincial committee in Havana, Fidel Castro insisted on family doctors playing a more decisive role in the efforts to eliminate the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito -carrier of dengue, as well as the early detection of the disease. (Radio Habana Cuba, 15/1/02)

**January 16:** The Cuban dissident group Corriente Socialista Democrática Cubana (CSDC) decided to postpone its national conference due to obstacles from Cuban authorities. Manuel Cuesta Morúa, coordinator of the CSDC, issued a Declaration explaining the decision. Several international observers from political parties affiliated to the International Socialist had been invited to the conference. (Corriente Socialista Democrática Cubana, 18/1/02)

**January 15:** During a meeting in Havana with some 132 Mexican parliamentarians, Fidel Castro said that Cuba rejects the multiparty system, given the calamities and political fragmentation it has caused in Latin America. (Radio Habana Cuba, 16/1/02)

**January 17:** FBI agents are helping Cuban authorities investigate the killing of five people -- two of them residents of Miami -- in a brutal roadside attack on the island last month US officials said. "The Cuban government went to the State Department asking for law enforcement assistance, and the State Department turned it over to us," FBI spokeswoman Judy Orihuela said. (Reuters, 17/1/02)

**January 20:** In an interview to the national press, Juan E. Marañón Depestre, President of the Cuban Postal Company (Correos de Cuba), acknowledged that for years mail, particularly from abroad, has been the subject of thefts, or extremely long delays. Also, many a time telegrams and money orders do not reach their destination. "The problems of the Cuban postal service are a matter of culture and tradition. There is a backlog of bad service that needs to be addressed", he said. (Juventud Rebelde, 20/1/02)

**January 23:** Cuba's Deputy Minister of Informatics and Communications, Melchor Gil, told the press that the Cuban government's efforts to expand access to the Internet and e-mail have increased, although there are still restrictions on access in the private sector. Household use of computers "is not our main focus, although it has not been excluded," said Gil. "We cannot think for the time being that that area (the private sector) will be the solution to the country's informatic limitations," he said. (IPS, 23/1/02)

**January 24:** Cuba has officially bid to host the 2012 Summer Olympic Games in Havana, the President of the Cuban Olympic Committee José Ramón Fernández told the local press here. "We are still candidates," said Fernández. "We have reasons to be optimistic and we have many attributes to take into battle." He pointed out that the Games had never been held in the Caribbean and only once in Latin America, in Mexico in 1968. (AFP, 24/1/02)

**January 26:** Raúl Castro pledged to catch those responsible for the roadside killing of five people, including a couple from Florida. General Raúl Castro told reporters, after a government rally: "They will be caught, of that you can be sure, even if we have to move heaven and earth." In Cuba's first public reference to the case, Castro said: "We hadn't given out information, because we wanted to capture them, that's true." (...) "We informed the United States by diplomatic channels and we asked them for cooperation. I think that is being carried out," he added. (Reuters, 26/1/02)

**January 26:** From midday until well into the night, Fidel Castro toured the Havana municipalities of 10 de Octubre and San Miguel del Padrón to confirm the progress of the campaign to eliminate breeding grounds of the Aedes Aegypti mosquito, which transmits dengue [see also Chronicle on Cuba, December 2001]. (Granma, 31/1/02)

**January 26:** Cuban police detained one of the country's best-known dissidents, Martha Beatriz Roque, apparently for refusing to allow fumigators into her house during a state campaign to eradicate dengue disease. Roque, speaking before she was picked up, said she had denied entry to the fumigators on health grounds. Roque heads the dissident Cuban Institute of Independent Economists. (Reuters, 26/1/02)

**January 28:** Fidel Castro addressed the participants at the closing session of the 10th Congress of the Federation High School Students (FEEM), which took place over the last three days at Havana's Convention Center. During the conference, 1300 delegates representing school children all over the country analyzed and discussed the current educational system in Cuba and proposed solutions to counteract problems relating to lack of materials, school buildings in bad repair and transportation. The final plenary session concluded with a commitment that the congress would remain open and at the request of Fidel Castro, delegates would meet again in three months to review the implementation of new initiatives to improve high school education. (Radio Habana Cuba, 29/1/02)

**January 30:** In time for World Wetlands Day on the 2nd February 2002, Cuba is preparing to nominate four Ramsar wetland sites. The WWF, with support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), have already partnered with the CNAP (Centro Nacional para las Areas Protegidas) to implement a one million US dollar, 6-year conservation program for the wetlands of the Ciénaga de Zapata and they have also supported the project to identify suitable additional sites. The four proposed sites are dispersed across the island and have their own distinct features: The Cienaga de Lanier, one of Cuba's most important archaeological sites with considerable evidence of pre-Columbian settlements; Cuba's longest river, the Cauto; the wetland site of Buenavista falls; and the Maximo-Camagüey site, the largest nesting site in Cuba for phoenicopterus ruber ruber, the pink flamingo that provide a stunning sight when up to 100,000 gather here during the nesting season. (WWW Global Network, 30/1/02)

## **Economy**

**January 10:** The President of the Italian region of Lombardy, Roberto Formigoni, arrives in Cuba for a swift 24-hour official visit. The objective of the visit is to carry out discussions with Cuba on small enterprises, urban planning and construction. (AFP, 11/1/02)

