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## Research Forum on Cuba

# Chronicle on Cuba

## April 2004

### Highlights

**Domestic Affairs:** A Cuban court grants a blind human rights lawyer and another opposition activist conditional liberty. Thousands of Cubans break the world record for most people playing chess simultaneously.

**Economy:** Cuban officials and eight Canadian import companies meet in Havana.

**Foreign Affairs:** A resolution presented by Honduras at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva condemns Cuba for its March 2003 crackdown on dissidents. An exchange of diplomatic notes on the Carlos Ahumada case tenses relations between Cuba and Mexico. The European Parliament again calls on the Cuban authorities to immediately release all political detainees.

**Terrorism:** Cuba asks the UN's top human rights body to investigate the United States' detention of al-Qaeda and Taliban suspects at its naval base in Guantanamo. Cuba calls the sentences handed down in Panama to six individuals accused of plotting to kill Fidel Castro too short.

**US-Cuba Relations:** Cuba opens its petroleum sector to US investment at a bilateral meeting with US businessmen in Havana.



### Domestic Affairs

**April 1:** The Cuban Catholic Church urged the communist government of Fidel Castro to pardon or reduce the sentences of the 75 dissidents sentenced to up to 28 years in prison in April 2003. "Such a move would be very positive for Cuba," Catholic Church spokesman Orlando Márquez wrote in a local magazine. "Pardoning the prisoners of conscience or reducing their sentences would be a sign not of weakness but of moral strength." The latest edition of the same magazine called on the government to perform a meaningful act of clemency as urged also by Pope John Paul II. (ANSA, 1/4/04)

**April 1:** In a letter, Gisela Delgado, wife of dissident in jail since last year's crackdown Héctor Palacios, urged the Cuban government to broadcast in full the interview she gave to journalists from the official Cuban TV. Delgado sent a letter to Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, signed on March 31 st that was distributed to the foreign press based in Havana. (*Notimex*, 1/4/04)

**April 1:** "You are breaking precedent and historical ground in education for the world", Fidel Castro told the more than 460 young people studying to be elementary and junior high teachers in Cuba's innovative program. Castro spoke with the students at Havana Convention Center during the events preceding the VIII Young Communist Union Congress about the audacious junior high program now underway in the country. (*Prensa Latina*, 1/4/04)

**April 1:** Several residential areas in Havana have been without drinking water due to low levels affecting supply sources. This has created discomfort among the population who consider the government's water tank service is not enough. (*Cubanet*, 1/4/04)

**April 1:** Maritza Calderín Columbié, wife of Juan Carlos González Leiva, blind Cuban lawyer imprisoned for more than two years by Cuban State Security without a trial, denounced the unfortunate case of her husband. In a letter addressed to the Sixtieth Session of the United Nations' Commission for Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland, Calderín Columbié says that her husband remains in prison since March 4, 2002 in the State Security Department of Pedernales in Holguín, Cuba, many kilometers away from his home. She reiterates that "he is kept behind bars, deprived of sunlight and fresh air for months in a cell as filthy as a pigpen; denied a trial, and the opportunity to seek release under bail". "In addition, he is physically, mentally, and emotionally tortured systematically by intentionally exposing him to toxic substance with penetrating odors, which are also thrown on his body and inside his cell", she adds. (*Cubanet*, 1/4/04)

**April 2:** The illegal Cuban Independent Workers Confederation (CTDC), reorganized their National Executive Committee, informed the Press Secretary, Eduardo G. Estrada. According to Estrada, members José Alfonso González Torriente and Pedro Arrocha Arguelles were elected as president and vice president in function, respectively. Fernando A. González was promoted to National Coordinator. Victor Yunier Fernández Martínez, Bernardo Lázaro González Nodarse will be in charge of other Secretaries, while Maité Vazquez Gonzalez and Eduardo G. Estrada were voted Honorary Members, added the source. (*Puente Informativo*, 2/4/04)

**April 3:** Cuban dissident Pedro Pablo Alvarez, jailed for 25 years, was allowed to assist at the Havana burial of his mother. State authorities let the president of the illegal Unitarian Council of Cuban Workers leave prison and remain for two and a half hours at the funeral home where friends and family kept vigil over the remains of his mother, Raquel Ramos Soto. Later he attended the burial ceremony in Havana's Cristobal Colon Cemetery, watched by plainclothes agents. (*EFE*, 3/4/04)

**April 4:** Jos&acute; Enrique Santana Carreira, National Coordinator of the Democratic Party November 30 "Frank País" began an indefinite hunger strike at the Prison 1580. "Our brother is in a hunger strike demanding that his condition of political prisoner be respected and also, because on March 15, prison authorities endorsed common prisoners to force José Enrique to comply with the so called "prison regulations", according to Yamile Casas Sánchez, member of the National Executive Board of the illegal political party. (*Puente Informativo*, 4/4/04)

**April 4:** The Cuban Young Communist League celebrated its 42th anniversary hosting activities for children and teenagers such as parties, concerts and theater plays throughout the island. More than 500,000 youths are members of the organization. Its main objective is to continue the cultural, political and ideological training of young Cubans. Its priority is to consolidate the achievements of the Revolution. The Children's organization "Jose Marti" in which all the primary and secondary students are members of also celebrated its anniversary. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/4/04)

**April 5:** The Noni tree—whose fruit, leaves, roots and seeds hold promising properties for improving the quality of human life—is being researched in Cuba. The plant has raised high expectations as an effective stimulant and antioxidant. Cuban researcher Isidoro Scull has been studying for some years the therapeutic benefits of the plant as well as its use as a nutritional supplement. (*EFE*, 5/4/04)

**April 5:** Cuban parliament speaker Ricardo Alarcon defended last year's crackdown on 75 activists, telling a group of American newspaper editors that internal security outweighs international image. "I think you should take into account the problem of image," Alarcon told the board of directors for The Associated Press Managing Editors. But, he added, "No nation can base its conduct relating to fundamental national security based on how the media might reflect what you do." Alarcon's comments came during a two-hour meeting with the APME board of directors, which represents 1,700 newspapers in the United States and Canada. The board arrived in Havana for a two-day stay after visiting Mexico, where they met with President Vicente Fox. (*AP*, 5/4/04)

**April 6:** About 30 opponents of Fidel Castro launched a 24-hour fast seeking the release of more than 300 Cuban political prisoners, including 75 who were rounded up and jailed in a crackdown a year ago. In a cramped flat in the El Vedado neighborhood, seated under a huge red, white and blue Cuban flag bearing the names of 75 dissidents sentenced to lengthy jail terms last year family and friends demanded freedom for loved ones they say are held in dismal conditions. (*AFP*, 6/4/04)

**April 7:** A Cuban human rights activist, jailed for hatching plans to honor the late Brothers to the Rescue fliers, has lapsed into a coma after a prolonged hunger strike, according to sources monitoring his health. Sources described as "delicate" the condition of Leonardo Miguel Bruzón Avila, imprisoned without trial since February 23, 2002. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 9/4/04)

**April 7:** Cuba hopes to win the "2004 Stop Smoking And Win" International contest to take place worldwide in May, according to the Cuban Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP). Dr. Milvia Ramirez, an official of the MINSAP Epidemiology Department, said the competition is promoted by the World Health Organization. An estimated 200,000 Cuban smokers plan to register in April to give up tobacco during the four week period in May, after which they will receive tests to verify their having met the challenge. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 8/4/04)

**April 7:** Cuban dissident Vladimiro Roca, rejected statements by Ricardo Alarcón, president of the Cuban National Assembly. Alarcón stated that the 75 dissidents, imprisoned since last year, were sent to jail for "national security reasons". "That is a way to justify a major political mistake that they do not want to rectify", Roca said. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 8/4/04)

**April 8:** The first international conference on Values in Education will review more than 100 papers submitted by European and Latin American experts on ways to instill positive values in children, adolescents and young people. Deans, academics, researchers and other professionals on this field connected to institutions in Portugal, Spain, Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, the Dominican Republic and the host country, Cuba, are meeting in Camaguey, to discuss training of ethics and new realities in developed societies, among other topics. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 8/4/04)

**April 8:** One year after a firing squad executed her son and two other ferry hijackers, Ramona Copello says there is nothing left for her in Cuba. Her son, Lorenzo Enrique Copello, 31, was among a group of armed men who seized a ferry full of passengers and tried to force it to sail to the United States. "I keep asking myself why they executed him," Copello said in an interview. "I want to leave this country." She wants to exit legally, as a political refugee to the United States. Her paperwork was submitted months ago; now, she awaits final word from American officials. (*AP*, 11/4/04)

**April 8:** After more than two years of being divided into two factions, operating under the same name, The Democratic Party November 30 "Frank País", celebrated its merger. More than 30 activists and executives of the organization participated in the political act, celebrated at the home of the National Coordinator Ada Kaly Márquez Abascal. (*Puente Informativo*, 13/4/04)

**April 9:** It is reported that new regulations restricting the sales of cars to Cuban nationals in US dollars have become effective in the island. Under Resolution 54/2004 of the Ministry of Finances and Prices, the purchase of cars --in US dollars obtained abroad-- will only be allowed to "the ruling class, officials, technicians, professors, scientists, public health personnel, artists, administrative personnel working in official missions abroad", and "artists, athletes technicians, professors and scientists that have received international awards". The resolution was approved after Cuban police carried out the "HK Operation", aimed to confiscate all vehicles bought by foreigners and driven by Cuban nationals. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 9/4/04)

**April 9:** Cuban universities have welcomed more than 13,945 foreign students from 113 countries, via a cooperation program that is systematically growing. In the past semester, 17,654 students received their degrees, with 70% of them from African countries, and it is expected that the number of those from Latin America and the Caribbean will grow during upcoming semesters. (*Granma International*, 9/4/04)

**April 11:** Painstakingly recovered from under 27 layers of paint, the colonial-era murals at 12 Tacon St. are known to local art historians as the "Sistine Chapel of Old Havana." Located halfway between Old Havana's cathedral and the port, the colorful floor-to-ceiling murals offer a window into the city's past. Almost all homes, government buildings and stores in Old Havana's majestic but badly deteriorated historic quarter were once decorated with wall paintings that were obscured for a century or more under successive layers of paint. Now they are gradually being rediscovered and restored. The murals at Tacon Street are unusual in that they cover all the walls, rather than selected portions, of a small room in a former colonial residence, giving art historians a unique pictorial depiction of a bygone era. (*Sun Sentinel*, 11/4/04)

**April 11:** Every newspaper stand in Cuba is selling "Cuba and the Defense of All Human Rights for Everyone," a Cuban Foreign Ministry text that details the respect for human rights (economic, social, cultural, civil and political) on the island, Granma daily reports. [[Cuba and its Defence of All Human Rights for All](#)] (*Prensa Latina*, 12/4/04)

**April 11:** Dissident Leonardo Bruzón Avila was transferred from Salvador Allende Hospital to the military hospital "Carlos J. Finlay", in Havana, after having been lapsed into coma. After two years in jail, Bruzón initiated a hunger strike claiming for the celebration of his trial. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 11/4/04) (*El Nuevo Herald*, 11/4/04)

**April 12:** Dancer and choreographer Alberto Méndez received the National Dance Award 2004 after being chosen by jury among a group of five. Méndez was a founder of *Danza Contemporánea de Cuba* and has had a long and prestigious career as both a dancer and choreographer of the National Ballet of Cuba. (*Granma*, 12/4/04)

**April 13:** Roger Curbelo Tamayo, member of the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL) and Coordinator of the Civic Committee of the Varela Project in Las Tunas province, has been arrested for over two weeks without due process. Since the beginning of his confinement in El Típico prison, Holguín, Curbelo Tamayo initiated a hunger strike in protest for his unjust incarceration. Osvaldo Payá Sardiñas, national coordinator of the MCL gave this information to the foreign press in Havana. (*Puente Informativo*, 13/4/04)

**April 14:** Fidel Castro denied he's considering stepping down after 44 years in power, and his influence on the Cuban people could grow after his passing, he said in a documentary aired in the United States. "I'm not willing to please Mr. (George W.) Bush," said Castro, 76, in reply to a question from U.S. movie Director Oliver Stone as to why he doesn't

transfer power to a younger successor. "I've had no time to consider that option. It does not cross my mind to step down from my post of Commander in Chief," added Castro. "I believe I will die working," he affirmed. (*AFP*, 14/4/04)

**April 15:** A group of Cuban dissidents handed some 400 leaflets with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to passers-by in Central Havana's Parque de la Fraternidad, so that they have a "real knowledge" of the document. (*EFE*, 15/4/04)

**April 15:** Cuban dissidents welcomed the UN vote condemning the human rights situation on the communist-ruled island, though they expressed skepticism about the possibility of it bringing about changes. Elizardo Sanchez, who heads the Cuban Human Rights Commission, said the resolution "is appropriate and perfectly justified" given "the terrible situation of civil, political and economic rights that continues to prevail in Cuba." "Its impact will be minimal, because the Cuban government continues to ignore the calls of the international community on this matter," Sanchez told the press. Nonetheless, he said, the narrowly approved resolution "is important for the human rights and pro-democracy movement, like a practical form of moral support." Vladimiro Roca, head of the All United Movement, said the passing of the resolution constitutes "moral support for our struggle." "It's nothing more than moral support. Despite all the times they've singled out the Cuban government, the human rights situation worsens for days instead of improving," he said. "I don't think there are going to be changes. There's no will on the part of the government to carry out these changes," said Roca. (*EFE*, 15/4/04)

**April 15:** Cuban dissident Julio Antonio Valdes Guevara, one of 75 dissidents jailed a year ago, has been temporarily released to receive a kidney transplant, he said. "I'm happy to be free, despite the fact that my health is very bad," Valdes told a group of foreign journalists before being admitted to the Nephrology Institute of Havana. Valdes, 52, was sentenced to 20 years behind bars during a series of summary trials which sent 75 dissidents to prison in the spring of 2003, but due to the gravity of his condition, he was granted a temporary release to attend to his health problems. (*EFE*, 15/4/04)

**April 16:** An international workshop on democracy and the role of local and national governments will be held in Matanzas, in October. Legislators, academicians, historians, economists, philosophers, lawyers and students will attend the conference sponsored by the Matanzas Provincial Assembly (equivalent to State Legislature), Granma daily's website reported. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/4/04)

**April 16:** On April 16, Cubans remember the response of the Cuban people to Fidel Castro's proclamation in defense of the socialist character of the revolution. Castro's speech was made at the burial of the 56 Cubans (48 of them civilians) who were killed in the attack bombardment by mercenaries on Cuban airports on April 15. Cuban newspapers recall how thousands of new Cuban militia, with no combat experience, responded to that proclamation by joining the Rebel Army and the National Revolutionary Police in repelling the 1,500 strongly-armed amphibious 2506 Brigade landing that day at Playa Giron on the Bay of Pigs, in the island's south central coast. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/4/04)

**April 16:** Ten members of the Cuban Foundation for Human Rights (Fundación Cubana de Derechos Humanos), FCDH, imprisoned since 2002 will go to trial. The information was provided to Martiza Calderín, wife of Juan Carlos González president of FCDH, imprisoned without trial since 2002, by a police investigator from the Pedernales Prison, Holguín. The FCDH members waiting for trial are Juan Carlos González Leiva, Lázaro Iglesias Estrada, Léxter Téllez Castro, Carlos Brizuela Yera, Enrique García Morejón, Antonio Marcelino García Morejón, Delio Laureano Requejo Rodríguez, Virgilio Mantilla Arango, Odalmis Hernández Márquez y Ana Peláez García, these last two released on bail. (*Cubanet*, 16/4/04)

