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Research Forum on Cuba

Chronicle on Cuba

August 2004

Highlights

Domestic Affairs: Dissident organizations and individuals demand the release of political prisoners. Cuba ranks 11 at the close of the 2004 Olympics in Athens.

Economy: Hurricane Charley causes more than \$1 billion in damage to Havana and its surrounding provinces. Sherritt International Corp. plans to resume exploratory drilling in northern Cuba.

Foreign Affairs: Cuba breaks off relations with Panama. The Cuban government issues an official statement praising the results of the Venezuelan referendum. Brazil proposes to open a dialogue with Havana at the Rio Group ministerial meeting.

Terrorism: The Government of Panama grants amnesty to a group of Cubans jailed for acts of terror.

US-Cuba Relations: Food imports from the United States exceed 960 million USD according to Cuba's food importing company Alimport. The US government's TV Marti broadcasts from an airborne C-130 cargo plane to the island.



Domestic Affairs

August 1: "El Mejunje", a cultural center in the Cuban city of Santa Clara, draws both gays and straights, adding yet another attraction to this city. "El Mejunje," which means mixture, is a social-cultural project created 20 years ago to promote openness and tolerance. "Undoubtedly, El Mejunje is a unique center in Cuba for the breadth of its cultural projects and for the kind of people who come to this place. There is nothing else like it. It has never marginalized anyone and it takes in people who were a bit rejected in other places," center director Ramon Silverio said. The cultural center, located in downtown Santa Clara, some 300 kilometers (186 miles) east of Havana, was for many years a venue for transvestite shows, and they still show up on the program occasionally. (*EFE*, 1/8/04)

August 1: Members of the Democratic Party November 30 "Frank País", collateral with the November 30 Movement in Exile and members of the "20 th of May" Movement, created a project they named "Liberty Project", with the objective of letting the world know of their support to the measures implemented last June 30, 2004, by the President of the United States, George W. Bush. Promoters of this project in Cuba believe that the measures are extremely important for the Cuban people for they will force the regime towards a peaceful transition in the island. [[Liberty Project](#)] (*Netfor Cuba*, 1/8/04)

August 2: The last group of Cuban athletes bound for the Athens 2004 Olympic Games were seen off at the Jose Marti International Airport by local Olympic Committee Chair Jose Ramon Fernandez. Representatives of 14 disciplines including gymnast Erick López, canoeists Ledy F. Balceiro and Ibrahim Rojas, cyclist Yoanka González and Greco-Roman and free style wrestlers, are the 137-strong delegation that will be training in different European countries. (*Prensa Latina*, 2/8/04)

August 2: A telephone exchange in Havana caught fire, interrupting communications in several municipalities, informed the Cuba Telecommunications Company (ETECSA). The disaster took place at the Luz Plant located in the Lawton district, municipality of Diez de Octubre, which serves around 1,500 customers, said a source from ETECSA. (*EFE*, 2/8/04)

August 3: The western Cuban province of Pinar del Rio has reduced its infant mortality rate to 4.9 percent during 2004, with 17 deaths less than in a similar span last year, Granma newspaper published. According to Granma, Sandino and Guane -two of the westernmost municipalities there- registered the province's best results, as their infant mortality rate for every thousand live births has so far remained zero. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/8/04)

August 4: Imprisoned journalist Normando Hernández González has been kept in a punishment cell for over 90 days, after he declared himself "plantado" (a protest for not receiving the treatment political prisoners should). Hernández' relatives have denounced that they haven't been allowed to visit him in prison since last May, the organization Madres y Mujeres Anti-Represión por Cuba (MAR por Cuba) said. The independent journalist began his "plantado" strike after he was "brutally beaten and dragged" by the guards at Kilo 5 1/2 prison, in Pinar del Río, where he was sent for a 25 years sentence in April 2003. (*Netfor Cuba*, 4/8/04)

August 4: The editor-in-chief of the Cuban magazine Vitral, Dagoberto Valdes Hernandez, said that Cuba is in need more than ever of "a climate of reconciliation, a language of reconciliation, gestures of reconciliation, attitudes of reconciliation and a future of reconciliation." In an article titled "Cese la Crispación: Venga la Reconciliación," ("No More Tensions: It's Time for Reconciliation") Valdés explained that the country's present "climate of confrontation does not help any kind of good cause" and "in the wake of vote-catching measures from abroad we need to react calmly focusing on solving our own problems from within, among ourselves." (*ACI*, 4/8/04)