**January 12:** The new airport Jardines del Rey located in the keys north of the Ciego de Avila province is ready to start operations. The airport is valued at over 40 million pesos after its initial phase of construction. (Juventud Rebelde, 12/1/02)

**January 13:** The governments of the Basque country and the Republic of Cuba signed an agreement on economic cooperation aimed at strengthening cooperation linkages. (Granma, 13/1/02)

**January 14:** The 8th Cuba-Iran Inter-governmental Mixed Commission for Economic and Scientific Cooperation began sessions in Havana. The Cuban delegation is headed by Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas, while the visiting delegation is headed by Mahmood Hojati, Minister of Agriculture of the Islamic Republic of Iran. (Radio Habana Cuba, 14/1/02)

**January 16:** The Ministry of Informatics and Communications (MIC) started the new year by reestablishing all services damaged by Hurricane Michelle in November even though some of the solutions are temporary. Minister of Informatics and Communications Ignacio González Planas said in a press conference that this year's priority will be to install a national fiber optic network to insure national transmission capabilities and replace the current coaxial cable, which is insufficient to fulfill communications needs. (Granma, 16/1/02)

**January 16:** Businessman Emilio Azcárraga Jean, main shareholder of Televisa (the Mexican television giant), met in private with Fidel Castro in order to discuss possible investment initiatives in Cuba. (AFP, 17/1/02)

**January 18:** New Zealand's Foreign Minister, Phillip Golf, who is also Minister of Commerce and Justice, signed the first cooperation agreement with his Cuba counterpart Felipe Perez Roque aimed at boosting trade and cooperation between the two nations. (Radio Habana Cuba, 21/1/02)

**January 21:** Cuba had 400 active companies formed by partnerships between the government and foreign firms at the end of last year, official media said. The mixed enterprises collectively represent \$5.4 billion in foreign investment. Together, they account for about \$1.8 billion in sales and services each year, including \$768 million in exports. Most of the mixed enterprises are formed with European companies. They include 104 from Spain, 70 from Canada and 57 from Italy. (Granma, 21/1/02)

**January 21:** Matanzas' Antonio Guiteras thermoelectric plant began a three-month repair and modernization process. The repairs and modernization works, at a cost of over 25 million dollars, are aimed at creating the conditions for the plant to operate with Cuban crude oil, surpassing the current levels of half a million tons a year. At the time, when the Matanzas thermoelectric plant resumes operations in April, it should be ready to generate up to 90 percent of the demand for electricity on the island, using Cuban crude oil. (Radio Habana Cuba, 21/01/02)

**January 23:** According to an annual report made by Cuban Labor and Social Security Minister Alfredo Morales, this ministry has taken up the challenge of not only maintaining present employment levels, but of reducing unemployment to less than 3.5 percent this year. Last year the unemployment index was reduced to 4.1 percent, according to this report. Minister Morales added that most of the new jobs were created in the five eastern provinces, which were the most affected by unemployment after Cuba's economic crisis, suffered at the beginning of the 90s, with the fall of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of socialism in eastern Europe. At that time, when the island lost its main markets and suppliers, unemployment in the country reached 8.1 percent. (Prensa Latina, 23/1/02)

**January 24:** The Joint Hispano-Cuban Commission for Cooperation started its seventh meeting today in Havana to review current projects, official sources said. (EFE, 24/1/02)

**January 25:** The post-Sept. 11 decline in Cuba's tourism business has stretched into January, further weakening the economy, Cuban tourism industry sources said. While the Tourism Ministry has not commented on the situation, hotel managers and employees said the December-through-March tourism season was off to a weak start. "Occupancy is down 25 percent in Havana, 40 percent at Varadero and 10 percent to 20 percent in the rest of the country, compared with this time last year," a foreign hotel manager said to the press. (The Sun Sentinel, 25/1/02)

## **Exile Community**

**January 22:** Two Cuban-Americans accused of helping run an alien-smuggling mission that ended with a woman's death on a barren Bahamian island a year ago will not face the death penalty, prosecutors decided. The crew allegedly forced seven people overboard to gain speed and flee Cuban border guards. The Justice Department must decide whether to pursue the death penalty in cases where deaths occur, but federal prosecutors filed a notice last week saying they would not pursue it. (AP, 22/1/02)

**January 22:** Cuban exile organizations have censured the political and business interests of the United States with regards to Cuba and warned about "possible negotiations" between the Bush administration and the government of Fidel Castro. In a meeting with the press, members of 10 different organizations, civil activists and religious leaders released a declaration signed, among others, by the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), Brothers to the Rescue, Movimiento Democracia, Directorio Revolucionario Democrático Cubano, Municipios de Cuba en el Exilio, and Plantados hasta la Libertad y la Democracia de Cuba. These organizations support the US embargo against Cuba and do not recognize any agreement with Fidel Castro in power. (El Nuevo Herald, 23/1/02)

**January 27:** Two boats from the Cuban exile group Democracy Movement returned to Florida after staging a fireworks display off Cuba's coast at around 9:00 p.m. the day before, in commemoration of independence hero José Martí's birthday. The U.S. Coast Guard accompanied Democracy Movement vessels on their journey to the edge of international waters. Democracy Movement leader Ramón Saúl Sánchez said neither the Coast Guard nor Cuban authorities interfered with the fireworks display. (The Miami Herald, 28/1/02)