**April 16:** CMHW, the provincial radio network of Villa Clara, announced that the census for the distribution of sanitary pads to women has concluded. To register, women between the ages of 10 and 55 had to present their current ration card and ID document. Several women of the area who were interviewed regarded the initiative as a very

positive one. As a result, it is expected that the supply of sanitary pads will be normalized, since the current distribution system of 2 or 3 times a year is insufficient. (*Cubanet*, 16/4/04)

**April 17:** On the first anniversary of the wave of arrests and summary trials that took place last year, eleven political prisoners initiated a hunger strike in protest for these events. The prisoners are confined in the Cerámica Roja prison, Camaguey. Francisco Pacheco Espinosa, Lázaro Iglesias Estrada, Jorge Luis Suárez Varona, the brothers Enrique and Antonio García Morejon, Delio Laureano Resquejo Rodríguez, Egberto Ángel Moral Escobedo, Jorge Liriano Linares, Elizardo Calvo Hernández, José Aguamonte Leyva, and Yosbel González Plaza, have been on hunger strike for 48 hours. (*Puente Informativo* 17/4/04)

**April 18:** The 2nd Cuban Sports Olympics, with the participation of three thousand Cuban athletes and over a thousand foreigners opened, with competitions in track and field, baseball and volleyball. The day began with 45 runners competing in the marathon followed by the opening ceremony at Havana's Sports City Coliseum, which holds 15,000 people. During the inaugural speech, Fidel Castro announced the use of new techniques in schools for athletes in the island. Castro said that these techniques constitute a revolution in Cuban sports. [[Speech by Fidel Castro at the inauguration of the Cuban Sports Olympics](#)] (*Europa Press*, 18/4/04)

**April 18:** Cuba's fourth television channel went on the air, kicking off programming with coverage of the second-ever National Olympics. It is Cuba's second educational channel. During its first two weeks on the air, Canal educativo 2 will cover the athletic games. Following the athletic event, the station will "continue to broadcast experimental programs with educational goals," the official press reported. (*EFE, Europa Press*, 18/4/04)

**April 18:** Reina Luisa Tamayo requested from Cuban authorities that her son be released from prison. Orlando Zapata Tamayo has been held without due process since his arrest in March 2003. Cuban State Security has accused him of the alleged crime of public disorder. During this time, the State Attorney has set his case for trial in 4 occasions, but prison authorities have refused to take him to the Tribunal, she added. "If they refuse to take him to trial then they should set him free", she said. (*Puente Informativo*, 18/4/04)

**April 20:** Cuban Minister of Culture Abel Prieto explained Cuba's project to bring authentic culture, from any point of view, to every Cuban family, by quoting Jose Marti "without culture there is no true freedom." The minister, in Argentina for the Buenos Aires Book Fair and to meet with Argentine government and cultural leaders, told a university audience about culture as part of the battle of ideas, pointing out, also in the words of Marti, that to be cultured is the only way to be free and to be able to withstand manipulation or exploitation. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/4/04)

**April 20:** Cuban mass organizations are telling their members to beat any person who might be talking about human rights and the Varela Project. According to a member of the dissident organization 24 de Febrero, these instructions began to be transmitted in meetings in Santiago de las Vegas, City of Havana, and have been extended to the municipalities of Centro Habana, Habana Vieja and Playa. (*Lux Info Press*, 20/4/04)

**April 19:** At the 43th anniversary of the triumph of Cuba's army and militia at Bay of Pigs, Fidel Castro said that Cuba is ready to face any attack coming from abroad. During the official TV program Round Table, Castro also stated that the internal opposition in the island is "a 0.03 percent" of the Cuban population. (*World Data Service, Notimex*, 20/4/04)

**April 20:** Cuban opposition leaders expressed concern over the health of Marta Beatriz Roque, the only woman among the 75 dissidents sentenced a year ago to prison terms of up to 28 years. Roque, sentenced to 20 years in jail, has for months been confined to a prisoners' ward of the Carlos J. Finlay Military Hospital in Havana because of her health. A communique issued in Havana and signed by Vladimiro Roca of the outlawed Todos Unidos movement, among others, complained that relatives have been banned from visiting Roque at the hospital for the past two weeks. (*EFE*, 20/4/04)

**April 21:** The Cuban Workers Federation (CTC) has advanced that the upcoming celebrations on May Day as a new example of Cuba's decision to defend socialism and its national independence and sovereignty. Under the slogan Unity and Victory, a huge rally will be staged by millions of people. They will be joined by 400 delegates from 34 nations who will be participating in a solidarity meeting to be held at Havana's Convention Center. (*Prensa Latina*, 21/4/04)

**April 21:** A group of Cuban government opponents gathered at a home in Havana to pray for the release of imprisoned dissidents on the island. The prayer chain, which brought together nearly 30 people, was organized by Yolanda Triana Estopiñan, whose husband Orlando Fundora Alvarez is one of the 75 non-violent democracy activists and independent journalists sentenced last year to prison terms averaging 20 years. Relatives of other jailed dissidents, members of outlawed opposition groups and a Greek Catholic priest co-sponsored the chain and shouted slogans in favor of human rights and the release of the prisoners. (*EFE*, 21/4/04)

**April 23:** Cuba's Ministry of Sciences, Technology and Environment has completed the first ethno-ecological map of Guanahacabibes Peninsula, in the western province of Pinar del Rio. The Atlas involves two years of fieldwork and analysis of the population and nature of the region, declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO. The book details the positive and negative affects of human interaction with the environment in the last 5,000 years. It further highlights the need to preserve places of cultural and archaeological interest, and endangered flora and fauna species. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/4/04)

**April 23:** Cuban dissidents and the top US diplomat in Havana gave Oliver Stone's second documentary on Fidel Castro bad reviews, saying it failed to present an objective view. "The documentary is biased. I was disappointed, even though I was interviewed by his team," said veteran human rights activist Elizardo Sanchez. "It does not manage to give an objective picture of Cuban reality and is influenced by the enormous propaganda capability of a totalitarian regime," Sanchez said. (*Reuters*, 23/4/04)

**April 23:** Political prisoner Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello, hospitalized in the "Carlos J. Finlay" military hospital in Havana, asked the political police to take her back to the Manto Negro prison, where she had been interned. The request follows a statement from Cuban foreign minister during a televised press conference regarding the health and medical attention she's receiving and the "great health condition"—according to him—she's in. (*Cubanet*, 23/4/04)

**April 25:** Cuban scientists are conducting a project for the creation of a vaccine against the avian mycoplasmosis—a disease that affects particularly hens, roosters and chicken. The project was initiated three years ago at the Centro Nacional de Sanidad Agropecuaria (CENSA), indicated the specialized magazine *Juventud Técnica*. (*DPA*, 25/4/04)

**April 25:** Cuban Yipsi Moreno became one of the athletes to win the hammer gold medal at Athens Olympic Games in 2004. Moreno sent the hammer at 75,18 meters during Cuba's second national Olympic games in Havana. (*Reuters*, 25/4/04)

**April 26:** A blind lawyer and nine other opposition activists were put on trial in Cuba in the first prosecution of government opponents since last year's jailing of 75 dissidents. Blind human rights lawyer Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leyva and the other nine opponents of Fidel Castro were charged with disrespect for authority and public disorder, according to the Cuban Human Rights Commission. Only relatives were allowed into the courtroom for the trial, which took place in the central town of Ciego de Avila. "They face sentences of up to six years," said veteran rights activist, Elizardo Sanchez, head of the commission. All ten were arrested March 4, 2002, when they tried to visit an independent journalist, who had allegedly been beaten by police at a Ciego de Avila hospital. They have been jailed without charges since then. (*CNN*, 26/4/04)

**April 26:** Blind Cuban dissident Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva was found guilty of disrespecting Fidel Castro and other offenses and sentenced to four years in prison, dissident sources said. Eight other dissidents received shorter prison

sentences in the one-day trial in the central Cuban town of Ciego de Avila where only relatives were allowed in the courtroom. A tenth man facing trial revealed himself to be a government agent who had infiltrated the dissident group in Ciego de Avila, commission president and veteran human rights activist Elizardo Sanchez said. (*Reuters. BBC, EFE, 26/4/04*)

**April 26:** During the trial followed to blind dissident Juan Carlos González Leiva and other activists, it was known that the group included Lester Tellez Castro, an independent journalist who revealed in court he had been working as a state security infiltrator called agent "Ignacio." During the trial, he publicly renounced his work for the Cuban police. After his statement in court, Trelles was immediately sent back to jail, where he expressed his repentant for having defended what he called "an unfair and worthless cause". The court sentenced him to 3-1/2 years in prison. (*Cubanet, Reuters, 27/4/04*)

**April 26:** Eloy Gutierrez-Menoyo, the former exile who returned to Cuba last year without government approval, praised the election of Spain's new prime minister in an unusual political statement. Gutierrez-Menoyo also criticized dissidents who had admired new Socialist Party President Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero's more conservative predecessor, Jose Maria Aznar. "For Cuba (the electoral victory) must represent a happy opportunity in which the differing groups can and must be discussed within the confines of mutual respect," Gutierrez-Menoyo's statement read. In the statement, Gutierrez-Menoyo said he was "perplexed" by some of the island's government opponents, including democracy activist Oswaldo Paya. He said Pay` bade farewell to Aznar "with adolescent admiration" while approaching Social Democrat Zapatero "without even blushing from his opportunism." (*AP, 26/4/04*)

**April 26:** Oswaldo Paya, promoter of the Varela Project democracy effort, accused dissident Eloy Gutierrez-Menoyo of siding with the Cuban government in its opposition to the island's dissidents. "Mr. Menoyo is among those who call themselves members of the opposition -- but without any substance -- and then criticize those of us who are working inside Cuba," Paya said after reading a statement that Menoyo sent to the press. (*AP, 26/4/04*)

**April 26:** Cuba's Silvio Rodríguez affirmed in a talk with young people in Mexico that in Cuba, "basic human rights" are respected and expressed his desire that his country remains socialist. "Basic human rights are covered in Cuba, of that I am totally convinced, and I am proud that it's so. And if we weren't under so much pressure from the enemy, we would also dedicate ourselves to being a little more self-critical in some areas that need that in the Cuban process," he commented. Silvio also expressed that Cuba "has passed through a series of realities," and that he would not like to see it go backwards. "And if some day we did go backwards, I would at least like for us to do that on our own account, not because someone imposed it on us," he said. (*Granma International, 27/4/04*)

**April 27:** A Cuban court granted a blind human rights lawyer and another opposition activist conditional liberty, while eight other dissidents received prison sentences of three to seven years, a prominent member of the opposition told the press. Elizardo Sánchez, the president of the illegal but relatively tolerated Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, said the blind activist, Juan Carlos González, was given a four-year sentence that was commuted to conditional liberty or parole. (*IPS, 27/4/04*)

**April 28:** Cuban will participate with very young athletes at the World Figure Skating Championship scheduled for September in the United States, Alejandro Martinez Osorio, the National Commissioner, informed. The best international results by a Cuban figure skating team was in Santo Domingo during the Pan-American Games 2003 with a fifth place finish after the United States, Argentina, Chile and Colombia, Martinez recalled. He recognized Cuban skaters are still below the high technical and artistic level prevailing today in the world where more than 80 countries practice this discipline, which only began to be practiced on the island in 1989. (*Prensa Latina, 28/4/04*)

**April 29:** Thousands of Cubans, young and old, played their favorite game into the night to break the world record for most people playing chess simultaneously. Former world chess champion Anatoly Karpov was among the 13,000

people that Cuban officials claimed had succeeded in surpassing the current Guinness World Record of 11,320 players -- set in Havana in December 2002. Fidel Castro, who helped break the chess-playing record in 2002, was not present. A surprise guest, however, was Elian Gonzalez, the 10-year-old boy made famous after a high-charged custody battle between his Cuban family and relatives in Miami. (*CNN*, 28/4/04)

## **Economy**

**April 5:** Cuban citrus fruits enterprise Ceiba excelled its production record in 3,000 tons up to now, a total of 89,000 tons, and could possibly surpass this figure since it might end the harvest season with 95,000 tons. In statements to the press, Jorge Perez, director of Ceiba Enterprise, added citrus fruits plantations counted on enough reserve to reach the aforementioned number of tons, though it is already surpassed their best production record ever, reached in 1998. Among the immediate plans, they want to plant 350 hectares this year to produce 100,000 tons of fruits, a goal suggested by Fidel Castro. (*Prensa Latina*, 5/4/04)

**April 5:** The worst year for rainfall in a decade is the description for the period between May 2003 and this April in Cuba, given that precipitation has only been at 84% of its historic average. The provinces suffering the most dramatic drought of the last 10 years are Camagüey (76% of average rainfall since last May); Holguín (74%) and Guantánamo (69%). Scarcity of is also reported in Las Tunas (78%), although that province's worst year for rainfall was 2001. Granma, which also reports low rainfall (79%), had its worst year during 1999-2000. Holguín is in the worst situation, suffering from two consecutive years of the poorest rainfall in the last decade. During the 2002-2003 period, the eastern province only received 83% of its average rainfall, now standing at 74%. (*Granma International*, 5/4/04)

**April 7:** Cienfuegos is now home to the only yacht basin on the Caribbean coast of Cuba with the opening of a joint venture between Cubanacan and Bluesail, subsidiary of the German ConImpex. ConImpex, based in Berlin and with interests in Russia, Spain, Hungary and Bulgaria, was founded in 1990 and has been in business with Cuba since 1995, chiefly in finance and commerce, but also renting motorboats in Varadero and Jardines del Rey. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/4/04)

**April 6:** Germany's ConImpex Company and Cuba's Cubanacan Corporation have opened a yacht club in Central Cienfuegos City for on-board tourist crews. ConImpex president Klaus Apel told reporters that his company will initially contribute eight boats to the international marina, located 250 kilometers East of Havana. The local fleet is expected to count on 15 boats over the coming months and is the only business of its kind along Cuba's southern coast, said Apel, who added that at present an increasing number of tourists are seeking yachting vacations. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 11/4/04)

**April 7:** The trade turnover between Argentina and Cuba is seen to double in 2004, the Argentine Ambassador to Havana, Raul Taleb, said. According to the ambassador, the trade turnover stood at \$40 mln (33.1 mln euro) in 2003. The trade turnover is expected to be boosted mainly by a purchase, made recently by Cuba from companies from Entre Rios province, eastern Argentina, but no figures were available. (*Latin America News Digest*, 8/4/04)

**April 7:** A 750-million-dollar investment undertaken by the Cuban oil sector has led to steadily increasing yields based on expanded exploitation of local reserves over the past few years. Energy industry statistics indicate that as a result of such continuing investment, as well as the setting up of joint ventures with foreign companies, local oil production has grown sevenfold over the past decade, allowing for significant import reduction. The oil industry in Central Matanzas province is leading the local production increase with a current exploitation of 170 oil wells, followed by other reserves in Havana and eastern Ciego de Avila provinces. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 11/4/04)

**April 7:** Cuban biotechnological products have begun to garner a place in the complex pharmaceutical market, which is controlled by first world companies. Doctor Mauro Alfonso, Commercial Manager of CIMAB Ltd., a medium-sized firm dedicated to the marketing of Cuban pharmaceuticals, said the island's biotechnology products are currently being sold in 14 Latin American, Middle Eastern and Asian countries, while 40 new sales contracts have already been signed with businesses with other nations of the world. The executive gave details on some of the most promising products including anti-cancer vaccines and monoclonal antibodies, which are being used in Canada, Spain and Italy. Dr. Alfonso said that CIMAB Enterprise is also promoting the setting up of joint ventures with Chinese and Indian companies in order to build pharmaceutical processing labs that meet the current demand of monoclonal antibodies and other pharmaceuticals. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 11/4/04)