August 4: The influential specialized magazine Sports Illustrated has predicted that Cuba will once again head Latin American nations and will finish 8th in the medal standings in the upcoming Olympic Games in Athens, Greece. The US sports magazine noted that Cuban athletes could achieve 29 medals and be placed 8th in the world games. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 4/8/04)

August 4: One of 75 political dissidents arrested in a government crackdown last year was in the hospital after suffering a heart attack behind bars. Margarito Broche, who was sentenced to 25 years in prison for allegedly working with US diplomats to undermine Cuba's communist government, was transferred to Salvador Allende Hospital, said his wife, Maria de la Caridad Noa. Noa and other relatives waited outside the hospital in hopes of seeing the 47-year-old Broche. There was no official word on his condition. (*AP*, 5/8/04)

August 6: Cuba's socialist government has sent thousands of health professionals on a crusade to other developing countries, with high points like the 10,000 doctors actively in service in Venezuela. But complaints have been heard back home over the months-long absence of healthcare specialists. The exportation of medical services is not always understood by a Cuban population accustomed over the years to a quality system of specialist services as well as primary health care. Castro himself is aware of the complaints. "It could very possibly be true that in the midst of so much movement there is no doctor in a certain place for a short time. These situations must be immediately resolved," he said in a speech in September last year. Other frequent complaints are the scarcity of certain medicines, and the deterioration of health facilities over the last ten years. (*IPS*, 6/8/04)

August 6: Cuban dissident Margarito Broche Espinosa, one of 75 mostly pro-democracy activists and independent journalists sentenced to prison more than a year ago, is in "stable" condition after suffering a heart attack in jail, according to his wife, Maria Caridad Noa. "His health is delicate although right now he is stable. His blood pressure and heart rate under control," she told the press. Doctors told Noa that her husband is "progressing quite well," and if he continues to improve, he could be transferred to intermediate care". (*EFE*, 6/8/04)

August 8: Fidel Castro presented 797 new nurses with their titles in a ceremony held at the Astral theater in Havana. In this way, the Escuela de Formación Emergente de Enfermería Republic of Panama, in Cotorro municipality, supplies new staff to hospitals and policlinics with a third group of graduates to meet the shortage of nurses in the capital. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/8/04)

August 9: In the absence of any official data, which is constantly denied by Cuban authorities, Cuban dissidents have prepared a report indicating that the number of high security prisons on the island has gone from 1 to 45; women's prisons from 1 to 12; and detention centres for minors have increased from 1 to 8. In the course of four and a half decades, there has been a disproportionate increase of prisons and inmates, according to the Cuban Commission of Human Rights (CCDH), a banned but tolerated organization headed by activist Elizardo Sánchez. According to the CCDH, in 1958 there were 5.5 million people in Cuba and 14 penitentiaries, which housed 4000 inmates. Today, with a population of 11.2 million, the number of inmates is estimated to reach 100 thousand, held in around 200 prisons. (*Reforma*, 9/8/04)

August 9: Magalys Suárez Martínez, a delegate from the National Independent Labour Confederation of Cuba (CONIC) in Villa Clara, informed that the Independent Teachers and Health Workers unions were recently created. Ricardo Sanfiel Bermúdez and Dr. Ibey Rodríguez Valdés were elected as their respective secretary-generals. The union leader also added that with the addition of these two the number of unions created by the CONIC in central Cuba now totals four. (*Cubanet*, 9/8/04)

August 9: Political prisoner Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta, who was sentenced to 20 years in prison, is on hunger strike. In a statement, the dissident organization Directorio Democrático Cubano denounced that Herrera began the strike in protest for ill treatments received in jail. (*Cubanoticias*, 9/8/04)

August 10: Cuba's highest-profile dissenter, Oswaldo Payá, who heads the Christian Liberation Movement, called for renewed efforts to press for the release of all political prisoners. Payá's plea for the release of all Cuban political prisoners is aimed at governments and international bodies like the United Nations and the Organization of American States. The campaign had been started by the wives and relatives of the prisoners. "We think that this amnesty campaign that they had initiated should be a priority", Payá said. "The campaign for the liberation of all our brothers should go on regardless of any political position or platform", he added in a public statement given to the press in Havana. [[Primero la Amnistía para los Prisioneros Políticos](#)](*EFE, Sun Sentinel*, 11/8/04)