## **Foreign Relations**

**January 3:** Police sources cited by the Spanish daily El País have confirmed the arrival of a large number of potential Cuban political asylum seekers at the Madrid's Barajas airport. The number of applicants has tripled since September, totalling 1750 requests. (AFP, 8/1/02)

**January 3:** Six members of the Cuban men's national volleyball team --Ihosvany Hernández, Angel Dennis, Jorge Luis Hernández, Yasel Romero, Leonel Marshall and Ramón Gato- took refuge in Italy after attending a tournament in Belgium. The players said they had no intention to request political asylum unless the Cuban government bans them from playing abroad. (AFP, 8/1/02)

**January 7:** Government officials from Chile and Cuba met in Santiago to examine their bilateral relations amidst intense disagreements on the human rights situation on the island and on the concept of democracy. This will be the first encounter of this consultation mechanism between both nations after diplomatic relations were reinstated at the ambassadorial level in April 1996. (Notimex, 7/1/02)

**January 9:** The International Volleyball Federation (FIVB) announced that none of the six Cuban players who abandoned their national team and fled to Italy on December 30 cannot be transferred into any Volleyball Club, or National Federation, "without the official FIVB Transfer Certificate that carries the authorization of the Cuban National Federation". (El Nuevo Herald, 9/1/02)

**January 10:** The Cuban government released an official declaration on the situation in Argentina in which it blames liberal policies for the current crisis in that nation and urges Argentines to back the President as well as the measures taken by the government to deal with the difficult situation in that country. (MINREX, 10/1/02)

**January 11:** More than 130 Mexican legislators arrived in Cuba for a visit. (Prensa Latina, 11/1/02)

**January 14:** Mexican Undersecretary of Foreign Relations, Gustavo Iruegas, arrived in Cuba to negotiate the agenda of President Vicente Fox who is scheduled to visit the island on February 3, 2002. Gustavo Carvajal Moreno, President of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the legislature said to the press that during their meeting President Vicente Fox would propose to Fidel Castro, to act as an intermediary between Cuba and the United States so that the economic embargo against the island is lifted. This proposal has been pressed forward by the Mexican Senate and has been approved by the nation's Legislature as well. (Reforma, El Universal, 14/1/02)

**January 15:** Foreign Minister of Mexico, Jorge Castañeda, confirmed that President Vicente Fox will make "a very important trip" to Cuba this coming February 3 and added that this is the first international tour of the Mexican President this year. (Granma, 15/1/02)

**January 15:** Asked about the role Mexico could play as an intermediary for the lifting of United States' embargo against Cuba, Fidel Castro said it was "a good idea" that should be analysed. (El Universal, 16/1/02)

**January 16:** Human rights lawmaker at Ukraine's parliament, Nina Karpachova visited the Tarara Tourist Complex in Eastern Havana where Chernobyl children have been receiving medical treatment since 1990. Karpachova told the Cuban press that her visit is aimed at providing the Ukrainian parliament and government with information on the medical aid and support given by Cuba to the Chernobyl children. (Radio Habana Cuba, 16/1/02)

**January 17:** The European Commission expressed its satisfaction with the U.S. President George Bush's decision to waive for another six months the provisions of the Helms-Burton Act

that would allow U.S. citizens and companies to sue foreign companies doing businesses with Cuban expropriated properties after the 1959 revolution. (AFP, 17/1/02)

**January 20:** Fidel Castro met with the Foreign Minister of Perú, Diego García Sayán. García Sayán delivered a letter to Castro from his Peruvian counterpart, President Alejandro Toledo and also thanked the Cuban leader for the island's cooperation in training Peruvian experts in areas like health and sports. During his stay in Cuba various agreements were penned aimed at strengthening bilateral relations between Lima and Havana. (Radio Habana Cuba, 21/1/02)

**January 20:** Fidel Castro received the Foreign Minister of New Zealand, Phillip Golf and his delegation. Phillip Golf is the first minister from New Zealand to visit Cuba since the two nations established diplomatic relations in 1999. (Radio Habana Cuba, 21/1/02)

**January 21:** A Cuban who is believed to have traveled from Varadero, Cuba, in the cargo hold of an Air Transat flight has claimed refugee status after being arrested on the tarmac at Toronto's Pearson International airport. Airport workers discovered the man after 267 passengers had deplaned from a Lockheed 1011-500. The man was arrested by airport security and Peel Regional Police handed him over to immigration officials after he could not produce proper identification. (The Globe and Mail, 22/1/02)

**January 22:** Fidel Castro and his counterpart from the Saharawi Democratic Arab Republic, Mohamed Abdelaziz, presided over official, bilateral talks. In the area of health cooperation, it was pointed out that since 1977, more than 450 Cuban health specialists have offered their services in the Saharawi Democratic Arab Republic. As part of the island's cooperation program with the African nation, more than 300 Saharawi doctors have been trained in Cuba and another 58 are currently studying medicine on scholarships granted by Cuba. (Radio Habana Cuba, 23/1/02)

**January 23:** President Vicente Fox will not meet with Cuban dissident leaders during his February 3-4 state visit, the Foreign Relations Secretariat's undersecretary for Latin America and the Caribbean, Gustavo Iruegas, confirmed. (EFE, 24/1/02)