**April 8:** Cuban officials and eight Canadian import companies met in Havana to foster Cuban exports to Canada, *Business in Cuba* weekly informed. The meeting, sponsored by the "Centro de Promocion para las Exportaciones de Cuba" (CEPEC) and the Trade Facilitation Office Canada (TFOC), focused on food products such as nutritional supplements, drinks, organic products as well as sugar by-products, medicine and others. The Canadian business representatives met with at least 25 Cuban export companies. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/4/04)

**April 8:** Venezuela is looking at options to further economic ties with Cuba which includes the possible purchase of an oil refinery and opening a bank branch in Havana to expand trade. The new Venezuelan ambassador Adán Chávez, the elder brother of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said at his first news conference in Havana that he had come to strengthen economic and ideological ties between the two political allies. Chavez said the purchase of the unfinished Soviet-built oil refinery in Cienfuegos was being studied as part of an oil supply agreement signed in October 2000 under which Venezuela ships Cuba 53,000 barrels a day on generous terms. He revealed Cuba will help Venezuela build low cost housing and will also build a plant to produce medicine in Venezuela. Cuban sugar industry technicians have helped Venezuela restart abandoned refineries and build a new one the state of Barinas, Chavez said. (*Reuters*, 9/4/04)

**April 9:** The Angolan Foreign Minister, João Miranda, has invited in Havana (Cuba), the economic operators of that country to invest in Angola, having into account the peace climate in this state. The Minister, disclosed it while assessing his four-day visit to Cuba. (*Angolan Press*, 9/4/04)

**April 9:** Cuba's raw sugar output passed 2 million tonnes as the industry struggled to surpass last year's 2.2 million tonnes before the rainy season sets in, local analysts said. "They will have to mill into May to reach 2.3 million tonnes," said a Cuban economist who follows the harvest closely. Cuba planned to end the harvest by May at 2.6 million tonnes, but mills have operated at less than 70 percent of capacity, compared with the 80 percent planned, while yields have been more or less as expected at just above 11 percent, industry sources reported. No national milling and yield information has officially been available since mid-February. (*Reuters*, 9/4/04)

**April 11:** Corruption in Cuba does not only involve big corporations and branches of foreign firm, but it includes smaller domestic retailers as well. The most resounding case was that of the TRD Caribe, under the control of the Ministry of the Armed Forces and managed by General Julio Casas Regueiro. The store chain has a turnover of US\$250 million a year. The investigation is being conducted by the Military Counter-Intelligence. The CUBALSE Meridiano stores chain, administered by the Council of State, has not been exempt from similar irregularities. Since 1999, the so-called "verification of internal controls" carried out by the government show that 90% of the audited entities are operating properly. However, the Vice-President of the Association of Economists of Cuba (ANEC), Blanca Rosa Pampín, admitted last year that the number does not correspond with the reality, due to the use of inaccurate audit and control methods. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 11/4/04)

**April 12:** The intense drought in Cuba accounted for 14 forest fires last week and brought the total for this year to 218, with damage to 4,732 acres, according to the fire management chief of the National Forest Ranger Corps, Granma

newspaper reported. The drought in Cuba, particularly in March and April, has set the stage for the fires, which have been chiefly in the Isle of Youth and the provinces of Villa Clara, Camaguey, Holguin, Guantanamo, and Cienfuegos, Chief Martin Chavez Blanco informed. Although most of the forest fires have been small, two were of greater magnitude, one of them affecting 395 acres in Mayari Arriba, Holguin, before being brought under control. (*Prensa Latina*, 12/4/04)

**April 12:** The oyster-processing industry in Eastern Granma province is increasing production and expanding the commercialization of its product to foreign markets. The local oyster sector in Granma has so far processed over 165 tons of that marine specie, which is translated into 10 tons of edible oyster flesh, considered one of the seafood products in most demand around the world. The effort is part of a sales strategy aimed at including oysters on the list of Cuban exports for the foreign market. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/4/04)

**April 13:** Managers of Cuba's state enterprises have been told to hand over their expensive cars like Toyotas and Mitsubishi's and stick to the more proletarian Russian-made Ladas or smaller vehicles. It's part of Fidel Castro's campaign to roll back the market-oriented reforms that gave rise to social differences in an officially classless, communist-run society. The most recent clampdown has targeted executives of state companies, whose perks are under fire. "Cuban officials feel they have weathered the crisis and it's time for the state to take an even more central role in the economy," said Phil Peters, an expert on Cuba at Washington's Lexington Institute think tank. Western diplomats said Cuba is retrenching economically as well as politically. They point to a crackdown on dissent last year and increased regulation of foreign companies too. "The number of joint ventures fell by 70 last year, and will decline by a similar number this year. Tens of thousands of small independent business have folded in recent years under government pressure and small foreign trading companies are packing their bags," a European commercial attache said. Dozens of executives of the two largest corporations, Cimex and Cubanacan, were removed over alleged mishandling of dollars, charging of commissions and the use of foreign bank accounts. The government also ended the freedom most state companies had gained to import goods. "It's a double blow. First the dollars were taken away, and now the right to trade and make independent decisions," a Cuban economist said. "We are going back to the 1980s when everything was centralized." (*Reuters*, 13/4/04)

**April 13:** Cuba opened its energy sector in 2000 for the extraction of crude oil in association with foreign companies. The contracts grant foreign investors the right to commercialize a portion of the resources while the Cuban government uses the rest in refineries and electricity generation plants, said Eduardo Andrade, president of the Asociación Mexicana para la Energía y Desarrollo Sustentable de México. At the end of 2002, Spanish company Repsol YPF obtained the rights over six of Cuba's offshore blocs for oil exploitation. Sherrit International, a Canadian oil company, invested \$110 million last year in oil and gas exploration activities within the Cuban maritime territory. (*Grupo Reforma*, 13/4/04)

**April 14:** For years, Cuba's cash-starved businesses and state-run agencies have been allowed to develop specialties far outside their mandates to stay afloat. This practice appears to be ending. A government directive from April 1 has demanded that such secondary businesses cease and desist. The order's objective, the circular says, is "to adjust entities' social objectives to their primary function and suspend payment in hard currency for services that do not correspond to those functions". The shift on keeping companies to their primary objectives is likely to reverse many of the market mechanisms introduced to help the government survive the downfall of the Soviet Union. The move reflects the renewed embrace of centralised state-planning by Fidel Castro. Western diplomats say the changes follow Mr Castro's increasingly conservative trend. "Cuba's economy is moving in one direction and China's and Vietnam's another," one European diplomat said. (*Reuters*, 14/4/04)

**April 14:** Iranian Ambassador to Havana Ahmad Edrisian said that while Tehran and Havana have widespread cooperation in the political field, their economic relations are not satisfactory. Edrisian told the press that although Tehran and Havana have good cooperation in international fora, "but, the distance between the two nations has

hindered their economic ties." "However, recently important steps have been taken in this regard," he added. Edrisian said the bilateral trade volume stood at dlr 50 million in 2003. The exchange includes Iran purchase of sugar and medicine from Cuba, while Iranian export to Cuba consists of raw material for textiles, plastics, sugar cane production machinery and electrical parts, he stated. (*IRNA*, 14/4/04)

**April 15:** The important role of biomass fuel as a means of sustainable development was underlined during the second day of the 6th CUBASOLAR International Workshop on Renewable Energies. Engineer Julian Torres, of the Cuban Observatory of Science and Technology asserted that biomass conversion notably reduces the emission of contaminating gases in relation to those of fossil fuel. In Cuba, biomass conversion is used to generate 30% of the electricity in the country. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 15/4/04)

**April 16:** The Spanish company Repsol YPF is to start drilling the first oil well in Cuba's exclusive zone in the Gulf of Mexico, announced Juan Fleites, vice president of the Cuba-Petroleo company. Fleites was detailing developments in the Cuban oil industry during the first Cuba-US trade round of 2004, attended by 400-plus businesspeople and authorities from 30 US states. He noted that Cuba owns 112,000 square kilometers of 59 blocs to a depth of 1000-3000 meters in that area and contracts have been signed with European countries for 10 of those blocs. He announced that, to date, 16 prospecting and drilling contracts have been signed with foreign companies, essentially from Canada, France and Spain. However, the blockade obstructs US companies from participating in Cuba's oil development. The principal oil drilling area of the island is located on the northwest coast and ranges from Habana province to beyond the city of Cárdenas in Matanzas province. (*Granma International*, 16/4/04)

**April 19:** An Argentinean Trade Mission formed by representatives of 37 companies met with its Cuban counterpart to strengthen and expand economic bilateral relations. South American businesspeople participated in an Economic Seminar held at the Hotel Nacional with the purpose of exploring business and commerce opportunities in the island. After that, they met in a one to one negotiating round that includes the signing of several commercial agreements. The Argentinean business mission is organized by the Direction of Export Promotion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of that country, headed by Jorge Lapsenson, director general of Commerce Strategy and includes Abraham Taleb, Argentinean ambassador to Cuba and Ruben Guillen, director general of the Banco de la Nacion. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/4/04)

**April 19:** Argentina's Banco de la Nación will open a branch in Havana to offer loans and consultancy services to the increasing number of Argentine businesspeople in Cuba, said officials with a delegation of businesspeople from the South American nation visiting the island. The bank will open branch "in a short time," said Rubén Guillén, head of the Bank. (*AP*, 19/4/04)

**April 19:** Telecom Italia will disburse \$50 million (41,6 million euros) to take part in the Cuban mobile telephone system. Until now, the Italian operator had participation only in the fixed sector with Cuban company ETECSA. The Cuban company announced the purchase of two cellular operators with a license for fixed and mobile offerings until 2019. ETECSA will pay \$185 million for these companies, while Telecom Italia will add \$50 million to maintain its equity interest of 27% in ETECSA. (*Bloomberg*, 19/4/04)

**April 19:** A drought in eastern Cuba has reduced the amount of cane available for milling as the harvest enters its final weeks, the country's top sugar reporter said, adding to the problems of a beleaguered industry already behind schedule. "The cane remaining in the five easternmost provinces is less than expected, due mainly to drought," Juan Varela Perez said during his daily radio spot dedicated to the harvest. Varela gave no further details, except to say that estimates for the other eight sugar-producing provinces remained above what was needed to meet their plans. Cane was drying up fast in central Camaguey province, also affected by drought, an industry source said. The official Granma International reported rainfall in the area was the lowest in a decade. (*Reuters*, 19/4/04)

**April 20:** The 9th International Alimexpo 2004 Fair begins in Havana with the participation of exhibitors of 160 companies from 16 countries. The event, taking place at the EXPOCUBA fair grounds, includes the participation of representatives of Cuban enterprises of the Food Industry, the Light Industry, the Agriculture Ministry and the Sugar Ministry interested in strengthening trade relations and carry out business with foreign companies. Alimexpo 2004 includes lectures on graphic techniques, integral food and special diets for people with certain dietetic requirements. Companies from France, Canada, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Chile, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Belgium, Dominican Republic, New Zealand, Czech Republic, China, Venezuela and Cuba are taking part in this exhibit. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/4/04)

**April 21:** Bárbara Castillo, minister of Domestic Trade (MINCIN), announced the reinstatement in May of the so-called "deregulated eggs" (which are not distributed as part of the ration card and are sold at market price). (*Cubamet*, 21/4/04)

**April 22:** Cuba said the tobacco harvest in western Pinar del Rio province, home of its highest quality leaf, was all but over at around 22,000 tonnes, ensuring supplies for its much sought after cigars. "Pinar del Rio met its plan for this year's tobacco harvest and is at the point of ending it," the country's official radio reported. Pinar del Rio's 2003 crop weighed in at around 17,000 tonnes. Official reports when the harvest began indicated the plan would insure enough tobacco for cigar production and to build up a reserve. The tobacco that goes into Cuban cigars comes exclusively from Pinar del Rio, except for 50 percent of the raper leaf grown in neighboring Havana province, which reported a bumper crop. (*Reuters*, 22/4/04)

**April 26:** Cuba is looking for an international distributor for two new varieties of coffee, which it expects to launch to the market under the name of its most well-known cigars. The Cohiba Atmosphere and the Montecristo Delelegend are high quality coffees from specially developed plantations with very little or no chemical fertilizer at all, according to representatives from the state-owned company Cubacafé. According to specialized sources, organic coffee is valued at 30% higher than varieties cultivated with chemicals. In spite of some recovery, the value of a pound of coffee (450 grams) is under 70 U.S. cents in the international market. (*Opciones*, 26/4/04)

**April 26:** Cuba is meeting restructured short-term debt payments to some governments, diplomats said, apparently using increased tourism and nickel revenues, as well as cash gleaned from recently imposed hard currency controls. But the same sources cautioned the effort was not sufficient to free the Communist nation from its status as one of the world's worst credit risks. A Japanese diplomat said Cuba had paid on time \$50 million in principal under a 2002 restructuring of \$120 million in short-term official debt. European diplomats said Havana was paying France's and Germany's restructured short-term debt on schedule too. Other European Union governments also reported some payments, though at times late and on an irregular basis, with Spain an exception and owed more than \$300 million in short-and medium-term trade cover. Most foreign and Cuban analysts said Cuba's foreign debt, excluding former communist countries, has increased from \$11 billion in 2001 to between \$13 billion and \$14 billion due to borrowing, accumulated interest, and a weaker dollar. (*Reuters*, 26/4/04)

**April 26:** Cuba's main hard currency earner, tourism, increased more than 13 percent in the first quarter, according to a government report. Top officials have told foreign bankers they expect nickel plus cobalt profits to be around \$400 million this year due to high international prices. Tourism generates more than 40 percent of Cuba's hard currency, or some \$2.1 billion in 2003, while nickel has replaced sugar as the top export earner. "The first three months of the year were very good, especially because tourism put in a strong showing on top of last year's record arrivals," said Juan Triana, head of Havana University's Center for the Study of the Cuban Economy. Most foreign and Cuban analysts expect Cuba's GDP to increase at least 3.5 percent this year, compared with 2.6 percent in 2003 and 1.1 percent in 2002. (*Reuters*, 26/4/04)

**April 27:** Iran is to export cars to Cuba, said Iran's ambassador to Havana Ahmad Edrisian in a meeting with Cuban Minister of Foreign Trade Raul de la Nuez in Havana. Edrisian said Iran is also to enter a venture with Cuba for production of shoes, basic materials for textiles and plastic bags. Nuez said his country is ready for any cooperation with Iran to upgrade trade with the Islamic state. (*IRNA*, 27/4/04)

**April 27:** Cuban tropical geographers are studying the Zapata marshland in southern Matanzas Province, one of the six internationally-declared Biosphere Reserves on the Island, to determine a managed development plan. Cuban Tropical Geography Institute specialists have preliminary results on an environmental and socio-economic history of the Zapata swamp, as well as an analysis of the natural and economic elements characteristic of the area. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/4/04)

**April 27:** Mexicana Airlines is increasing its promotion of flights to Havana and Varadero. According to Armando González, the regional director of the airlines, the company will step up its advertising in the coming months -- with the view to increase travel to the top two tourist destinations on the Caribbean island. During a news conference in Mexico City, Armando González noted that Mexicana Airlines moved more than 83,000 passengers on round-trip flights between Mexico and Cuba last year. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 27/4/04)