August 11: Three Cuban dissidents, installed in a house of one of Havana's neighborhoods, are in their 11th day of hunger strike demanding freedom for political prisoners in the island. Carlos Miguel Lopez, 50, Francisco Moure, 44

and Yusimin Gil, 27, began the strike on August 1st in a house of La Lira, in the municipality of Arroyo Naranjo, where they have had only water, with their mouths covered with plaster, sitting under a Cuban flag next to a wall full of signs that demand unconditional freedom for all political prisoners. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 11/8/04)

August 11: Vladimiro Roca, leader of the dissident coalition Todos Unidos, said that La Lira strikers are members of ground organizations not known by the Cuban population. But, Roca acknowledged that their attitude has generated solidarity and concern among residents of the neighborhood where the strikers have installed themselves. "Total control by the [Cuban] regime does not allow that the population know what is going on", he said. "Although the government will not attend to their demands, the strike will have its impact in international public opinion, that is well informed of what is happening in Cuba," he added. Members of the National Commission for Reconciliation and Human Rights have visited the strikers, who will finish their protest on August 13, Fidel Castro's birthday. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 11/8/04)

August 11: The collapse of a decaying building in Old Havana left at least one dead and an unspecified number hurt, said a press report. The accident took place late morning, when the facade on the third floor crumbled down unexpectedly. (*AFP*, 11/8/04)

August 11: Cuban political prisoner Cándido Terry Carbonell was released from prison after a two-year sentence. Carbonell Terry was sent to jail after walking along the streets with a 1.60 meter poster that said "Down with the dictatorship". (*AdCuba.Org*, 17/8/04)

August 11: Clara Lourdes Prieto, sister of independent journalist and political prisoner Fabio Prieto Llorente, reported that her brother began a hunger strike in Kilo 8 prison, Camagüey. The prisoner is demanding to be moved to a prison closer to his home, in Isla de la Juventud. (*Europa Press*, 19/8/04)

August 12: Political prisoner Léster González Pentón informed his relatives that he has been transferred from the Kilo 7 Prison in Camagüey to another one in Santa Clara, closer to his home. González Pentón has been serving a 20-year sentence since March 2003. He is the fourth member of the group of 75 to be transferred in recent hours. (*Cubamet*, 13/8/04)

August 19: Cuba called on unions and neighborhood groups to mobilize members for a massive clean-up effort to pick up trees and debris flung in the streets when Hurricane Charley ripped through the island on its way to Florida. The effort is necessary to help speed up recovery in Charley's aftermath, Pedro Saez, the Communist Party's first secretary for Havana, told Cuba's National Information Agency. (*AP*, 19/8/04)

August 19: For Manuel Vázquez, prison was hell, a place of rats and roaches, bedbugs and mosquitoes. In June, he was unexpectedly freed. Mr. Vázquez, 52, was among the 75 dissidents, writers and librarians sentenced to prison terms of up to 28 years in April 2003. But his torment isn't over. "I came out of prison completely crazy!" he yelled from his fifth-floor apartment in Alamar, east of Havana. "Tell them I'm crazy!" Back in Alamar, Mr. Vázquez is fighting, too. But it's taken a toll, his wife said. "Manuel thinks that God is speaking through him," she said. Over the last year, Ms. Huerga was among the many wives of jailed dissidents and journalists who risked their own freedom in denouncing prison conditions, staging silent marches and demanding that their loved ones' be released. Now that her husband is free, she doesn't want to get involved in the political opposition. "I'm relieved Manuel was released. But I'm also afraid because in Cuba nothing is certain." (*The Dallas Morning News*, 19/8/04)

August 21: Water supplies to some areas of Havana have not been restored and residents get their daily water ration from government tanker trucks. In some areas the fire department helps supply water to homes, hospitals and even the Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, among other institutions. According to the most recent figures, 12,869 people remain affected by the water shortage and 2,741 are still in shelters because they cannot return to homes

that must be rebuilt. Thousands of residents in Old Havana still depend on water tankers, where a large number of companies, businesses, hotels and restaurants for foreign tourists are located. (*EFE, Europa Press, Granma* , 21/8/04)