**January 26:** The Honduran Government has re-established diplomatic relations with Cuba after 41 years. The move was announced by the Honduran foreign minister just hours before the outgoing president, Carlos Flores, hands over power to president-elect Ricardo Maduro. The Honduran recognition of Fidel Castro's government leaves just El Salvador and the United States as the only two countries in the Americas not to have diplomatic relations with Cuba. (BBC News, 27/1/02)

**January 28:** Salvadorian President, Francisco Flores, ruled out re-establishing diplomatic relations with Cuba. He also emphasized that Salvadorians are fond of the Cuban people, but not "of the dictatorship that rules that nation". (Notimex, 28/1/02)

**January 29:** The position of President Eduardo Duhalde of Argentina on the human rights situation in Cuba coincides with that of the United States government. Foreign Minister, Carlos Ruckauf, indicated that "there was a total coincidence on the position we would hold at the United Nations", in reference to a meeting he had with U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell. (Notimex, 29/1/02)

**January 29:** The Nicaraguan government of Enrique Bolaños, who took office last January 10, will keep relations with Cuba unchanged, that is, at the level of commercial attachés and will continue advocating for the respect of human rights on the island, said Foreign Minister Norman Caldera. (Notimex, 29/1/02)

**January 30:** The Cuban dissident organization Mesa de Reflexión de la Oposición Moderada (MROM) officially asked the Mexican Embassy in Havana for a meeting with President Vicente Fox during his visit to the island. (Notimex, 30/1/02)

## Security

**January 14:** The head of the international police agency Interpol, Secretary General Ronald Noble, arrived in Havana at the invitation of the Cuban government. (AP, 14/1/02)

**January 27:** The Russian Armed Forces confirmed the dismantling of the electronic spy center at Lourdes, in Cuba. According to the press, twenty Russian soldiers will still remain in that area. (AFP, 28/1/02)

## Terrorism

**January 4:** The Government of Guatemala has made no comment on the sentences ranging between 10 and 15 years of imprisonment that the Cuban government has imposed on three Guatemalan citizens accused of terrorism. (AFP, 7/1/02)

**January 6:** Military police from Fort Hood, Texas, and forces from other U.S. bases began to ship out for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to establish a maximum-security detention facility that will hold al Qaeda and Taliban prisoners, the Pentagon said. (The Miami Herald, 6/1/02)

**January 6:** Two of South Florida's congressional representatives are stepping up their criticism of the treatment of Cuban refugees at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, now that the military is preparing to also house top al Qaeda prisoners there. "It's a sad irony that those fighting for freedom will be placed with those who want to destroy democracy," said Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Miami, at a news conference. Ros-Lehtinen and Rep. Lincoln Díaz-Balart, R-Miami, have sent letters to U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft and Navy Secretary Gordon England requesting the refugees, many of whom have been at Guantanamo for years, be released to the United States. Ros-Lehtinen and Díaz-Balart emphasized that they are not opposed to the captives from Afghanistan coming to Guantanamo, but rather the continued confinement of the refugees at the site. (The Miami Herald, 6/1/02, The Washington Post, 7/1/02)

**January 7:** A Panamanian court has turned down suits filed by local groups against the four terrorists jailed in Panama city since November 2000, accused of plotting to assassinate Fidel Castro. According to the daily El Universal, the Second Court of Justice rejected the validity of lawsuits filed last August by worker and student organizations against Luis Posada Carriles and his three accomplices. At the same time, the Government of Panama is considering a request from Venezuela to extradite Posada Carriles. Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Harmodio Arias, informed to the press that Venezuela accuses Posada Carriles of masterminding the planting of a bomb that blew up in mid air a Cubana airliner carrying 70 passengers most of whom were athletes, on October 6, 1976. (Granma International, AFP, 7/1/02)

**January 10:** In a rare interview, Gen. José Solar Hernández, second in command of the Cuban army's eastern troops, said Cuba had not upgraded its elite Frontier Brigade in anticipation of the Afghan prisoners' arrival. "We haven't taken any additional measures," Solar Hernández said. "We hope the Americans will take a number of high security measures. On our side we have taken all the measures already to resolve whatever contingency may occur." (The Sun Sentinel, 11/1/02)

**January 11:** U.S. military authorities at the Guantanamo Bay naval base in Cuba took custody of 20 al Qaeda and Taliban fighters after their transfer from Afghanistan. (CNN, AP, 11/1/02)

**January 11:** The Cuban government has announced its official position on the transfer of Afghan prisoners of war to the U.S. Naval Base at Guantánamo -- expressing its willingness to "cooperate with the medical services required as well as with sanitation programs in the surrounding areas under our control." (Radio Habana Cuba, 12/1/02)

**January 14:** A military cargo plane carrying a second group of Afghan war detainees arrived at U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, boosting the number of Taliban and al Qaeda prisoners there from 20 to 50. (CNN, 14/1/02)

**January 16:** Interpol's secretary general, Ronald Noble, said he thanked Cuba for condemning the Sept. 11 terror attacks and would help connect the country to a global police network battling international terrorism and other crime. "There cannot be any countries in the world that do not participate in the fight against terrorism." (...) "Cuba has indicated its commitment" to participate in that fight, Noble told a news conference at the end of a three-day visit. "The ministry of foreign affairs gave us such a document. It's about this thick," Noble told a news conference in Havana, holding his arms wide open to indicate the bulk of material handed over by Cuba. (AP, Reuters, 16/1/02)