**April 28:** Resolution 11/2004 of the Cuban Ministry of Labour establishes that from October onwards no new licences—required for self-employment activities—will be issued on 40 different trades. The document indicates that those who already have a licence may continue their activities, but transfers from licence-holders to relatives will not be permitted nor new licences will be issued. (*BBC Mundo*, 28/4/04)

**April 27:** The Sixth Caribbean Annual Conference on Development of Sustainable Tourism takes place in Havana with the participation of 200 delegates to analyze aspects related to a balance between land development and underwater conservation. "Maintaining a Correct Balance - Meeting of Land and Sea," includes conferences, workshops and technical visits that begin in Old Havana, declared World Cultural Heritage in 1982 by the UN Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO). (*Prensa Latina*, 27/4/04)

**April 30:** Ciego de Avila province has introduced new Cuban agricultural exports, which have increased the island's presence in the international market, agriculture sources said. ASEMAG trading company expert, Jose Luis Tapia, told the press that his company has exported tomatoes, pimiento, papaya, aubergine, haricot and cucumber to Europe and Canada with good acceptance for the quality and presentation of the products. The expert said that the country is developing a variety of Neapolitan pumpkin in Ceballos town, 267 miles east of Havana. Farmers have obtained fruits of up to 189 pounds. The country is selling the pumpkin directly to Italy. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/4/04)

**April 30:** British tourists seeking Caribbean sun and beach have spurred the recovery of Cuba's tourism trade, which grew 13.6 percent in the first quarter of this year, the Cuban government said. British tourists have flocked to communist-run Cuba in growing numbers, and charter companies are increasing weekly flights from eight to 12 a week. Rebeca Jara, sales promotion director at Cuba's Ministry of Tourism, said British tourism grew 37 percent in the first quarter to 32,616 visitors, and became the fastest growing European market for Cuba in March, though still behind Canada Italy, Germany, France and Spain in overall numbers. British charter operators Monarch and Britannia are adding new weekly flights to Cuba this year, Jara said, and the first charter flight from Ireland operated by SunAir will arrive in Varadero, she said. (*Reuters*, 30/4/04)

### **Exile Community**

**April 1:** An exhibition hall in Salamanca, Spain, is kicking off the spring season with a 15-year retrospective of the most representative works of Cuban painter Jose Bedia, considered one of the Caribbean island's most prominent

contemporary artists. Born in Cuba, Bedia now lives in Miami. He was one of the most active members of the radical Volume I movement that profoundly influenced the post-revolutionary cultural trend on the island. "This is very evident in my work and has marked all my production," the artist said. (*EFE*, 1/4/04)

**April 2:** Reporters Without Borders - which champions freedom of the press - has invited several people to Montreal to discuss the issue of journalistic freedom in Cuba. The guests include Castro's daughter, Alina Fernández Castro. "At least we can try to keep those people alive by keeping them in the news," Fernandez said in a brief telephone interview from Miami, Florida., where she now lives in exile. "We have to take every opportunity to let people know about the situation (in Cuba)." Reporters Without Borders gave Cuba the dubious distinction of being the world's biggest prison for journalists, with 30 reporters behind bars to date. (*Montreal Post*, 2/4/04)

**April 5:** A group of anti Castro exiles is training a group of Venezuelans, including ex-military personnel, in Miami in case they resort to "belligerency" if the political crisis in their country is not resolved peacefully. The leader of the radical group Comandos F-4, Rodolfo Frómota, said to the press they have helped train Venezuelans in training camps located in Homestead and the Everglades. (*Notimex*, 5/4/04)

**April 7:** The Cuban government has confirmed that from June, Cubans living abroad will no longer need to apply for a visa to visit the Caribbean island. They will require a Cuban passport to visit the Communist-led state. The move, announced by Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, appears designed to increase tourism. (*BBC*, 8/4/04)

**April 18:** With George W. Bush and Democratic presidential hopeful John Kerry both campaigning in Miami, expectations are high among Cuban Americans that they will present some new, effective anti-Castro plans. The political stakes are high in South Florida, with Democrats and Republicans battling to win votes in the state's volatile Hispanic electorate. "Cuban Americans are hungry for bold and dramatic new messages," said Republican State Representative David Rivera, a critic of Bush's Cuba policy who says Cuban Americans are frustrated with hollow anti-Castro rhetoric. "President Bush should use this as an opportunity to begin to galvanize and motivate Cuban-American voters for the upcoming election." "I don't know how Kerry can repackage himself to the Cuban-American community and say he will be tougher on Castro than Bush," US Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen said. (*The Miami Herald*, 18/4/04)

**April 18:** Cuban American Democrat Roland Sanchez-Medina, a board member of the Cuban American National Foundation and the Cuban American Bar Association, is planning to meet with Democratic candidate John Kerry and advise him on Cuba issues. "I think [Kerry] is going to have to make some sort of statement with respect to Cuba," Sanchez-Medina said. "If he wants to get more of the Cuban-American vote than he currently has, he is going to have to take a stronger position. I think the time is becoming ripe." (*The Miami Herald*, 18/4/04)

**April 21:** A Washington-based Cuban-American organization has condemned the United States policy of embargo toward Cuba. The Cuban American Alliance Education Fund (CAAEEF) has demanded the end of the travel restrictions that prevent US citizens and Cuban-Americans from freely traveling to the neighboring country, and expressed its rejection of putting limits in remittances Cuban-Americans send to their relatives in Cuba. The CAAEEF is also demanding the reopening of immigration talks between US and Cuba, Washington unilaterally suspended early this year. (*Prensa Latina*, 21/4/04)

**April 21:** The Cuban government and exiles in Miami clashed over the prison terms of six to eight years handed down by a Panamanian judge to four exiles convicted on charges linked to an alleged plot to assassinate Fidel Castro. Cubans in Miami called for Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso to pardon the men, jailed since their arrest in 2000, while others accused her of cozying up to Castro. Miriam Novo, 52, wife of defendant Guillermo Novo, told the press that she was only half surprised by the verdict. "I expected absolution. There was never any proof," she said. But, she added, part of her expected it. "We have always had faith in the justice system of democracies, but in the case of Panama you

can see that the Cuban regime has used intimidation, blackmail and bribery," she added. ``Castro's arm is long." "This sentence has been bought and paid for by the government of Cuba," said Hector Fabian, member of a committee supporting the Panama four. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/4/04)

**April 22:** Two days after a Panamanian judge convicted four Cuban exiles in a plot to kill Fidel Castro, hundreds of supporters rallied and raised funds for what has become a cause célèbre in part of the exile community. More than 400 people packed the Renaissance Ballroom in West Miami for the \$100-a-plate dinner. Among them: Francisco "Pepe" Hernández, president of the Cuban American National Foundation, sharing a table with Miami Commissioner Angel González. Nearby sat members of Brigade 2506, veterans of the Bay of Pigs invasion. Also making the rounds was former Miami Commissioner Humberto Hernández, who was removed from office and convicted of voter and mortgage fraud. He accompanied his father, Humberto Sr., a Bay of Pigs veteran. Prominent developer Mario Ferro donated reprints of works by Cuban artist Cundo Bermúdez for an auction. The four Cubans convicted -- including three from Miami -- have relied on local donations to support their legal fight, said Santiago Alvarez, a local developer and longtime supporter. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/4/04)

**April 26:** The Spanish-language radio station in the US city Miami that crank called Fidel Castro faces a \$US4,000 (\$A5,450) fine, according to federal regulators. The station, El Zol 95.7, duped Castro into believing that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez was calling to seek help in tracking down a suitcase containing secret documents he said he lost during a trip to Argentina. The Federal Communications Commission has recommended that the station be fined \$US4,000 (\$A5,450) for broadcasting a telephone conversation without notifying the other party. (*The Age.Com*, *Europa Press*, 26/4/04)

**April 30:** Because of José Ariel Contreras's defection, Cuban government officials have not allowed his wife and two daughters to leave Cuba. Contreras, through his interpreter Leo Astacio, told the press after pitching six strong innings in a 5-1 victory over the Oakland Athletics that he had arranged Nicaraguan visas for his wife, Miriam Murillo Flores, and their two daughters, 11-year-old Naylan and 3-year-old Naylenis, but Cuban government officials have not granted them permission to leave. "I call them every day," Contreras said, alluding to his wife and daughters. "They're fine, they're healthy." According to Contreras, there is a five-year waiting period before his family will be allowed to leave Cuba. "I have to wait three and a half more years," he said. "It's already been a year and a half since I left." (*The New York Times*, 30/4/04)

## **Foreign Affairs**

**April 1:** Angolan Foreign Minister Joao Bernardo de Miranda is scheduled to meet with Cuban authorities and tour several sites of interests as part of his official visit to Cuba. The Angolan guest and his delegation met with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, who highlighted the long standing bilateral friendship and solidarity links. Bernardo de Miranda layed a wreath on the monument in Havana Colón cemetery dedicated to the 2,106 Cubans who died in the defense of Angola. (*Prensa Latina*, 1/4/04)

**April 1:** President Vicente Fox invited his Cuban counterpart, Fidel Castro Ruz, to attend the next European Union-Latin America and the Caribbean Summit, announced Mexican Ambassador to the island. Roberta Lajous informed a group of journalists that she had personally delivered the invitation for Castro to attend the III Summit of heads of state and government of the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean in Guadalajara, Jalisco. (*Notimex*, 1/4/04)

**April 1:** Honduras said it would sponsor an international resolution calling for a human rights investigation in Cuba -- the harshest position the Central American country has taken since it restored diplomatic ties with the communist-run island three years ago. The decision was announced amid accusations by Cuba that Honduras bowed to US pressure in exchange for a promise of additional economic aid. Honduran President Ricardo Maduro avoided responding to the allegation during an impromptu news conference with Honduran news media. (*AP*, 1/4/04)

**April 1:** Dutch Ambassador to Cuba Wieck Wildeboer has been "frozen" for eight months. Except for that one hour when he presented his credentials. "It is rather frustrating," Wildeboer says. "All my requests to speak to officials are rejected or there is no reply." Persistent European protests over the treatment of Cuban dissidents have gone down completely the wrong way with the Fidel Castro regime. On the order of the commander who has been in charge for 45 years on the largest Caribbean island, no European diplomat is being spoken to. "The Cubans have dug a pit for themselves, and they can no longer come out of it because the leader has forbidden that," says EU ambassador in Havana Sven Kuehn von Burgsdorff. "They [dissidents in jail] are people who wish to have a chance to make known a different opinion quite peacefully. It is unacceptable to shut up dissidents and treat them as criminals," Von Burgsdorff says. (*Rotterdam NRC Handelsblad*, 1/4/04)

**April 2:** Jannet Rivero del Toro, activist of the Cuban Democratic Directorate, spoke before the UN Commission of Human Rights in Geneva. In a very tense atmosphere, Del Toro denounced the Cuban government's violations to the civil and political rights of the Cuban people, topic being debated presently at the Commission. This is the second time that Rivero De Toro intervenes at this session. "The Cuban government still has not subscribed to the Civil and Political Rights International Agreement, recommendation addressed to them in numerous occasions by this Commission", Rivero Del Toro pointed out. "The Cuban people have right to the rights. We have the responsibility before the world of not remaining silent, and of requesting from all the countries and democratic institutions solidarity in the fight for the human rights of the Cuban people." (*Puente Informativo*, 2/4/04)

**April 3:** Fiji hopes to establish human resource and sports capacity development through its bilateral relations with Cuba. These are among key areas to be pursued as Fiji's Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) and the country's first Ambassador to Cuba, Colonel Isikia Savua. Mr Savua was in Havana recently and presented his diplomatic credentials. Mr Savua said he would also pursue relations in trade, sugar, tourism and technical cooperation. (*BBC*, 3/4/04)

**April 4:** Angolan Foreign minister, João Miranda, considered as fruitful the official talks he held in Havana (Cuba), with his local counterpart, Felipe Perez Roque. Speaking at a press conference, the head of the Angolan diplomacy said that under the existing bilateral cooperation, more than 200 Angolan students are currently attending Cuba universities, whereas more than 400 Cuban expatriates are working in Angola as professionals in various areas. (*Angola Press*, 4/4/04)

**April 5:** Cuban authorities ordered a Mexican businessman jailed without bail while investigators continue the probe his alleged swindling of the Mexico City government. Mexican fugitive Carlos Agustin Ahumada will remain in jail pending an investigation by local authorities, states an official document. Havana District Attorney Luis Lorenzo Palenzuela specifies the precautionary measure was adopted by his office after studying the case file that includes information provided by INTERPOL and the Mexican Embassy in Havana. The text signed by Palenzuela confirms that the businessman gave false information on his immigration declaration upon arrival at the Caribbean Island, and was detained after receiving a detention request from INTERPOL. (*EFE, Prensa Latina*, 5/4/04)

**April 5:** Delegates from 8 countries attend the 5th International Social Work Workshop in Camaguey's Horizontes Hotel, at 530 km (329.3 miles) away from the Cuban capital. In the 5th edition, investigators and professionals from Canada, Mexico, Italy, Peru, Ecuador, Puerto Rico and Cuba take part. (*Prensa Latina*, 5/4/04)

**April 5:** The leftist Unión Democrática (UD) party said that Honduran President Ricardo Maduro and his government "are mouthpieces for the war-mongering will of (US President George W.) Bush." In an open letter addressed to Maduro, the UD expressed outrage over his administration's decision to present before the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva a resolution criticizing the regime in Havana. "We are convinced that this is not a sovereign initiative from the Honduran state, but that you and your government are simply mouthpieces for the war-mongering will of Bush, whose efforts to break the Cuban people and their resolve have failed, as have those of his predecessors," said the statement. (*EFE*, 5/4/04)

**April 6:** Honduras tabled a motion urging Cuba to guarantee freedom of expression and religion at the main United Nations human rights forum, with the apparent blessing of the United States. The text of the motion to the UN Commission on Human Rights also called on Havana's communist authorities to hold a "fruitful dialogue" with Cuban political groups and thinkers to develop democratic institutions and civil liberties. It backed citizens' rights to due process and deplored the heavy sentences handed down against some 75 dissidents rounded up a year ago, but stopped short of demanding their release. Peru, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Australia and the Czech Republic have so far joined Honduras as official sponsors of the motion. Diplomats said that although the United States had not yet signed up as a co-sponsor, it had made clear it backed the motion and would support it, along with European Union countries on the body. (*Reuters*, 6/4/04)

**April 6:** Puppeteers from Spain, Mexico and France are attending Cuba's 6th International Puppet Theater Workshop, at which French playwright Jean Marie Binoche is scheduled to deliver a lecture on the role of masks in the theater. Binoche's play "The Revenge of the Daisies" is being staged at the festival taking place in the city of Matanzas, 100 kilometers (60 miles) east of Havana. This year the workshop, which also features puppeteers from other Cuban provinces, includes a tribute to the children's puppet theater group "Papalote" on the occasion of its 42nd anniversary, and to its director, Rene Fernandez Santana. (*EFE*, 6/4/04)

**April 6:** A total of 78 French members of parliament and senators have joined the sponsorship campaign of Cuban political prisoners, launched by member organizations of *Colectivo Solidaridad Cuba Libre*. The parliamentarians and senators have sent letters to Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin, and to Cuban Ambassador in Paris, Eumelio Caballero, expressing concern over the health and prison conditions of their protegés and demanding their immediate release. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 6/4/04)