August 21: Cuban expertise in the field of clinical hypnosis was confirmed recently when a top psychologist received the prestigious HipnoCaribe 2004 prize in an international event in Puerto Rico. The award was the one of two Alberto Cobián Mena received at the First Congress of Therapeutic Hypnosis held in Puerto Rico. The judges praised Cobián for his contribution to the development of the specialty in both medical practice and academic research. Doctor Cobián is the current President of the Caribbean Association of Therapeutic Hypnosis that has offices in Puerto Rico, Colombia, Panama, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 21/8/04)

August 21: Several slogans stating "down with Fidel", "down with the dictatorship", "Liberty for the Cuban People", appeared in the neighborhood of San Francisco de Paula, in San Miguel del Padrón, declared Frank García Llerena, a member of the National Directive of the Democratic Party November 30 "Frank País". According to the information, the slogans appeared written on walls of stores and bus stops where many citizens gather on a daily basis. Officers of the State Security removed them by painting the walls with yellow paint. (*Puente Informativo*, 21/8/04)

August 21: People in Havana began an intensive effort to clear away the devastation left behind by Hurricane Charley a week ago. Organization of the cleanup work has been centered in labor associations of townships most affected by the hurricane, which summoned workers for a day of clearing and cleaning green areas and surrounding streets. Vice President Carlos Lage called upon Cubans to make sure every street is picked up in the hardest-hit neighborhoods - Playa, Marianao, Boyeros, Arroyo Naranjo, Plaza de la Revolucion and La Lisa. The notice circulated by local media said the cleanup is to be conducted by neighborhood organizations that should concentrate on picking up garbage, cleaning streets and eliminating possible mosquito breeding grounds, among other tasks. (*Radio Habana Cuba, EFE*, 21/8/04)

August 22: Cuban shot-putter Yumileidi Cumbá became the first gold medal winner for Cuba in the Olympic Games, after Russian Irina Korzhanenko was positive in a doping control. Cumbá, who had won the silver after several fouls with a throw of 19.59m, will receive the gold medal. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/8/04)

August 22: María del Carmen Jerez Guevara, a 35-year-old nurse who worked for 14 years at a youth center in Manzanillo, was fired due to orders given by Cuban State Security in that locality. "She was fired because she visits and worries about the health of one of her cousins, political prisoner Julio Antonio Valdés Guevara, and also because she publicly protested when the government sentenced Julio to 20 years in prison back in April 2003", Cruz Delia Aguilar Mora, Valdés Guevara's wife, stated to reporters. According to the information provided, Abel Guevara, captain of the political police in Manzanillo, convinced the director of the youth center to fire María del Carmen. (*Puente Informativo*, 22/8/04)

August 23: Political prisoner Cándido Terry Carbonell was released from jail, after a two-year sentence for shouting "Down with Fidel" in front of tourists and passers by in Revolution Square, Havana. (*Cubamet*, 23/8/04)

August 23: Berta Antunez, sister of political prisoner, Jorge Luis García Perez, "Antunez", declared herself on a hunger strike for an indefinite period of time. The decision, as Ms. Antunez said is due to the situation that her brother is going through in the provincial prison in Ariza, Cienfuegos. "My family suffered an act of aggression during our visit last July 5 th, when the guards beat my brother in front of my own eyes," Berta Antúnez confirmed. The Antunez family had been told that within a month, the authorities would answer her letter, which is yet to happen, Berta Antunez has declared herself on a hunger strike to demand a definitive answer to all the arbitrary situations that her brother suffers in prison. (*Netfor Cuba*, 24/8/04)

August 23: Nivaldo Díaz Castellón, a Varela Project activist and member of Movimiento Cristiano Liberación (MCL) in Pinar del Río, was forced by State Security agents to get inside a police car where he was victim of harassment for two hours. After confiscating MCL papers from him -- including a letter to the municipal delegation of the National Assembly denouncing arbitrary procedures by local police, and receiving threats by the agents, Díaz Castellón was released. (*Grupo Decoro*, 23/8/04)

August 25: The Cuban Catholic church is collecting and distributing humanitarian assistance for the thousands of victims of hurricane "Charley". The head of the Cuban Bishops Conference (COCC), José Félix Pérez, said that after the hurricane the Church launched a relief effort to help provide food, medicine and clothing to the victims. (*EFE*, 25/8/04)