**January 16:** Cuban exiles split on housing Afghan prisoners at US Naval Base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba: "The United States is turning Cuba into a dumping ground for the undesirables [of] the world," said Ramón Raúl Sánchez, president of the Democracy Movement, an exile group that has issued a letter to Bush denouncing the transfer. Yet to others, the transfer of suspected Al Qaeda members offers fresh hope for continued use of the base. Many of them worry that the base could be tagged for closure in a post Cold-War world in which its importance has declined. "We are delighted that Gitmo will finally be used for national security interests," US R-Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, said. "It's important to have a viable use for the base and keep it in operation, especially so that when Cuba is free, we can use it to help build democracy." But José Basulto, president of Brothers to the Rescue, said: "What worries me most is the thought that the US was making deals with Castro." (...) "It's a very strange situation to think of, negotiating a space for terrorists with a terrorist." (The Boston Globe, 16/1/02)

**January 17:** A group of 30 Taliban and al Qaeda captives from the war in Afghanistan was flown to Guantanamo Bay from Kandahar, bringing to 110 the number held at the US Naval Base. (Reuters, 17/1/02)

**January 17:** Fidel Castro told Democratic Senator Maria Cantwell of Washington that Cuba's cooperation with the United States' use of Guantanamo naval base to hold war captives was an important gesture. Castro lunched with the Senator and a group of leading women from her home state, before personally accompanying the politician to the airport - something he does not always do even with visiting heads of state. "He told the Senator that Cuba's cooperation with our effort at Guantanamo was a goodwill gesture," Washington State Transportation Commission Chairwoman Connie Niva, who participated in the three-hour lunch, said. "Other high ranking officials pointed out to us that Cuba has not only offered medical assistance but is standing by as all sorts of U.S. aircraft needed to supply the effort come and go over their territory at Guantanamo," she added. (Reuters, 17/1/02)

**January 19:** During a conversation with foreign media inside the Cuban military zone in Guantánamo, Raúl Castro, Minister of Cuban Armed Forces said that if any Taliban or Al Qaeda prisoners escape from the U.S. Navy base on Guantanamo Bay, Cuba would send them straight back to American custody. "If anyone is lucky enough to escape, I doubt he would get through the minefields," the Cuban Minister said. "I doubt anyone can escape with the measures they are taking," he added. (Reuters, 21/1/02)

**January 22:** During an interview given to the press, Ricardo Alarcón, president of Cuba's National Assembly, said Cuba was a willing partner in the war on global terrorism but if the United States was true to its word, it should clamp down against those among the exile movement in Miami who had taken part in violence against Cuba. Alarcón also added: "The fundamental point is also that we are opposed to terrorism. Cuba is not part of any terrorist situation, on the contrary it has been a victim of terrorism." He listed a number of acts of violence and sabotage by anti-Castro militants based in Miami over the years. He dismissed Cuba's inclusion on a list of states deemed by Washington to support terrorism: "Why is Cuba on a list that never included Afghanistan? That's a very ironic situation." (Reuters, 23/1/02)

**January 22:** During his regular press conference, State Department Spokesman, Richard Boucher, answered "no", when asked if Washington would accept Cuban offer of humanitarian and medical assistance for the 158 Afghan prisoners in Guantánamo, and if Washington was thinking on loosening up relations with the island. (Notimex, 22/1/02)

**January 23:** The Pentagon suspended the transfer of Taliban and Al Qaeda prisoners from Afghanistan to its naval base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. Officials said flights were suspended because the base had run out of space, for the time being. (The New York Times, 23/1/02)

**January 29:** Talks between Colombia's government and second-largest guerrilla group, the 5,000-member National Liberation Army (ELN) began in Havana. Fidel Castro was joined by his Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque for the start of discussions. Colombian President Andrés Pastrana said that if Castro attended the event it "would be an important gesture" of support for the peace process. James LeMoyne, a United Nations envoy attending talks said he hoped Colombian rebels and government officials meeting would not let a wave of violence at home destroy chances for peace after 38 years of conflict. (AP, 29, 30/1/02)

## **US-Cuba Relations**

**January (no date):** The US Senate Judiciary Committee approved the candidacy of Mauricio Tamargo, an aide to Rep. Ileana Ros Lehtinen, (R-FL) to head the Foreign Claims Settlement Commission. But not before the nominee vowed that a new claims category for Cuban exiles who lost property during Fidel Castro's expropriations would be a violation of international law. (Cubanews, Jan/2002)

**January 3:** In what has been considered the first human smuggling operation from Cuba in 2002, a group of 27 persons arrived in Cayo Maratón (Key West) and were then apprehended by U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) authorities. During the fiscal period of 2001, a total of 2,406 Cubans reached the coasts of Florida, which amounts to the highest number of illegal immigrants from Cuba since the "balseros" (rafters) crisis of 1994. (El Nuevo Herald, 4/1/02)

**January 4:** George and Marisol Gari, a married couple from Orlando, were sentenced to 7 and 3 years in jail respectively by a Miami federal court after the accused admitted spying on the U.S. for the Fidel Castro government for more than seven years. The couple was part of the so-called "Wasp Network". (El Nuevo Herald, 5/1/02)

**January 6:** Republican Senators Arlen Specter and Lincoln Chafee (on political missions), 500 businesspeople and their families, and young members of the Young President Organization of the United States arrived in Havana this week. On January 5th, Specter and Chafee concluded a visit of several days during which they met with dissidents, government officials, and Fidel Castro. The Senators said that during a 6 and a half hour meeting with Castro, the Cuban leader told them he was interested in cooperating with the United States in drug interdiction efforts and the war on terrorism. They also said Castro confirmed that he would not oppose the use of the U.S.

Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to house detainees from the war in Afghanistan. (El Nuevo Herald, 6, 7/1/02)

**January 7:** The Bush administration has appointed Emilio González, a Cuban-American Army colonel from Miami, National Security Council Western Hemisphere director for the Caribbean and Central America to handle Cuban issues at the White House. (The Miami Herald, 26/1/02)

**January 7:** During a visit to Havana, six members of the U.S. Congress --Jo Ann Emerson and Lacy Clay, from Missouri; Stephen Lynch and William Delahunt, from Massachusetts; Víctor Snyder, from Arkansas; and Hilda Solís, from California-- held a lengthy meeting with Fidel Castro. After his fourth meeting in recent years with Castro Delahunt said he had a sense that Cuba-U.S. relations would improve this year: "This one was really distinguished by its tone," (...) "There was a willingness to be open, a willingness to accept opportunities." Most of the group met later with some of the main dissident leaders: Osvaldo Payá, Christian Liberation Movement (MCL); Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz, Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN); Héctor Palacios, Julio Ruiz Pittaluga, Gisela Delgado, Oscar Espinosa, Osvaldo Alfonso, Isabel Ramos, Pedro Pablo Alvarez, Miriam Leyva and Mercedes Núñez. Also present was Magaly de Armas, wife of Vladimiro Roca, President of the Social-Democrat Party of Cuba and member of the Group of Four, author of the document "La Patria es de Todos". Vladimiro Roca remains in jail since 1997. (El Nuevo Herald, AP, 8, 9/1/02)

**January 9:** An Illinois-based nonprofit agribusiness group, the Farm Foundation, gathered about 100 people, including two former agriculture secretaries, in hopes of going to the island last week on a fact-finding mission. But the Treasury Department rejected the trip. "The whole thing is entirely arbitrary," said Wayne Smith, who served as a consultant in preparations for the trip. (The Miami Herald, 9/1/02)

**January 11:** With Congress in recess, President Bush installed one of his most controversial nominees. This appointment will allow Otto J. Reich, the new assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs to stay in office until the end of the upcoming congressional session. Reich has been identified with the ideologically hard-line strains in Miami. Emilio González, a Cuban-American Army colonel from Miami, NSC Western Hemisphere director for the Caribbean and Central America, and Reich now handle the day-to-day development of policy on Cuba. (The Washington Post, The Miami Herald, 12, 26/1/02)

**January 12:** During an interview, ABC News' Barbara Walters asked President George W. Bush: "We have recognized Vietnam, an old enemy and now a socialist country. We have relations with China. We don't tell them what kind of government to have. Are there any circumstances that would induce you to establish relations with Cuba?" George W. Bush: Yeah. Free elections, and free prisoners, and free press. Barbara Walters: You don't say to China, unless you have free elections and free press, we won't do business with you? George W. Bush: No, but we do say this to China and that's different. That is to say, we want to make sure if there's trade, we trade with an entrepreneurial class. That doesn't happen in Cuba. In order to trade with Cuba, you're actually trading with a Castro or government-owned entity, and the people don't benefit. Barbara Walters: But if they had entrepreneurs then, you would recognize them? George W. Bush: They would be a different nation, though. If they had entrepreneurs, it would mean that Fidel Castro wasn't being Fidel Castro. And I am going to keep the pressure on him. (AP, 12/1/02)

**January 12:** A ship carrying the latest commercial deliveries of U.S. food purchased directly by Cuba under the first such contracts in nearly 40 years arrived in Havana with 33,000 tons of American wheat that the Cuban government purchased from Farmland Industries, based in Kansas City, and Archer Daniels Midland, of Illinois. (AP, 12/1/02)

**January 16:** President George W. Bush kept in place a prohibition on Americans suing people or companies that now control property confiscated after Fidel Castro took power in Cuba in 1959. Mr. Bush's second waiver of the so-called Helms-Burton law extends the prohibition until August. He said his action will promote democracy in Cuba. A 1996 law, written by Senator Jesse Helms and Representative Dan Burton, gives Americans the right to sue anyone who uses property that had been seized. It also gives the President authority to waive enforcement of the ban. (The Globe and Mail, 17/1/02)

**January 17:** The Office of the Press Secretary, at the White House, issued a note in which it is stated that the President has suspended application of Title III for an additional six months, effective February 1, 2002. It also adds that the president remains "firmly and fully committed to encouraging a rapid, peaceful transition to a democratic government (in Cuba) characterized by strong support for human rights and an open market economy" (...) "The President likewise remains committed to the use of the embargo and travel restrictions to encourage a rapid transition. As he indicated last July, the administration will oppose any effort to loosen sanctions against the Cuban regime until it frees political prisoners, holds democratic, free elections and allows for free speech" (...) "The Cuban regime is a repressive, totalitarian anachronism in a region where democracy and open markets prevail. Its leaders continue to carry out misguided and failed policies which have deeply damaged the Cuban people and left its economy in ruins" (...) "The Cuban government also properly remains on the Terrorist List, due to its continued support for terrorism, including the fact that it continues to harbor fugitives from justice in the United States wanted for terrorism-related offenses." (...) "The recent appointment of Otto Reich as Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs completes the President's foreign policy team. With it, a full review of the tools we are using to achieve our policy goal in Cuba is now appropriate." (Office of the Press Secretary, 17/1/02)