**April 7:** In a session marred by shouting matches between lawmakers and the forcible clearing of the galleries, Chile's lower house voted to urge the government to support a condemnation of Cuba in the UN Human Rights Commission. The motion passed by a vote of 67-8, with 14 abstentions. The resolution was introduced by the Christian Democrats, putting them at odds with the Socialists, their partners in the ruling coalition. Lawmakers from the two parties exchanged fierce barbs in the debate, accusing each other of inconsistency concerning human rights. (*EFE*, 7/4/04)

**April 7:** Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, refused versions about the possibility of an arrangement between Cuba and the EU in the near future. "There are no conditions to talk about that possibility", Pérez Roque said. "Relations have deteriorated because there are European countries that prefer to maintain relations with factions paid by Washington than with the Cuban government", he added. (*EFE*, 7/4/04)

**April 7:** The Attorney General's Office of the Republic of Mexico (PGR) presented Cuba four requests for judicial assistance that seeks to expand information in the case of businessman Carlos Ahumada, who is temporarily in detention on the island. The Coordinator of Foreign Relations of the PGR, Miguel Angel González Félix, delivered the requests to officials of the Cuban Ministry of Justice. (*AFP*, 8/4/04)

**April 8:** Hundreds of people participated in a two-hour interactive dialogue over the Internet with Cuba's Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, who responded to questions on the most varied of issues related to the island's realities

during "Cuba, human beings with rights," as the forum was dubbed. As soon as the session began, a team set up in an office at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs received more than 20 questions, and proceeded to relay Pérez Roque's answers. "It is very intense, but I think it is a useful effort. The participation has been massive; more than 800 cybernauts joined in, and we have responded to nearly 50 questions," he added. (*Granma Internacional*, 9/4/04)

**April 8:** New Venezuelan Ambassador to Cuba Adan Chavez Frias said in Havana that his country is carrying out important social programs with good results with the support of the Cuban people and government. Adan Chavez refused to go into detail concerning the agreement under which Venezuela sells Cuba some 53,000 barrels of oil a day, but insisted "it is false that Venezuela is giving away oil to Cuba." The new ambassador mentioned the work being done by some 8,000 Cuban doctors in Venezuela's poorest regions, which he said is benefiting 8 million people. He also pointed out that some 9,000 Venezuelan students had received scholarships to study in Cuba, most of them in medicine. In addition, Chavez announced that Venezuela's Banco Exterior will open an office in Havana in June and noted that the value of goods and services traded between the two countries has risen to some \$1 billion a year. (*Prensa Latina, EFE*, 8/4/04)

**April 8:** An editorial in Granma newspaper unmasks an attempt by former Mexican Foreign Minister, Jorge Castañeda, to capitalize on the crisis in his country over the "Ahumada Case" to mislead his compatriots and attack his political adversaries. In the article titled "Another Low Blow from Castaneda" the daily accuses the ex-official of suggesting that Havana is using the case of Mexican businessman Carlos Agustin Ahumada, arrested by Havana on request of INTERPOL and the Mexican Embassy, to obtain a favourable vote from that country at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/4/04)

**April 8:** Cuba declined to negotiate with Honduras their respective maritime border in the Caribbean Sea, said Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque in a telephone statement from Havana. "Cuba will not receive the Honduran delegation which is ready to travel to Havana to initiate the negotiations on the maritime border," said Pérez Roque. (*Notimex*, 8/4/04)

**April 8:** In a press conference at Hotel Occidental Miramar, Alicia Alonso, Cuban National Ballet director, highlighted the ties of brotherhood binding Cuba and Spain while she called to the 26 th Festival La Huella de España, to take place in Havana. The ballerina stated that these events take place in Havana, and she expects something like Las Huellas de Cuba festival to take place in Spain in a near future. The 26 th Festival includes Cuban companies only. Spanish companies are not expected to attend. (*Prensa Latina, Granma*, 8/4/04)

**April 8:** French playwright Jean-Marie Binoche, famous for his work with masks and productions for adults, travelled to Cuba to participate in a dance event and defended Cuba's artistic endeavours. Binoche's presence is the main attraction of the 9 th International Encounter of Dance in Urban Landscape "Moving City", which takes place in the island's capital. (*AP*, 8/4/04)

**April 9:** Journalists participating in the official Roundtable TV Program presented aspects of the Cuban "battle of ideas" to unveil the untruth of the anti-Cuban resolution presented by Honduras in Geneva and sponsored by US. The Cuban journalists recalled the pressures, threats and blackmail in UN Human Rights Commission by the Bush administration to accomplish their goals recruiting governments to vote against Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/4/04)

**April 11:** Honduras President Ricardo Maduro said that he himself wrote the resolution asking Cuba to authorize a visit of the UN's High Commission for Human Rights - and not someone from the United States government as has been charged. Maduro was answering critics from across the political spectrum who claimed that the United States had handed him the text - in English - to be presented to the UN High Commission for Human Rights in Geneva. "I wrote the resolution myself," the chief executive told journalists. He added that this would be the third time that the (Honduran) government backed "exactly the same position". "This resolution is almost identical to the one I voted for

last year and the year before. It was written here, it is proudly Honduran, because with it we defend human rights," Maduro said. "If defending human rights is servile, then I'll go on defending them and anyone can call me what he wants to," he said. (*EFE*, 11/4/04)

**April 11:** Some 200 representatives from 56 Spanish associations and groups which support President Fidel Castro's government, expressed their support of the island and denounced "the United States' manoeuvres in trying to condemn" the human rights situation in the Caribbean nation at the (United Nations) Human Rights Commission in Geneva. (*Europa Press*, 12/4/04)

**April 11:** A demonstration of 10,000 Cubans in Havana condemned the role of the Honduran government when it presented a resolution against Cuba at the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC). On behalf of the rest of the Cuban people, many representatives from the municipality of San Miguel del Padron pointed at US as the real author of the resolution in Geneva in an Open Tribune, a becoming habitual massive activity in Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/4/04)

**April 12:** Mexico's vote at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights could be the difference between a free Cuba and a Cuba invaded by U.S. forces, said Cuban Ambassador to Mexico, Jorge Bolaños. The diplomat said it would be sufficient for Cuba if Mexico would abstained from supporting a resolution that Honduras will present by "request" from the United States. (*El Sol de México*, 11/4/04)

**April 12:** Dr. Peggy Mc Evoy, representative of the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Medicuba-Switzerland, said the health care results in the Cuban western province of Matanzas sets an example in preventive work against AIDS-HIV. Mc Evoy is visiting Matanzas to check how an agreement signed two years ago between her NGO and the Cuban health authorities is moving along. Medicuba-Switzerland -based in Zurich, Switzerland- created several departments in the district of Jaguey Grande, Calimete and Colon to accomplish preventive actions and train activists to carry out this task. (*Prensa Latina*, 12/4/04)

**April 13:** Chile's Socialists urged the coalition government headed by one of their number, Ricardo Lagos, to abstain on a vote to condemn Cuba before the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. Announcement of the request was made by Senator Ricardo Nuñez, chairman of the Foreign Relations Commission of the Socialist Party, which is part of the coalition that has governed Chile since 1990. (*EFE*, 12/4/04)

**April 12:** Fidel Castro said the events that took place in Venezuela April 11 through 13, 2002, were sad, glorious, unforgettable and historic, Granma newspaper highlighted. The statesman also underlined how important the education and social programs now in progress in Venezuela are because, he said, people cannot be tricked by propaganda when they have acquired sufficient culture. In his wide-ranging discussion encompassing Venezuelan, Cuban, and international issues, the Cuban leader also discussed the US election campaign, in which candidates spend many millions of dollars in propaganda. He also stressed his recognition of the ethical behavior of the US people when they know the truth. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/4/04)

**April 13:** Argentine Ambassador to the UN Human Rights Commission, Alfredo Chiaradia, stated in Geneva that his country will abstain on the US promoted anti-Cuba resolution as it did in 2003. President Kirchner maintains the stance of his predecessor Eduardo Duhalde, which broke a decade of votes against Cuba by Presidents Carlos Menem (1989-1999) and Fernando de la Rúa (1999-2001). (*Prensa Latina*, 13/4/04)

**April 13:** The World Medical Association is pressing the Cuban Government for information on four physicians and two dentists who have been in prison in Cuba for the past two years for human rights activities. The WMA is urging its 80 national medical association members to write to their governments and to the European Commission requesting them to put pressure on the Cuban government to disclose information about what, if any, trials the six are facing, the

exact nature of their sentences and to ask for their fair and humane treatment in prison. Dr Delon Human, secretary general of the WMA, said: We are particularly concerned about one of the six, Dr Oscar Elias Biscet, who has been in poor health, and this has been exacerbated by his imprisonment in an underground dungeon.' The other five are Dr. Marcelo Cano Rodriguez, Dr. José Luis Garcia Paneque, Dr. Luis Milàn Fernández and the two dentists, Alfredo Manuel Pulido Lopez and Ricardo Enrique Silva Gual. (*WMA Press Release*, 13/4/04)

**April 13:** The President of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) Yasser Arafat thanked the Cuban people for their support and solidarity in a letter addressed to Fidel Castro. The PNA Vice Information Minister Ahmad Sabouh, who hand-delivered the letter, praised Cuba for what he called its principled defence of Palestine in all international forums, including the International Court of Justice in The Hague where the subject of Israel's so called 'Wall of Shame' was discussed recently. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 14/4/04)

**April 14:** The Mexican government denied the allegation that the United States exerted pressure on Mexico to prompt its support for a resolution to condemn Cuba in the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. Agustin Gutierrez Canet, the government's international press director, told the press that there is no pressure. (*People's Daily Online*, 14/4/04)

**April 15:** The UN Human Rights Commission condemned Cuba for its spring 2003 crackdown that sent 75 peaceful dissidents, mostly democracy advocates and independent journalists, to prison for terms averaging 20 years. The resolution presented by Honduras passed narrowly, by a vote of 22-to-21, with 10 abstentions. Most Latin American countries represented on the panel agreed to censure the Cuban government, with Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru and sponsor Honduras voting for the resolution. Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay abstained. With the exception of the Dominican Republic, Paraguay and Honduras, which were not on the commission last year, Latin American countries stuck to the positions they took in 2003. Non-governmental organizations considered the resolution, with its moderate language, too soft on the wave of arrests in Cuba last year. The resolution said that Cuba "should refrain from adopting measures which could jeopardize the fundamental rights, the freedom of expression and the right to due process of its citizens." It added that it "deplores the events which occurred last year in Cuba," referring to the sentencing of the 75 dissidents. It also urges the Cuban Government to cooperate with the UN's special rapporteur for Cuba, French jurist Christine Chanet. (*EFE, AP, Reuters*, 15/4/04)

**April 15:** Within minutes of the vote being passed in Geneva, Cuba rejected it. Describing the resolution as "ridiculous", Cuba's Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said that his government would not adhere to the commission's key request that a human rights investigator be allowed into the country. "Cuba rejects the spurious resolution approved in Geneva and would not abide by any of its stipulations", he said. Cuba co-operates with the international community but not when it is discriminated against, Pérez Roque added. Mexico's UN vote against Cuba on the human rights front earned it a reproach from Havana. Pérez Roque said that Mexico's vote made the resolution pass. [[Press Conference by Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister](#)] (*BBC, EFE, Radio Habana Cuba*, 15/4/04)

**April 15:** The beating by Cuban officials of a member of a nongovernmental organization at the United Nations in Geneva should be considered a criminal act for which the Cuban government must be censured, Freedom House said. After the United Nations Commission on Human Rights narrowly passed a resolution today critical of Cuba, members of Cuba's governmental delegation attacked Frank Calzon, executive director of the Washington-based Center for a Free Cuba. The attack took place inside the United Nations building in Geneva. Witnesses said a Cuban delegate punched Mr. Calzon, knocking him unconscious. UN guards reportedly protected him from further assault by additional members of the Cuban delegation. The attack occurred shortly after the Commission passed a resolution critical of Cuba's human rights record. (*EFE*, 15/4/04)

**April 15:** Mexican President Vicente Fox defended his administration's support of a resolution criticizing Cuba's human rights record Thursday, saying it was a vote "in favor of a cause, not against a nation." "Mexico has a firm

commitment with democracy and human rights," Fox said at a public event during a visit to his central home state of Guanajuato. "This is about a vote in favor of a cause not against a nation that has always deserved and will continue to deserve our respect and support," Fox said. He added that the decision was "not based on political or circumstantial considerations." "On the contrary, our vote in favor of the resolution for the defense of human rights was a vote in keeping with our principles," the president said in a speech broadcast live on Mexican news media outlets. (AP, 15/4/04)

**April 16:** Grenada Foreign Affairs Minister Elvin Nimrod of the ruling New National Party government has called on the United States to lift the over 40 year old economic blockade against Cuba. Addressing a Cuban delegation attending a seventh joint commission on collaboration, the Minister said that Grenadians once again join with the overwhelming majority of countries of the world in calling for the immediate and unconditional lifting by the United States of these harsh sanctions it imposed on the Caribbean neighbour for over four decades now. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/4/04)

**April 17:** Cuba ratified that it would not obey the US-imposed anti-Cuban resolution at the UN Human Rights Commission, in a rally held in Yara municipality, in the province of Granma. Revolution's commanders Juan Almeida and Guillermo Garcia, two important figures of the Cuban revolutionary process, participated in the act. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/4/04)

**April 17:** The Cubans -- part of the country's 525-member medical mission here -- treated more than 400 Haitians who had sustained deep gashes from machete attacks, bullet wounds or burns from being doused with gasoline and set on fire, when Haiti's political crisis spiraled into massive bloodshed. "Hellish," is how some of the Cubans describe February 29, when President Jean-Bertrand Aristide left the country and his angry supporters roamed the streets on a murderous rampage. "In my capacity as a doctor it was the worst day I've lived," Dr. Héctor Torres Nuñez, 39, said of the carnage. "By noon the injured started to arrive and we worked almost into the evening in what became a makeshift hospital in the courtyard." Even before that day, the Cuban doctors had won the love and respect of many poor Haitians who now seek them out for medical care or drop by to say hello. "I'm very happy with them," said Marie-Lourdes Pierre, a nurse at the overcrowded general hospital in Port-au-Prince. "Every time you call them, no matter what time, they come. The patients like them." (*The Miami Herald*, 17/4/04)

**April 18:** About 45 MBA candidates from the Richard Ivey School of Business in London, Ontario, will take a course in capitalism to countries in Eastern Europe that have embraced free-market economics only in the last decade. Some will also travel to Cuba. For the third year, the project will send Ivey students to three universities in Cuba, building on a relationship the University of Western Ontario has forged with a school in Holguín. The Caribbean island is "a very, very different stage in the developmental process than even Eastern Europe was 10 years ago," says Krista Pettit, 31, a co-director of the project. "In Eastern Europe, the wall had fallen and they were on their way, whereas in Cuba the wall has not fallen." Cuban students, for example, are surprisingly well versed in business theory, says Pettit, but "the application of the theory is still very, very foreign to them." In discussions of cases, she added, "you'd often get somebody in class putting up their hand, saying, "That's what happens when you have a capitalist system. You can't really trust it." (*The Toronto Star*, 18/4/04)

**April 19:** Cuban authorities detained an assistant to Carlos Ahumada—a businessman who's also under arrest in Cuba to be extradited, informed the Mexican Foreign Ministry. A Mexican citizen, Antonio Martínez Ocampo was arrested in Havana last April 5 in relation to current investigation on the Ahumada case, adds a communiqué from the Ministry. [[Nota Diplomática del Gobierno Cubano al Gobierno Mexicano](#)] (AP, 19/4/04)