August 26: A score of dissidents and wives of jailed government opponents gathered in a Havana apartment for a day of fasting to demand a pardon for all political prisoners. Most of those observing the day of fasting were the wives of the 75 dissidents sentenced in 2003 to up to 28 years in prison for allegedly conspiring with the United States, undermining the principles of the revolution and infringing on the freedom of the state. The protest was headed by Dolia Leal Francisco, whose husband, dissident Nelson Aguiar Ramirez, chairman of the outlawed Cuban Orthodox Party, is serving a 13-year prison sentence in the eastern province of Guantanamo. "We're asking for the immediate release of all Cuban political prisoners, which number more than 300, not only the 'Group of 75,' and we're also denouncing the conditions in which they are being held," Leal said. (*EFE*, 26/8/04)

August 26: In the town of Placetás, in the province of Villa Clara, 335 kilometers (208 miles) east of Havana, dissident Bertha Antunez has been on hunger strike since August 23 to demand that authorities transfer her brother, Jorge Luis Garcia Perez, to a jail in his native province, one of her relatives told the press. Garcia Perez was sentenced to 15 years in prison in 1993 after being found guilty of "enemy propaganda, attempted sabotage and possession of illegal arms and explosives," his brother-in-law, Alejandro Garcia, said. Several dissident groups have gone on hunger strike in the past weeks to demand that the communist regime headed by Fidel Castro release the island's political prisoners. (*EFE*, 26/8/04)

August 26: Blanca Reyes, wife of Cuban dissident and poet Raul Rivero, criticized the "harassment" of her husband in prison where he is completing a 20-year sentence. Reyes informed the press that her husband called her and explained that on August 20 he had a "verbally violent incident" involving prison security personnel. "They threatened to put him in solitary confinement for five days, but then decided to revoke his marital visiting privileges," stated Reyes. "They are tormenting Raul, even though he is smart and tries to take it very calmly, but they are trying to humiliate Raul, they are trying to break him," she said. Rivero is being held in the Ciego de Avila prison some 450 km from Havana. According to his wife, Rivero is entitled to one visit by his spouse every five months, and the visit authorized for next September 11 has been cancelled. (*EFE*, 26/8/04)

August 29: Cuba ranked 11 at the close of the 2004 Olympics in Athens. It was the only Latin American country ranking among the top 15 countries in Athens, followed by Brazil ranking 18. Cuba obtained nine gold medals, five in boxing, one free style wrestling, one women's shot put, one women's javelin and of course, the gold in baseball. The Caribbean nation also secured 7 silver and 11 bronze medals for a total of 27. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/8/04)

August 30: Blanca Reyes, the wife of Cuban imprisoned dissident and writer Raúl Rivero, addressed an "open letter" to intellectuals throughout the world denouncing Rivero's worsening of jail conditions. According to Reyes, Rivero is suffering from constant psychological tortures and humiliations" by the prison guards of a facility in Ciego de Avila -- 460 kilometers away from Havana—where the writer has being held since April 2003. (*ABC*, 30/8/04)

August 31: Bertha Antúnez -- the sister of political prisoner Jorge Luis Antúnez-- was taken to a hospital in Placetás, Las Villas province, after losing consciousness. Over 20 persons, among relatives and human rights activists, have

joined a hunger strike that Bertha initiated on August 27, in demand of better treatment and better conditions for her brother in jail. Among the people who have joined the hunger strike are Antúnez' relatives, Alejandro García Sardiñas and Damaris García -- Bertha's husband and daughter --, Mirta Asela Pernet Reyes -- her mother --, Damaysi Jiménez Pernet, Iris Pérez Aguilera and Mario Pérez Aguilera -- her cousins. Also joining the hunger strike were human rights activists, Taimara Agramonte Grau, José Antonio Pérez González, Francisco Becerra Vázquez, Blas Fortún Martínez, Pedro Regalado Cárdenas Silverio, Amado Ruiz Moreno, Xiomara Martín Jiménez, María Elvira Ruíz García, Guillermo Pérez Yera, Marta Beatriz Roque, Marilín Díaz Fernández and Lázaro González Arana. The Directorio Democrático Cubano, based in Miami, made a call to Cuban authorities to listen to Bertha Antúnez requests for better treatment for her brother in jail. Dissident Martha Beatriz Roque who was recently released from jail, after having been sentenced in April 2003, joined the hunger strike. (*Europa Press*, 31/8/04)