**January 19:** During a conversation with foreign media at the Loma Malones observation point, in Guantanamo, General Raúl Castro, minister of the Cuban Armed Forces, said that recent events have created a situation that obliged Cuba and the United States to cooperate. (Granma, 22/1/02)

**January 20:** A group of prominent Americans gathering information for a report on U.S. policies toward Cuba ended up a visit to Havana after meeting with government officials, church leaders and ordinary Cubans. "The only requirement that we had is that everyone come with an open mind," said James R. Jones, former U.S. ambassador to Mexico and the chairman of the group that visited with the Washington think-tank Center for National Policy. Jones said the center's Cuba Policy Advisory Group will later put their impressions in a report. They will include specific recommendations for possible changes in U.S. policy toward the island. Members of the delegation included former Texas Gov. Ann Richards; Alexander F. Watson, former Assistant U.S. Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs; Harriet Fulbright, president of the Fulbright International Center; Peter Magowan, president and managing general partner of the San Francisco Giants; and Msgr. Thomas Wenski, auxiliary bishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Miami. (The Miami Herald, 21/1/02)

**January 22:** US company signs deal to sell lard to Cuba. An easing of financial restrictions, a simpler licensing process and efforts to create two-way trade between Cuba and the United States are all moves that the Cuban government "will respond to positively," said Pedro Alvarez, president of Cuban Alimport. "We are hoping for more gestures from both sides for this to continue," said Don Marsh, president and CEO of the Indiana-based Marsh supermarket chain, when he appeared with Alvarez at a news conference. Marsh is selling 1,100 tons of pork lard to Cuba under the first round of contracts. (AP, 22/1/02)

**January 22:** During an interview Ricardo Alarcón, president of Cuba's National Assembly hailed cooperation over the detention of Afghanistan war prisoners at a U.S. naval base in Cuba as a model for improving ties between Cuba and the United States. But Alarcón also said it was probably too soon to talk about a major rapprochement: "I wouldn't go that far at this moment,"

Alarcón cautioned. "What is happening is the continuation of the process that began a few years ago." (...) "You have a growing trend of people in favor of rapprochement." (...) "If even the militaries of both sides may cooperate and coordinate, and have established a kind of detente around Guantanamo (...) why not the two countries?", he said. "They are giving us an example of what is possible," he added, urging further U.S.-Cuban cooperation on issues like combating drug-trafficking. Alarcón foresaw the U.S. embargo against Cuba eventually crumbling under pressure from Americans who wanted to trade with Cuba, to travel, or who disagreed with what he called a "failed policy." During the interview, he said it was impossible to predict if the U.S. embargo on Cuba would end sooner or later: "I am a definite optimist in terms of the future," he said. "It's a little bit of a paradox -- this (U.S.) administration has been quite clear in maintaining the old position. They have said they will not soften or modify the embargo but at the same time the mood in other quarters is clearly in the other direction." Alarcón said he believed the Cuban government could deal with the Republican government of President Bush. He scoffed at the "crazy" appointment of Otto Reich as the administration's Latin American policy chief. Alarcón said he was not worried that Reich could scuttle any warming of U.S.-Cuban ties but the appointment should be a concern to all of Latin America. Asked about a possible role for Cuban Americans in Miami in a post-Castro Cuba, Alarcón said: "Miami is still living in the 1950s, dreaming of the 50s and hoping to return to the 50s. This will never happen. Miami is frozen in time." But, in a more conciliatory tone, he also noted that despite the position of hard-line exile leaders, many Cuban Americans were visiting their homeland. "They are renewing links with their country. There you see a transition, a change," he said. (Reuters, 23/1/02)

**January 23:** A ship at the Port of Lake Charles will be loaded with 2,500 metric tons of rice from Acadiana this weekend and shipped to Cuba as humanitarian relief for victims of Hurricane Michelle, officials announced. The rice from Acadiana is the first U.S. bulk-milled rice to be shipped to Cuba in 43 years, U.S. Rep. Chris John, D-Crowley, said at a press conference at the Port of Lake Charles. John called this weekend's shipment a first step toward free trade with closed world markets, including Cuba. He called on President Bush, who was in New Orleans last week to push for free trade, to lift a trade embargo against Cuba to help Louisiana rice farmers: "His administration has not been very warm to the idea of dealing with Cuba and opening up trade. If he's going around talking about how good free trade is, why leave out Cuba? Why do China and not Cuba? It doesn't really make any sense," John told the press. Before the embargo was imposed in 1962, about 300,000 tons of rice, wheat and other grains were being shipped to the island out of the Port of Lake Charles, said Hillery J. Langley Jr., president of the port commission. (The Daily Advertiser, 24/1/02)