**April 19:** Cuba denounced that terrorism of State is being practiced by Israel with the help of modern and lethal weapons, knowing no limits. Cuban ambassador to the UN, Orlando Requeijo, condemned the most recent assassination committed by Israeli aviation on the person of the Palestine Hamas resistance movement leader, Abdelaziz Rantissi. According to the diplomat the new extrajudicial execution is added to an increasing and

wideranging Israeli portfolio of aggressions and violations of the most basic human rights and physical and moral damages to the Palestinian people. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/4/04)

**April 20:** Jamaica and Cuba will sign an agreement pledging greater cooperation against drug trafficking through the Caribbean, a Jamaican official said. The memorandum of understanding will allow for intelligence sharing and joint training for anti-drug operations, National Security Ministry spokesman Donovan Nelson said without giving details. The agreement will also set a framework for prosecuting transnational crimes like money laundering and counterfeiting, Nelson added. (*AP*, 20/4/04)

**April 20:** In a press conference, Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, said that the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva has become “a pathetic scenario” in which “third world countries, traditionally accused by the richest countries, have now become accusers.” The Cuban Minister was referring to debates taking place about a resolution presented by Cuba against human rights violations in US Naval Base in Guantánamo. [[Press Conference by the Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister](#)] (*World Data Service*, 20/4/04)

**April 21:** A third figure linked to Mexico City corruption scandals has been detained in Cuba, Mexico's Foreign Relations Department announced. The department said in a news release that Cuba had reported that Enrique Arcipreste, who is accused here of fabricating documents to force a government payment, was detained in Havana and was being held at a security headquarters there. Cuban officials were already holding two other figures - businessman Carlos Ahumada and Antonio Martínez Ocampo. (*AP*, 21/4/04)

**April 21:** "No government or transitory action can affect the bonds between the peoples, legislators and NGOs [Mexico-Cuba]", Cuban Parliament Vice President Jaime Crombet said concerning current strained bilateral relations. In an interview with the press during the Inter-Parliamentary Union meeting, the legislator recognized that Mexico's submission to the United States in the vote against Cuba at the UN Human Rights Commission has injured bilateral relations and that immediate prospects are not promising. The significance of this vote, Crombet explained, is that the US uses this policy to justify its 45-year blockade on the Island and, to judge by a series of declarations by Bush, even a possible armed invasion. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/4/04)

**April 22:** Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs, Felipe Pérez Roque, accused the European Union of being an accomplice of the human rights violations inside the US military base in Guantánamo. According to Cuba, the allegation is based on the EU's support of the United States and opposition of a Cuba-sponsored draft resolution on the issue at the UN Commission of Human Rights in Geneva. (*Europa Press*, 22/4/04)

**April 22:** Cuba's highest profile dissident wrote to both the new Spanish prime minister and the man who held that post until mid-April, thanking the latter for his staunch support for persecuted human rights activists on the island and telling the current leader, a Socialist, he hopes the support will continue. In a letter, Cuban dissident Oswaldo Paya said he trusts Zapatero will continue showing solidarity with the opposition movement on the island and thanked Aznar for his support. Paya - head of the Christian Liberation Movement and winner of the 2002 Sakharov Prize, Europe's highest recognition for human rights advocates - sent a letter to Zapatero and one to Aznar. "We hope that Spain, which has taken a new step within its democratic continuity, will continue fostering solidarity with the Cuban people," Paya said in his letter to Zapatero. "Those of us inside Cuba who fight for peaceful changes toward democracy and respect for human rights, many of whom are unjustly imprisoned, want to see the historic ties between Spain and Cuba find fulfillment in friendly relations that reach" throughout society, said the letter. (*EFE*, 22/4/04)

**April 22:** Cuba's planned trial of a blind human rights lawyer, along with nine other dissidents and independent journalists, on charges of “disrespect for authority” demonstrates a continuing pattern of political repression, Human Rights Watch said. Human Rights Watch has learned that the trial of the 10 defendants is scheduled to be held on April 27. Juan Carlos González Leiva, a blind lawyer, is the president of the Cuban Foundation for Human Rights

(Fundación Cubana de Derechos Humanos). He and most of the other defendants have been held in pretrial detention in eastern Holguín province for more than two years. "The upcoming trial is a travesty," said Joanne Mariner, deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Americas Division. "The defendants face criminal charges that clearly violate their basic rights to freedom of expression." (*Human Rights Watch*, 22/4/04)

**April 22:** With the adoption of a resolution on the situation in Cuba after its emergency debate, the European Parliament again calls on the Cuban authorities to immediately release all political detainees. It is pleased to note the release of Julio Antonio Valdes for health reasons. It is waiting for the Cuban authorities to decree a new de facto moratorium on the death penalty. Parliament calls for utter compliance with the constitutional process, which consists in collecting signatures in the context of the Varela project on the basis of Article 88 of the Constitution, which authorises citizens to present a legislative initiative as soon as 10,000 signatures, or more, have been collected. It unreservedly restates the EU's commitment and willingness concerning aid for the Cuban population. The Parliament invites all Community institutions to send an open invitation to Oswaldo Paya Sardinias, Sakharov Prizewinner 2002, and calls on the Cuban authorities to no longer prevent him travelling to Europe. [[Political Prisoners in Cuba](#)] (*Agence Europe*, 22/4/04)

**April 23:** The President of Chile, Ricardo Lagos, said in Santiago that his government would support Cuba in its presentation in the UN Human Rights Commission of a request for investigation of alleged human rights violations in the US military base in Guantánamo. The Chilean leader indicated that after knowing of the Cuban proposal, "the Chilean government considered and studied it and decided to support it as it contained a legal issue. Cuba knows it could count on the Chilean vote. We are a small but honourable nation, and the Chilean foreign policy is decided here, in the Palacio de La Moneda (seat of the Chilean government), nowhere else." (*Europa Press*, 23/4/04)

**April 23:** Several Cuban dissidents praised new Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero's statement in support of democratic change in Cuba. "Fidel Castro's regime must open up to democracy," Zapatero said in an interview published in the Madrid daily *El Mundo*. "All my communication with Cuba and Fidel Castro will point in that direction." According to Oswaldo Paya, leader of the Christian Liberation Movement and winner of the 2002 European Parliament's Sakharov Prize, this "expression of commitment to Cuban democracy is a demonstration of true respect for the Cuban people and is the essence of what relations between our nations should be." (*EFE*, 23/4/04)

**April 23:** Peruvian organizations and personages held a workshop on Cuba's respect for human rights, in an expression of solidarity with the Island and condemnation of the US blockade, organizers said. More than 500 people attended the two central conferences in Trujillo given by Cesar Vellejo University's Dean Sigifredo Orbeago and the Cuban Embassy Political Consul Eneida Sanchez. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/4/04)

**April 24:** Cuba considers "positive" its participation at the 60th Session of the UN Human Rights Commission, and applauded 12 of the resolutions passed by the 53-nation body. Juan Antonio Fernandez, chief of the Cuban delegation, said his country's support for those resolutions, as well as its motion on the arbitrary detentions at the US Naval Base in Guantánamo, reinforced the island nation's prestige at the international body. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 24/4/04)

**April 25:** Dominica's Commonwealth Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Planning and Caribbean Affairs, Roosevelt Skerrit, is beginning an official visit to Cuba to further expand trade and economic relations. Skerrit will participate in several official activities including the 3rd Meeting of the Cuba-Dominica Joint Commission and will visit sites of political, economic and social interest. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/4/04)

**April 26:** Former International Chess Federation world champion Anatoli Karpov is in Cuba and is expected to participate in a gigantic simultaneous chess game at the close of the Cuban Sports Olympiad. (*Prensa Latina*, 26/4/04)

**April 26:** Special recognition was given to members of the Cuban delegation to the 60th session of the UN Human Rights Commission that concluded recently in Geneva, Switzerland. Cuban Foreign Ministry officials greeted the delegates during a ceremony held in Havana. Cuba showed the enormous strength of the Revolution at the United Nations Human Rights, said Cuban Communist Party Political Bureau member Jose Ramon Balaguer at the ceremony. He said the voting results (22-21 with 10 abstentions) showed what can be done in a world militarily, politically and economically dominated by one powerful country. Balaguer stressed the strength of Cuba's positions based on principle, capable of defeating the US Empire. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 26/4/04)

**April 27:** Dominica's Prime Minister Rossevelt Skerrit visited the Latin American School of Medicine and the Computer Science School in Havana on the second day of his official visit to Cuba, geared to strengthen bilateral ties. Fidel Castro and other Cuban authorities welcomed Skerrit and his delegation and held the first round of talks. The visitor also presided over the opening session of the 3rd Cuba-Dominica Mixed Commission. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/4/04)

**April 27:** Cuba and Ethiopia have signed an agreement in Havana to strengthen bilateral legislative cooperation. Participants in the signing agreement ceremony included Cuban Politburo member Esteban Lazo Hernandez, the Vice President of the Cuban Parliament Jaime Crombet Hernandez-Baquero and the Speaker of the Ethiopian House of Representatives Dawit Johannes. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/4/04)

**April 27:** Cuba has requested Honduras to co-sponsor a new draft resolution for the United Nations to inspect the U.S. Guantánamo base where over 600 detainees accused of terrorism are held, said diplomatic sources. Cuba hopes the motion be discussed in July or August in the context of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), or during the next UN General Assembly in November, said the Cuban Ambassador in Tegucigalpa. (*Europa Press*, 27/4/04)

**April 28:** Cuba's best-known opposition leader said that a former Castro comrade-in-arms who later turned on the regime is speaking like "a spokesman for the regime's vile position" in his comments on last year's arrests and convictions of 75 dissidents. The public spat between Oswaldo Paya, leader of the Christian Liberation Movement, and one-time revolutionary "comandante" Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo is the result of a communique released by the latter. The Spanish-born Gutierrez Menoyo accused Paya of "opportunism" for backing the policy toward Cuba of Spain's former conservative Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar and then writing a letter to his successor, Socialist Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, expressing hope for continued support for dissidents by the new administration. Paya, for his part, accused Gutierrez Menoyo of "lying" and "joining forces with the regime, accusing us with the same arguments that were used to unjustly sentence our 75 brothers," alluding to the prison sentences averaging 20 years handed down to dissidents in April of last year. Gutierrez Menoyo "has become a spokesman for the regime's vile position by repeating the same false arguments that were used to unjustly condemn the prisoners of the Cuban Spring," he added. (*EFE*, 28/4/04)

**April 28:** Cuba has ratified to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) its will to help train experts on nuclear security from nations with less development on this field. The IAEA Board of Directors in Vienna, Austria, welcomed this recent proposal, said Cuban Angelina Diaz, president of the Nuclear Energy and Cutting-Edge Technologies Agency (AENTA) who attended a meeting of this organization. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/4/04)

**April 28:** The Mexican media gave wide coverage to the Cuban decision to deport the businessman of Argentinean origin established in Havana, Carlos Ahumada, summoned by Mexican courts. Radio stations read the whole text of the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs communique where the reasons leading to the decision are explained. Secretary of the Interior of Mexico, Santiago Creel, expressed satisfaction Wednesday for the Cuban decision to deport Ahumada. Creel told the program Monitor during a visit to the state of Tlaxcala that if Cuba decided to give up Ahumada, "we are going to be very satisfied"[[Official Statement by the Cuban Foreign Affairs Ministry](#)] (*Prensa Latina*, 28/4/04).

**April 29:** The return of a fugitive Mexican businessman from Cuba has touched off a terse diplomatic exchange between Mexico and Cuba. Mexico's Foreign Relations Department objected to comments by Cuban authorities about

the motivations behind the request to extradite Ahumada. "To insinuate that the extradition request by Mexico is part of a scandal constitutes a value judgment about an internal matter in Mexico, which is clearly discordant with (...) healthy relations between nations," said Arturo Dager, a legal consultant at Mexico's Foreign Relations Department.

[\[Diplomatic Statement by the Mexican SRE\]](#) (AP, *El Universal*, 29/4/04)

**April 29:** The Cuban Foreign Ministry has not received any "official note" from Mexican authorities regarding the deportation to that country of businessman Carlos Ahumada. "We have not received a single official document from Mexico," said a source from the Cuban Ministry who also added that Cuba is disconcerted after information released in Mexico by spokesperson Alan Nahum saying that Mexico had sent a diplomatic note in protest to Cuba. (*Europa Press*, 29/4/04)

**April 29:** In a letter to a Senator from Strassburg (North), the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Michel Barnier says that the French government closely follows the situation of political prisoners in Cuba, and will continue to request from Cuban authorities their total liberation. The French Minister also says that he has "attentively followed the situation of Mr. Manuel Vázquez Portal and that of the whole group of political prisoners in Cuba". He also added that France has "regularly" requested from Cuban authorities "to review their position on this matter". (*AFP*, 29/4/04)

**April 29:** A French Film Festival has been inaugurated in eight Cuban provinces after its success in Havana. The official inauguration of this annual event in the island took place in the Charles Chaplin Theater with the film *The Choir*. (*Boletín Cubarte*, 30/4/04)

**April 29:** The expansion of the European Union to embrace former Soviet-bloc states has deepened a diplomatic "cocktail war" between Europe and Cuba over human rights on the Communist-run island, diplomats said. The Cuban national anthem played at a hotel reception in Havana to mark the entry into the EU of its 10 new members. But the only Cubans present were Catholic Church officials and the waiters serving mojitos and Cuba Libre cocktails. (*EFE*, 29/4/04)

**April 30:** Blanca Reyes, wife of dissident imprisoned Raúl Rivero, denounced that Cuban authorities have not yet responded a petition she made to travel. Reyes asked an exit permit to travel to Belgrade where she will receive Rivero's award granted by UNESCO. The World Award for Freedom of the Press was granted to the dissident intellectual. Although some UNESCO sources feel optimistic about the possibility of Cuban authorities granting Reyes the permit, she showed her skepticism about it. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 30/4/04)

**April 30:** Spain will favor democratic development in Cuba through dialogue, the first vice president of the socialist government in Spain, María Teresa Fernández de la Vega, said. "Our policy will be that of favoring, supporting and trying to help the modernization of those countries which are still under non democratic situations from an economic, social and political perspective." "And Cuba is one of them," Fernández de la Vega said. (*AFP*, 30/4/04)

## **Terrorism**

**April 2:** Fifteen detainees held at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay have been freed, the Pentagon has said. They come from a variety of countries, including Afghanistan, Turkey, Tajikistan, Sudan, Iraq, Jordan and Yemen, it added. The prisoners, who were not identified, were flown out to their home countries in the past few days, an official said. It brings to 146 the number of men to have left Guantanamo, for release or for detention by their own governments. (*BBC*, 2/4/04)

**April 12:** As the indefinite detention of terrorism suspects faces legal challenges, military authorities have allowed unprecedented media access to prison operations in a bid to dispel what they call "the myth" of human rights violations. For the first time since terrorism suspects were brought to the base two years ago, authorities in recent weeks opened the door to rooms used for interrogations, provided limited information on efforts to gather intelligence from prisoners and showed off a courtroom where military tribunals likely will be conducted. (*The Miami Herald*, 12/4/04)

**April 16:** Cuba has asked the UN's top human rights body to investigate the United States' detention of al-Qaeda and Taliban suspects at its naval base in Guantanamo Bay, ending Havana's policy of avoiding direct confrontation on the issue. The Cuban delegation urged the Commission, the highest UN authority on human rights, to investigate the conditions in which the non-US citizens of around 40 different nationalities are being held. Most of the men, who the United States describes as Al Qaeda and Taliban suspects, have been held at Guantanamo Bay in southeastern Cuba since January 2002. [[Draft Resolution presented by Cuba](#)] (*The Australian*, *IPS*, 16/4/04)