August 31: The wives of Cuban political prisoners Hector Palacios and Oscar Espinosa, hospitalized several months ago due to ill health, expressed that they are worried because of their husbands' health. Gisela Delgado made a plea in favor of her husband, 63-year old Hector Palacios, in a letter addressed to the International Red Cross and international human rights organizations. Delgado reported that Palacios, sentenced to 25 years in prison as part of the group of 75 dissidents sentenced in the spring of 2003, "is in poor health and in the coming days his situation may worsen." Miriam Leiva shared a communique in which she warns that the health of her husband, Oscar Espinosa Chepe, sentenced to 20 years in jail, "continues to decline." She also expressed her "worry" for his "progressive deterioration." Espinosa Chepe, who also belongs to the "group of 75," is in the hospital at the "Combinado del Este" jail in La Habana. (*EFE*, 31/9/04)

Economy

August 1: Cuban oil production through July was 17 million barrels toward a new record of more than 30 million barrels this year, the official media said. "The central oil producing region arrived at 1 million tonnes (7 million barrels)" the government's midday television newscast said. State-run radio said the 7 million barrels represented 41 percent of this year's output, which would therefore be 17 million barrels. Cuban oil production was 26 million barrels (71,300 bpd) in 2003 and 653 million cubic meters of gas. The media reports said natural gas production was 500 million cubic meters through July. Foreign companies, mainly Canadian firms Sherritt International Corp. (S.TO) and Pebercan Inc. (PBC.TO), have joint ventures and production agreements with state oil monopoly Cubapetroleo (Cupet) and account for around 60 percent of Cuba's oil and gas output. (*Reuters* 1/8/04)

August 2: Cuba is urging sugar workers to take advantage of recent rainfall and ease damage caused by drought, local media said, though reports left no doubt that the coming harvest was in trouble and some mills would not open. Light-to-moderate rainfall over the last few weeks has put some life back into cane plantations devastated by months of unusually dry weather, but the moisture was not nearly enough. "Last year we had 680 millimeters (26.8 inches) of rain through July and this year 190 millimeters (7.5 inches)," the deputy director of central Villa Clara province's sugar industry, Sergio Guillen Sosa, said. (*Reuters*, 2/8/04)

August 3: An end to the oil shipments from Venezuela, combined with recent US restrictions on travel and remittances to Cuba, could put the Cuban economy and Castro's government against the ropes. "Clearly it is in the Cuban government's commercial and economic interests to have Chávez remain the president of Venezuela," said John Kavulich, president of the US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, a New York-based group that monitors trade with the communist island. Kavulich compares a possible Chávez loss to the end of Soviet subsidies to Havana in 1992. "Venezuela has clearly replaced the USSR in terms of the commercial and economic element," says Kavulich. "Without Venezuela, Cuba would not be able to maintain its current commercial, economic, and political systems. There would have to be some changes." (*The Miami Herald*, 3/8/04)

August 5: Cuba has just inaugurated a new service to receive money remittances through Italy and Spain, five weeks after the restrictions approved by US President George W. Bush went into effect, according to a report in the press. The new service is called Sercuba and is provided by the Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba S.A. (ETECSA), a Cuban-Italian joint venture. Its offices will initially be in Italy and Spain, with prospects to spread to other countries. "Sercuba provides a safe, easy and rapid solution to send money transfers to your relatives and friends in Cuba," says the company on its website. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 7/8/04)

August 5: Addressing the opening session of ASCE's three-day conference in Miami, Phil Peters, a Cuba expert with the Washington-based Lexington Institute, said the economic openings Cuba adopted in the early 1990s -- after its massive Soviet subsidies ended -- were positive in the beginning but "now we see things slipping into reverse." The island now has a "culture of illegality," because of the mixture of private and state-controlled economic activities, and could achieve more positive results with "minor changes," he said. But as long as Castro is in power, Peters stressed, "they're going to keep things as they are.". ASCE (The Association for the Study of Cuban Economy) is largely made up of academics and business people interested in Cuba issues. (*The Miami Herald*, 6/8/04)

August 5: The British government gave \$34,785 dollars to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Havana for the construction of a drinking water system in Guantánamo. The system will benefit 571 residents in Hatibonico, of which 251 are women and 108 are children, and will supply water for household and general consumption as well as for food production and other economic activities. (*AFP*, 5/8/04)