**January 23:** Illinois Governor George Ryan arrived in Havana with drug company representatives willing to do business with Cuba. "As I said when I was here last, it's time to end the embargo and welcome Cuba fully into the international marketplace," he said. The Illinois politician arrived in Havana to participate in the International Imaging Congress at Varadero. Ryan brought a donation of nearly one million U.S. dollars in medical supplies. The president of the Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power, Ricardo Alarcón met Ryan at Havana's international airport. Warren R. Staley, chairman and CEO of Minnesota agribusiness giant Cargill, Inc., also in Havana, told a news conference: "It is our sincere hope that the success of this initial commercial transaction will lead to a further improvement in U.S.-Cuban relations." He announced the arrival of 25,000 metric tons of American corn his company sold directly to Cuba. In an interview Staley said he met with Castro and Cuban cabinet ministers at a dinner. (AP, St. Paul (Minnesota) Pioneer Press, Xinhua, 24, 25/1/02)

**January 24:** Two Cuban soccer players, Rey Angel Martínez, 20, and Alberto Delgado, 22, to take part in the Gold Cup soccer tournament, have been reported missing and are believed to have defected. Strikers told the press that they want to stay in the United States permanently and play for Major League Soccer. (AP, 26/1/02)

**January 24:** Illinois Governor George Ryan met with Fidel Castro. Regarding this interview with Castro, Ryan told reporters that there was no reason people of good faith could not meet and come to an agreement on business matters even if they do not agree on politics. (EFE, AP, 25/1/02)

**January 25:** Fidel Castro said to a group of American students that January 2002 should be called "Americans' Month" in Cuba because of the high number of U.S. visitors to the island. Castro met with 768 students and professors from U.S. colleges and universities visiting Cuba under the University of Pittsburgh-sponsored Semester at Sea program. This is not the first time that students from the Semester at Sea Program visit the island (Juventud Rebelde, 26/1/02)

**January 26:** Speaking with a small group of journalists, Cuban Defense Minister Raul Castro said that a new climate of cooperation reigns in Cuba-US relations, proving that the two countries are capable of getting along. The Minister told reporters that relations between the United States and Cuba are advancing slowly, step-by-step, and that a new climate prevails regarding those relations. He added that relations between the two nations could improve, and that any goodwill gesture on the part of Washington will find an equal response on the part of Cuba. He explained that the process is slow, despite the ever-growing numbers of people in the U.S. who oppose the 40-year long blockade. Raúl Castro said that there could be a mutually beneficial rapprochement as long as it is based on mutual respect and non-interference in the internal affairs of the other nation. He noted, however, that a spokesperson for the White House or the State Department may one day say something and complicate things between the two nations -- pointing out that within the U.S. administration itself, there are forces that represent different tendencies. (Radio Habana Cuba, 28/1/02)

**January 27:** With pressure building to open up U.S.-Cuba trade, a leading anti-embargo group reported that U.S. farmers lose an estimated \$1.24 billion annually because of sanctions against this country. A study commissioned by the Washington-based Cuba Policy Foundation estimated that America is missing out on up to \$3.6 billion more in related economic activity because of the 40-year-old U.S. embargo. Sally Grooms Cowal, foundation president hopes that "this study should encourage Congress to take some steps if only to help out American farmers." (AP, 28/1/02)

**January 28:** Former President Jimmy Carter is considering an invitation by Fidel Castro to visit Cuba, Carter spokeswoman Deanna Congileo said. "He is considering the invitation. However, no further details have been worked out yet." If he accepts, he would be the first American president to visit Cuba since Castro rose to power in 1959. (CNN, 29/1/02)

**January 28:** The United States dismissed Cuban speculation about a possible improvement in relations. U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said: "Cuba has not taken any of the steps necessary to make improvement of relations possible. These steps include free elections, the release of political prisoners, the removal of draconian laws that, for example, send Cuban citizens to prison if they criticize their government. "The Cuban government portrays the fundamental issue as being one between Cuba and the United States, but that's not really it. It's not a question of our relationship. It's a question of the Cuban government's continued denial of basic human rights," Boucher told a daily briefing. (The Sun Sentinel, 28/1/02)

**January 29:** Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, condemned in a press interview the U.S. efforts among Latin American governments to stage an anti-Cuban resolution in UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva for alleged violations of human rights. (Prensa Latina, 29/1/02)

**January 30:** A dozen of high Cuban government officials, executives from more than a hundred U.S. companies, members of Congress and officials from important U.S. farming states inaugurated a trade conference in Cancun, Mexico. The conference, called Cuba - US

Agricultural/Wood Products Sales to Cuba, has the purpose of finding ways to facilitate trade with Cuba in the new context of the U.S. laws passed last year which allow the sale of agro-industrial products and pharmaceutical to Cuba. (El Nuevo Herald, 31/1/02)

**January 31:** A novice Florida pilot who crash-landed a plane in Havana was sentenced to six months in federal prison for taking a stolen aircraft to Cuba. Milo John Reese was told to circle once around the Marathon airport on his first solo flight last July 31 but instead headed south for Cuba. He was arrested when Cuba sent him back to the United States. (AP, 31/1/02)

**January 31:** After scouring 31,400 square miles of water over the course of about 36 hours, the US Coast Guard suspended its search for 10 Cuban migrants, including a 3-year-old girl. The extensive search was launched after family members of the migrants reported that their relatives and others departed from Carahatas, Cuba on a 20-foot boat, said Petty Officer Gene Smith. (The Miami Herald, 1/2/02)

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