**April 19:** Fidel Castro lashed out at the United States for building a "concentration camp" at Guantanamo Bay for prisoners suspected of ties to terrorist organizations. Castro said European nations that voted against Cuba last week at the U.N. Human Rights Commission are now faced with an "embarrassing" decision on whether to monitor the situation at the US naval enclave in eastern Cuba, where hundreds of prisoners have been held without charges since 2002. Without naming the United States, Castro said the US naval base had been "converted into a concentration camp where absolutely no rights are respected." The 77-year-old Castro, wearing a military uniform, spoke during a television talk show marking the anniversary of the botched 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion by CIA-trained Cuban exiles seeking to end his fledgling socialist revolution. (*Reuters*, 19/4/04)

**April 20:** Mexico plans to vote for a resolution introduced by Cuba in the UN Human Rights Commission condemning the United States for "arbitrary detentions" at the US naval base in Guantanamo, Cuba, a top diplomat said. The deputy secretary for global affairs at the Mexican Foreign Ministry, Patricia Olamendi, said that if Cuba brings its proposal to a vote, "our vote will be in the same vein - we are demanding respect for human rights in the struggle against terrorism." (*EFE*, 20/4/04)

**April 20:** A Panamanian judge convicted four Cuban exiles in a plot to kill Cuban President Fidel Castro and sentenced the oldest -- 76-year-old Luis Posada Carrilles -- to the maximum sentence of eight years. Caught in Panama City with a fake passport and 33 pounds of explosives, Posada and the three others were found guilty of endangering public safety after 3 ½ years in jail. Codefendants Pedro Remón and Guillermo Novo, both of Miami, were sentenced to seven years, Remón told *The Herald* by telephone from prison. Posada and Gaspar Jiménez, also of Miami, received an extra year each for using false passports to enter Panama in November 2000, just before Castro was to visit the Ibero-American summit. The defendants will all get credit for time served. (*The Miami Herald*, 21/4/04)

**April 20:** The US Supreme Court began weighing the historic question of the power of a wartime president, hearing the first of a series of challenges to the Bush administration's policy of holding what it calls "enemy combatants" without trial. At least five of the nine justices raised grave questions over US President George W. Bush's contention that a nation at war against terrorism has the right to hold almost 600 prisoners at the Guantanamo Bay naval base in Cuba without charging them or permitting them access to courts or legal advice. (*The Toronto Star*, 20/4/04)

**April 21:** Cuba called the sentences handed down in Panama to six anti-communist militants accused of plotting to kill Fidel Castro with explosives in November 2000 too short. "The sentences imposed do not correspond to the seriousness of the crimes they planned to commit in Panama," the Cuban Foreign Ministry said in a statement published by official government newspapers in Havana. [[Official Statement](#)] (*EFE*, 21/4/04)

**April 22:** Cuba avoided a showdown with the United States by withdrawing from the top UN human rights body a hard-hitting resolution which called for an investigation of treatment of terrorism suspects at the US naval base at

Guantanamo. Citing US "threats and blackmail," Cuban Ambassador Jorge Mora Godoy told the commission he would not ask for a vote on the motion, which claimed widespread rights abuses against the suspects held at Guantanamo. Western diplomats said Havana likely feared the UN Human Rights Commission would fail to condemn the United States over its detention of more than 600 individuals from 44 countries at the base. Mora Godoy accused the United States of bullying other governments on the 53-nation commission to ensure the failure of the Cuban resolution. (AP, 22/4/04)

**April 22:** Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque conducted a press conference in Havana to inform the national and international news media of Havana's decision to not insist on a vote of its draft resolution concerning arbitrary detentions at US Naval Base at Guantánamo. With Cuba's decision, said the island's foreign minister, Havana will be able to bring up the issue of the arbitrary detentions at any time and at any international forum, such as the UN General Assembly. [[Cuban Foreign Affairs Press Conference](#)] (Radio Habana Cuba, 22/4/04)

**April 22:** Cuba dropped a call to the UN's top human rights body to probe allegations of US abuse of Guantanamo detainees and accused European and some Latin American states of cowardice for not backing it. The resolution expressed "deep concern" that the United States might be depriving detainees at the US naval base on the southeast tip of Cuba of their rights under international law. Cuba's ambassador to the UN in Geneva told the 53-state Commission on Human Rights Cuba was withdrawing the resolution because the United States "and its allies" were preparing to present a counter motion to prevent any action on Cuba's call. He said the Europeans and Latin Americans, many of which have been critical of the United States over Guantanamo, had caved in to US pressure. (Reuters, 22/4/04)

**April 23:** Panama's Foreign Affairs Minister Harmodio Arias said that the anti-Castro Cuban, Luis Posada Carriles, must serve out his entire eight-year prison sentence for planning to assassinate Fidel Castro. "Mr. Posada Carriles was condemned to eight years in prison and will have to serve out his time for the crime of which he was found guilty," said Arias in a brief statement carried by Panamanian local television's Channel 11. (EFE, 23/4/04)

**April 29:** The United States has praised efforts by countries across Latin America to fight terrorism in 2003, but again designated Cuba a state sponsor of terrorism. The US State Department, in its annual report on terrorism, said Cuba continued to provide support to US-designated foreign terrorist groups. The report said that Cuba also acted as host to several terrorists, including members of the Basque separatist group ETA. The United States also named Cuba a state sponsor of terrorism in 2002. [[Patterns of Global Terrorism, 2003](#)] (VOA News, 29/4/04)

## US-Cuba Relations

**April 1:** The second of three Cuban rafters who arrived near Lauderdale-by-the-Sea was discharged from Holy Cross Hospital. US Border Patrol agents picked up William Villavicencio Pérez, 31, of Cuba's Arroyo Naranjo neighborhood, at the Fort Lauderdale hospital, spokeswoman Christine Moncrieffe said. (The Miami Herald, 2/4/04)

**April 2:** Venezuela's ties to Cuba entered the US presidential campaign as Senator John Kerry, the presumptive Democratic nominee, said Chavez's "close relationship with Fidel Castro has raised serious questions about his commitment to leading a truly democratic government." The comment was part of a broader attack that President Bush was not doing enough to support democracy in the region. (Chicago Tribune, 2/4/04)

**April 3:** A flying team of eye surgeons ended its fifth trip to Cuba, leaving behind -- as it does elsewhere -- medical expertise for host doctors and patients treated free of charge. Orbis and its 42-member team of physicians recently wrapped up a four-week program in Havana and eastern Manzanillo, treating patients for everything from cataracts to

glaucoma. Surgeries took place on the plane and at nearby hospitals, in an effort coordinated with Cuba's Ministry of Public Health. (*The Miami Herald*, 3/4/04)

**April 4:** A core group of GOP lawmakers in Tallahassee apparently believes Florida needs its own anti-terrorism foreign policy. And they are supporting HB 1193, the "Commerce with Terrorist States Act." The bill would levy a surcharge on direct flights from Florida airports to countries on the State Department's terrorist nations list, including Iran and Libya. It would also require university and other groups making such a trip to file detailed itineraries 50 days before departure. There are no such flights from Florida to countries like North Korea or Libya, so this bill applies only to Cuba. (*Sun Sentinel*, 4/4/04)

**April 5:** The recent call for the assassination of Fidel Castro by a US congressman on American television should receive a suitable response from US Congress and judicial system, a Cuban weekly asserted. "Trabajadores", a Cuban union daily, expressed outrage that a person in this respected position could take advantage of congressional immunity to make statements considered criminal in any other setting. Representative Lincoln Diaz Balart said in an interview on Miami's Channel 41 that he thought Fidel Castro should be assassinated and that US agents should infiltrate and disrupt the island posing as tourists. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 5/4/04)

**April 5:** US publishers would be free to edit scholarly manuscripts from Iran and some other off-limit countries without fear of running afoul of economic sanctions, the Bush administration has determined. The Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, which enforces US trade embargoes against certain countries, came to that conclusion in a case involving the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, a professional group that is a big publisher of scholarly materials in electrical and electronics engineering and computer sciences. OFAC's decision "makes clear that scientific communities in sanctioned countries may publish their works in US scholarly journals," OFAC Director Richard Newcomb said in a statement. (*AP*, 5/4/04)

**April 5:** Nicaragua, El Salvador and Peru intend to support a US-prompted Honduran draft resolution condemning Cuba's human rights policy before the UN Human Rights Commission. High-ranking State Department officials called a press conference to announce the development and explain Washington's position toward the Commission's session this month in Geneva. Kim Holmes, assistant secretary of the State Department's Bureau of International Organization Affairs, said the wording of the resolution to be presented April 15-16 "is stronger than last year's." The United States and some other countries want stronger language this year in light of last year's sentencing and imprisonment of more than 70 Cuban dissidents. Holmes said he was optimistic the text drawn up by Honduras will receive wide endorsement and predicted that the majority of Latin American nations will vote to upbraid Havana. (*EFE*, 5/4/04)

**April 6:** For complete normalization of Cuba-US relations Washington must recognize Cuba as an independent country, and permitting its citizens to visit would be a significant step in the right direction, the President of the Cuban Parliament Ricardo Alarcon told US press in Havana. Speaking to an editorial board of the Associated Press Managing Editors, led by its vice president Stuart Wilk (Dallas Morning News), Alarcon discussed how such people-to-people visits would offset the military threat the US administration represents for the Caribbean country. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/4/04)

**April 6:** A group of ten Cuban rafters who were thought adrift may have been detained by the Coast Guard Service. According to some information, the group left off Santa Fe beach, west of Havana, on a wooden boat with a diesel engine. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 6/4/04)

**April 6:** A Cuban rafter who swam to shore along with two other men accused of attacking US Coast Guard officers testified that the guardsmen were the aggressors, using pepper spray and pointing a gun at the migrants. Alfredo Morales, who is not facing charges, was a witness in federal court for the defendants - his brother, Javier Morales Molina, and cousin, Reinaldo Molina Morales. The two men stand accused of attacking Coast Guard officers who tried

to intercept their vessel at sea on May 6, 2003, during their bid to reach the Florida coast. Morales said the Coast Guard agents fired pepper spray when the Cubans refused to lower the sail of the wooden raft they used to flee the communist island. (*EFE*, 6/4/04)

**April 7:** Vermont Lieutenant Governor Brian Dubie is expected to announce an upcoming state trip to Cuba. Dubie says the goals of the trip are to help establish a relationship between the people of Vermont and the people of Cuba and pursue opportunities to export Vermont products to the country. (*AP*, 7/4/04)

**April 8:** Two Cuban migrants were acquitted of charges they threatened US Coast Guard officers with weapons as they tried to reach the US shore last year. A jury deliberated for three hours before clearing Javier Morales Molina, 27, and his cousin, Reinaldo Molina Morales, 30, of two counts of assaulting federal officers. The accused were two of three migrants whose evasion of a Coast Guard vessel and two-mile swim from their disabled homemade boat to the mangrove-thick shores of northern Key Largo was televised live last May. (*Sun Sentinel*, 8/4/04)

**April 8:** Cuba took its turn at the podium of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva to accuse the United States of encouraging and promoting the illegal emigration of Cuban citizens. By way of the Cuban Adjustment Act, citizens of the Caribbean Island are privileged with US residency if they are able to reach its territory, independent of how they get there. Many of those that don't make it have perished at sea. Cuban diplomat Jorge Ferrer reminded the UN commission that a very different welcoming exists for other undocumented immigrants, citing the 900,000 Mexicans detained annually in US border areas. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/4/04)

**April 9:** HBO will broadcast on prime time a documentary on Cuban leader Fidel Castro directed by US filmmaker Oliver Stone, who made an earlier portrait of the aging strongman that was pulled by the cable network. "Looking for Fidel" includes interviews with the Cuban president, who has ruled for 45 years, as well as with jailed dissidents and relatives of political opponents and human rights activists. (*EFE*, 9/4/04)

**April 8:** The relatives of five Cubans imprisoned in the US gave their testimonies at the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC). During a seminar to condemn the human right transgressions against the five Cubans, Magali Llort, Adriana Pérez O'Connor and Olga Salanueva also strongly denounced the US hostility on Cuba. Havana's Permanent Ambassador to the UNHRC Jorge Ivan Mora Godoy stressed that the visit of Magali, Adriana and Olga allows opening new opportunities for the understanding and solidarity with the Cuban Five. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/4/04)

**April 9:** A two-month US tour by the 15-piece Cuban jazz-pop band "Cubanismo" has been canceled because its members were denied visas to enter the US. The group's 43-show, 34-city itinerary included a stop in Los Angeles. "Cubanismo", made up of musicians from various Cuban bands, has played in the US several times over the last decade. (*Los Angeles Times*, 9/4/04)

**April 10:** The Cuban Olympic Committee (COC) decried the denial by the US government of a visa for one of its directors to travel to San Antonio, Texas where he is supposed to participate as a delegate in the General Assembly of the Pan-American Sport Organization (ODEPA). (*Prensa Latina*, 10/4/04)

**April 11:** A new investigation into a former head of the Bacardí dynasty that acquired vast fortunes from the rum has levelled fresh allegations involving links to international terrorists, assassination attempts and a plot to overthrow Fidel Castro's communist regime. Claims, to be screened on BBC3, hint at the murky past of a key member of the family who tried to depose Castro throughout the 1960s. They detail how the late Pepin Bosch, former head of Bacardí, acquired a bomber in a plot to blow up a Cuban oil refinery. A successful attack, he hoped, would leave large parts of Havana without electricity, triggering a popular uprising that would topple Castro. (*The Guardian*, 11/4/04)

**April 11:** Fifty-seven Cubans landed on the South Florida coast on Easter Sunday in four different vessels, informed the Coast Guard. The first boat, carrying 32 people, landed in the Marquesas islands near Key West. Another group of five arrived in Miami Beach while two other groups landed on two different points along the Florida coast. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 11/4/04)

**April 12:** Farm leaders say Cuba wants to buy at least \$10 million of agricultural products from South Dakota. Making that happen will take persistence and patience, said Gary Duffy, president of the South Dakota Value-Added Agricultural Center. Agricultural and business leaders met in Huron recently after a trade mission to the Caribbean nation. Duffy said he hopes South Dakota farm products will be on their way to Cuba within a year. (*AP*, 12/4/04)

**April 12:** Vermont Lieutenant Governor Brian Dubie is expected to announce an upcoming state trip to Cuba. Dubie says the goals of the trip are to help establish a relationship between the people of Vermont and the people of Cuba and pursue opportunities to export Vermont products to the country. (*AP*, 12/4/04)

**April 13:** Moving to cement trade ties with US business, Cuba agreed to buy \$13 million in food from American companies and reached a tentative deal for up to \$10 million in farm goods from California. Hundreds of US farm representatives hoping to build a trade relationship with communist Cuba traveled to Havana for three days of talks organized by Cuba. Cuban said that by the time talks end they hope to contract to buy as much as \$100 million more in American farm products. More than 300 people from about 150 U.S. companies attended the gathering. The biggest contract announced was with Archer Daniels Midland of Decatur, Ill., for \$9 million in corn. The other contracts were for \$3.4 million in rice from Riceland Foods Inc. of Stuttgart, Ark., and nearly \$1 million for peas from PS International Ltd., of Chapel Hill, N.C. "Cuba was the No. 1 market for American rice prior to sanctions," said USA Rice Federation representative Marvin Leherer. Mexico is now the world's No. 1 importer of American rice, buying about 750,000 metric tons annually, said Leherer. (*AP*, 13/4/04)

**April 13:** US President Bush and Mexican President Vicente Fox held a phone conversation on Cuba. The seven-minute conversation between Bush and Vicente Fox apparently gave rise to differences in interpretation by the two sides. In Washington, White House press secretary Scott McClellan said the presidents discussed the meeting of the U.N. Human Rights Commission now under way in Geneva. "They agreed on the importance of passing a Cuba resolution at that meeting and working together to improve the human rights situation," McClellan said. But Agustin Gutierrez Canet, Fox's spokesman, said the White House version "does not coincide with Mexico's position, because Mexico has not made any decision on how it will vote on the proposed resolution." (*AP*, 13/4/04)

**April 13:** A US Coast Guard officer told the press that seven Cubans intercepted at sea have been returned to the island. The immigrants were detected in two groups trying to reach the US coasts. (*AFP*, 13/4/04)

**April 13:** Forty-five Cuban migrants were returned to the Caribbean island, including six who were apparently being smuggled to the United States, the US Coast Guard said. The Coast Guard sent nine people to Bahía de Cabañas, Cuba, in a first group and 36 more in a second group, according to a news release. (*Sun Sentinel*, 13/4/04)

**April 14:** Joining the bandwagon of trade with Cuba, Philadelphia port and state agriculture officials are scheduled to fly to Havana to sign commitments for up to \$10 million in exports to Cuba. The signings would make Philadelphia the only port, and Pennsylvania the only Northeastern state, with limited commerce with the government of Fidel Castro, the officials said. (*The Inquirer*, 15/4/04)

**April 14:** "To support its political interests, the Cuban government is looking for a way to manipulate the political process in the United States through purchases," James Cason said in a communique released in this capital. Cason's statement coincided with the first round of negotiations between Cuba and the United States concerning food

purchases, which is taking place here this week with some 400 representatives of more than 170 US companies interested in trade with the island attending. (*EFE*, 14/4/04)

**April 15:** Cuba opened its petroleum sector to US investment at a bilateral meeting with US businessmen in Havana. Officials from Cubapetroleo (CUPET) and the Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation Ministry presented to the participants at the 1st Round of Cuban-US Food Negotiations the characteristics of the island's petroleum industry and the possibilities for investment in Cuba. "We are open to US oil companies interested in exploration, production and services," Juan Fleites Melo, vice president of state oil monopoly Cubapetroleo, told the US companies' representatives. His invitation came on the third day of a four-day event during which \$65 million in food sales agreements have been signed. CUPET vice president Juan Fleites explained that currently the island has 16 contracts with European and Canadian firms in the oil sector. "There is no reason US companies shouldn't take advantage and compete so close to home," he added. (*EFE, Reuters*, 15/4/04)

**April 15:** Central Bank President Francisco Soberon told the US representatives of 173 companies, who gathered in Havana to sell agricultural products, that "the United States would have less than 90 miles away the world's second-largest nickel reserve," if the embargo were lifted. He said ports and airports would open to US companies and trade would boom. Cuba is one of the world's largest producers of nickel plus cobalt at 71,600 tonnes last year. Nickel is used to make stainless steel and alloys for construction and industrial uses. Nickel oxide and cobalt oxide are used in the manufacturing of lithium batteries. (*Reuters*, 15/4/04)

**April 16:** The Cuban government has agreed to buy more than \$100m worth of American food and agricultural produce. The sales come after a week of talks with US business representatives in Havana. Food sales have been permitted since 2000 under an exception to the four-decades-old US trade embargo on Cuba. (*BBC*, 16/4/04)

**April 16:** Democrat John Kerry, making his third tour of Florida in seven weeks since clinching his party's presidential nomination, will begin with a one-hour appearance on NBC's Meet the Press broadcasting from Miami, followed by a rally at the University of Miami. Kerry will be host at a town hall meeting at the Palm Beach Community College campus in Lake Worth. He heads to Tampa, later. As part of a three-day Florida swing, Kerry will campaign with U.S. Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, the Democrats' 2000 candidate for vice president, in Palm Beach County, home of the "butterfly ballots" that became enmeshed in court battles over Florida's presidential vote. U.S. Sen. Bob Graham of Florida will accompany Kerry throughout the tour. (*Sun Sentinel*, 16/4/04)

**April 16:** US Congressman Clement Leroy Otter (Republican-Idaho) met with Fidel Castro for the third time and said he was very satisfied with the Cuban leader's awareness of the problems of Cuba and the world. Lawmaker Otter, leading the US business delegation to this year's first bilateral negotiations, fully agreed with Fidel Castro's remarks on the need to peacefully work together to solve the problems of humanity. We have the talent, technology, and ability, we only need to build the willingness to do it, Otter declared. The congressman was equally enthusiastic about an artistic function offered to the visitors at the Hotel Nacional, and said he was certain Cuban ballet and music would be well received by the US market if there were no economic blockade. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/4/04)

**April 16:** The United States says its representatives at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights and other participants in the meeting currently under way in Geneva have been subjected to "acts of intimidation, threat and aggression" by members of the Cuban delegation. Ambassador Richard Williamson, the US representative to the commission, described three incidents in which members of his delegation were directly threatened by members of the Cuban delegation. In a statement to the commission April 16, Richardson recounted how a US delegate was warned by a Cuban diplomat that he would "pay a high toll" for what he was doing at the commission. Williamson also cited the attack against the representative of an American nongovernmental organization that took place outside the commission meeting hall just after the body adopted a resolution criticizing Cuba's human rights record. Ambassador Kevin Moley,

the US permanent representative to the United Nations in Geneva, witnessed the attack on human rights activist Frank Calzon and described the assault as unprovoked and "full of malice." (*US State Department Press Release*, 16/4/04)

**April 18:** Democratic candidate John Kerry has not announced any major new plans or initiatives that he would implement if elected to speed up a Democratic transition in Cuba. Kerry spokesman Mark Kornblau said Kerry is not planning any Cuba policy announcements during his visit to Florida, but plans to roll out a Cuba initiative in the future. "You can stick with the failed policies or try to find a better approach, and that's what John Kerry will do," Kornblau said. "We are tired," said Republican Hialeah Councilman Esteban Bovo, who wrote a warning letter to Bush last year that was signed by dozens of local Republican leaders. "We've listened to enough rhetoric from politicians looking for votes. We know Castro is evil, that he is a dictator, that he violates human rights. We need to know what they are going to do about it." (*The Miami Herald*, 18/4/04)

**April 18:** Democratic candidate, Senator John Kerry, denied having suggested that the US embargo against Cuba should be lifted. During the TV Program "Meet the Press", Kerry said that in 20 years he has been in the Senate has never been in favor of ending the embargo. Kerry said that he has noticed a change in the Cuban American community in Florida, and he is in favor of promoting travels by US citizens to the island, as well as sending remittances by Cuban Americans to their relatives in Cuba. (*Radio Martí*, 19/4/04)

**April 19:** Daniel Benitez may well become a figure in US legal history when the Supreme Court rules on his case this year. Benitez, a former Miami resident, is one of two cases the high court will review in October to decide whether immigration authorities can detain foreign nationals indefinitely, including Cuban Mariel inmates whose government refuses to take them back. Benitez, 46, sums up his predicament simply. "Let me go free or send me back to Cuba," he said in a recent interview at a federal prison near Denver. Benitez argued in his October petition to the Supreme Court that there is no valid reason to keep him in detention because he has served his sentence and the high court itself has ruled against indefinite detention. Though the Supreme Court ruled in 2001 that foreign nationals cannot be detained indefinitely, it did not resolve the question of whether Mariel detainees like Benitez can go free. (*The Miami Herald*, 18/4/04)

**April 19:** Pennsylvania, the first northeastern US state to send a trade mission to Cuba, pledged to lobby for an end to trade and travel sanctions against the communist-run island. The Port of Philadelphia, once the second largest importer of Cuban sugar, signed a memorandum of understanding to reopen its docks to trade with Cuba under an easing of sanctions in 2000 that allowed food sales to the island. "We intend to talk to our congressional delegation (in Washington) and encourage them to consider lifting the trade and travel restrictions," said Pennsylvania Agriculture Secretary Dennis Wolff, heading an 18-member business delegation to Cuba. Wolff said Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell was "very much in favor" of restoring two-way trade and free travel to Cuba. (*Reuters*, 19/4/04)

**April 20:** A handful of protesters shouted, carried signs and hoisted US, UN and Cuban flags in support of six Cuban hijackers facing sentencing for hijacking a Havana-bound airliner to Key West. The hearing was to decide punishment in the first of a spate of plane and boat hijackings that aggravated US-Cuba relations a year ago. Defense attorney Stewart Abrams argued in court for the mandatory minimum sentence of 20 years for "escaping the political and economic repression of a communist government." Prosecutors argued for the maximum life sentences for a crime that they said endangered 37 people flying on the DC-3. (*CNN*, 21/4/04)

**April 20:** A retired couple from Strafford is facing \$55,000 US in fines for trips to Cuba they made while writing a travel book for bicyclists. Wally and Barbara Smith travelled to Cuba four times - once for a vacation, and the next three to do research for *Bicycling Cuba*, a book that came out in November 2002. In doing so, they violated US sanctions that prohibit most US citizens from spending money in Cuba. Now the Smiths could pay a \$55,000 fine, although they plan to contest that at hearings in Washington. Meanwhile, they're at work on another cycling book - this one about eastern Canada. (*Canadian Press*, 20/4/04)

**April 21:** Alabama's poultry industry has resumed sales to Cuba that were interrupted by the island nation's concerns about avian influenza. State Agriculture Commissioner Ron Sparks said that poultry sales to Cuba from Alabama resumed April 14 -- a day after Sparks visited Havana on his third trip to Cuba negotiating sales of agriculture products. (AP, 21/4/04)

**April 21:** Six Cubans were sentenced to at least 20 years in prison for hijacking an airliner from Cuba to Florida. The hijacking was the first in a series of air and sea hijackings that raised tensions between the United States and Cuba. The six men were accused of using five knives and a cockpit ax to commandeer the Cuban airliner during a domestic flight. The DC-3 with 37 people aboard landed in Key West with a US fighter escort. The men insisted it was a flight to freedom, with secret inside help from the co-pilot. But the jury rejected the claim in December. (CNN, 22/4/04)

**April 21:** The Havana Film Festival, sponsored by The New York Times, is exhibiting the work of Cuban filmmakers. Fernando Pérez, Cuban film director attending this cultural event as a special guest, will present his films "Madagascar", "Hello Hemingway", and "Suite Havana", awarded in the last Latin American Film Festival in Havana. The New York Times Festival is also the scenario for the debut of some young filmmakers, like Miguel Coyula who is presenting his first film, "Red Cockroaches", subtitled in Spanish. Coyula, 27, is presenting a film about an incestuous love between a brother and a sister who meet in a subway and fall in love. The story takes place in a high-polluted city with acid rain, flying vehicles and full of red cockroaches. Coyula is currently living in New York. (AP, 22/4/04)

**April 21:** A philanthropist best known for selling millions of dollars worth of musical instruments at a discount to the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra has fled to Cuba to avoid tax fraud charges, authorities said. A federal judge issued an arrest warrant for animal publishing tycoon Herbert Axelrod after he failed to show up for an arraignment on charges that he hid income from the Internal Revenue Service. Assistant US Attorney Michael Guadagno said Axelrod's yacht was docked in Cuba and that the multimillionaire was staying at the Marina Hemingway, a four-star resort in Havana. The United States has no extradition treaty with Cuba. (AP, 21/4/04)

**April 22:** Cuba's foreign minister denied knowing anything about an American multimillionaire who reportedly fled here to avoid tax fraud charges, but said the island is not a haven for those fleeing justice. "Cuba has never been a refuge for those fleeing justice," Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque told international journalists. (AP, 22/4/04)

**April 23:** Ecology, Cuba's freedom and a commitment with democracy in Iraq were the messages that George Bush gave in South Florida. "We believe in freedom, not only in Iraq but in our neighborhood. In only have two words for my foreign policy towards Cuba: Free Cuba", said Bush. Referring to Fidel Castro, Bush added: "We will maintain our pressure on the dictator". "I want the Cuban people to listen this message loud and clear: we will not make concessions to tyranny; we believe in freedom; and we will insist on respect for human rights, in the human rights given by God", the president added. (El Nuevo Herald, 24/4/04)

**April 23:** The Bush administration is considering making significant cuts in the amount of money Americans are allowed to send to family and others in Cuba, according to sources familiar with the discussions of the president's Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba. One proposal under review would temporarily freeze all remittances -- possibly for six months -- after which the administration would reinstate them at much lower levels than currently allowed. (Sun Sentinel, 23/4/04)

**April 24:** Looking for Fidel - a documentary by Oliver Stone about Fidel Castro-- has been panned by his critics for not being objective. Lending his voice to the criticism was the top US diplomat in Havana, James Cason, who felt that Justifying Fidel ought to have been a more appropriate title for the documentary. The diplomat said the message of Stone's film was that repression was justified in Cuba because the Bush administration was planning to invade the island. "It's the conspiracy theory that Stone has always had in his films," Cason said. (AlJazeera.Net, 24/4/04)

**April 25:** Cuba welcomed prison terms of at least 20 years handed down in Miami to six Cubans convicted of hijacking an airliner from the island to Florida. In a short statement published in the Communist Party daily newspaper Granma, Cuba's foreign minister said the sentences given were "a positive act that contributes to the struggle against the commission of violent acts during emigration attempts." The communiqué reiterated Cuba's stated commitment to honor 1994 and 1995 accords with the United States aimed at promoting safe, orderly migration between the countries. [\[Official Statement\]](#) (The Miami Herald, 25/4/04)

**April 27:** In an interview with the Communist Party daily Granma, Pedro Ross Leal criticized the United States for meddling in Cuban affairs by creating its own plan for the island's conversion to democracy "such as that installed in Iraq." "The principal motivation of the patriotic and forcible demonstration by our people this coming May 1 will be to answer to the Yankees that there will be a transition to more and better socialism," said Ross Leal, the head of the Confederation of Cuban Workers. (CNN, 27/4/04)

**April 28:** Cuba repeated that it will defend its sovereignty and independence adopting every measure at hand to repel US electronic warfare. Cuban diplomat, Rodney Lopez, addressed the UN Information Committee to denounce over 310 hours of illegal radio and TV broadcasts "calling for violence and terrorist actions" made by at least 15 organizations linked to, or sponsors of, renowned terrorists that live and operate in the US with government consent. Lopez cited as an example "the poorly-named Radio and TV Marti, to which the US government allocates annual budgets of \$35 million in its electronic war against Cuba that encourages illegal emigration, incites violence and terrorist actions, and calls to violate the law". (Prensa Latina, 28/4/04)

**April 30:** As election season heats up in vote-rich South Florida, the Bush administration is studying controversial recommendations to slash cash remittances sent by Cuban-American exiles to their relatives in Cuba. One proposal would temporarily suspend all remittances for up to six months, while another seeks to cut in half the amount that can be legally sent, according to the unattributed reports. "The administration is going to look at everything," said former National Security Council official Emilio Gonzalez, a Cuban-American. "Nothing is off the table." But analysts warn the issue of remittances is not as clear-cut as it might look. While cutting the flow of US dollars to Cuba is popular with older, overwhelmingly Republican voters in the 600,000-strong Cuban exile community, the issue is a touchy subject for many Miami Cubans who retain strong family ties to the island. "Politically this is extremely dangerous," said Sergio Bendixen, a leading Hispanic pollster. "If they are not allowed to take care of their loved ones the political price would be very high." (St. Petersburg Times, 30/4/04)