August 5: Cuba announced it will take new measures to reduce electricity consumption due to shortages caused by breakdowns in the generation system. The head of the Energy Conservation Program on the island, Víctor Puentes Monto, said on local television that the shortfall is estimated at 200 megawatts, mainly as a result of breakdowns in the Antonio Guiteras electrical plant in Matanzas. In an effort to reduce demand, the government has instructed state entities to halt non-essential production, to relocate indispensable staff to administrative headquarters and to send the rest on holidays. Other measures include turning air-conditioning off in state entities during peak demand, cut lighting and the use of electrical equipment as well as scheduling irrigation during early morning hours. (*EFE*, 6/8/04)

August 5: Sherritt International Corp., Toronto, plans to resume exploratory drilling in northern Cuba in the third quarter and is considering an increase in its \$90 million capital spending plan in light of the current oil price. Capital spending was \$46.2 million in the first half of 2004, and first half gross working interest oil production in Cuba fell 13% to 37,444 b/d (19,811 b/d net). The production dip was due to natural declines in Canasí and Puerto Escondido fields and delays in drilling several development wells in the last half of 2003. Exploratory drilling will start with the Santa Cruz prospect on Block 7. Sherritt said it has work commitments for several exploration wells in the next 12 months. With three rigs running, the company will refocus development drilling on the Seboruco area, where recent drilling has resulted in higher than anticipated initial production rates. It will undertake a 50% capacity expansion of the Yumurí oil treatment facility in late 2004 to process production expected from new wells at Seboruco and Yumurí. Construction was completed in the 2004 second quarter on a pipeline to ship gas from the Canasí facility to the Cuban gathering system at Puerto Escondido. (*Oil and Gas Journal*, 5/8/04)

August 5: Despite the current dramatic changes gripping the Cuban sugar industry, prompted by an international unfriendly market, the island's government has continued to improve living conditions for the relocated workers. As part of the benefits, the Paraguay community, in the easternmost Guantánamo province, already boasts a baseball field, a primary school, a library and a video cinema hall. Carlos Lage, the Secretary with the State Council's Executive Committee, said the government is also planning to increase the quality of life in former sugar-producing communities, while pondering other ways of improving conditions for residents in Paraguay community. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/8/04)

August 6: Despite the recent rain that fell in the east of Cuba, drought still persists in Holguín province, 164.7 miles away from Havana, as assured by Cruz Mario, director of the Enterprise for Aqueducts and Sewer Systems in this

province, who told the press that the lack of water supply has been partially mitigated, due to the rain in the last days, but a real restoration is not foreseen yet. The lack of rain in the last 10 years made the level of water go down from 21.4 to 2.4 million cubic meters in a reservoir called El Rincon, and the coming rain increased the amount of water in 2 million. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/8/04)

August 6: Cuba is seeking alternatives to tackle the intense drought affecting the eastern part of the island, by building water pumping stations and wells in round-the-clock working sessions, among other options. As part of such efforts, Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage has called on sugar cane farmers in Santiago, 900 km east of Havana, to find new alternatives and make their best to reduce the effects of the drought on the sugar cane plantations. On a recent tour of the east, Lage recommended to growers and harvesters that the soil in sugar cane plantations be permanently covered with straw, in order to keep grass from growing and maintain the level of humidity amid the surrounding dryness. The government has already built 10 water-pumping stations and sunk 100 new wells in Holguin. Its greatest hope is a new pipeline, being built at the cost of \$5 million dollars to channel water in a 32-mile distance from the river Cauto to the city of Holguín. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/8/04)

August 7: Cuban top engineers and operators are working round the clock to repair the turbine in one of the biggest sources of electric power in the country, interrupted since May, reported National TV News. The breakdown caused a deficit close to 200 mega-watts bringing frequent brownouts to many cities and localities of the island. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/8/04)

August 7: Cuba and Indonesia are exploring possibilities of stepping up cooperation in the fields of agriculture, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology sectors, Indonesian Ambassador to Havana, Indra Cahya, told local press. Quoted by Cuban newspaper Granma, Cahya stated that in order to further agree on future exchanges all that is left are visits by Cuban specialists to his country. Three commercial delegations from Indonesia have visited Cuba this year, following the Third Intergovernmental Meeting in 2003. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/8/04)

August 8: Professor Asma Ismail, a member of the Universiti Sains Malaysia-Cuba collaboration team, said that Malaysia and Cuba had both expressed interest in collaborating in vaccine development against infectious disease, development of monoclonal antibodies against cancer, biotechnology techniques in fish feed and fish production and human resource development programmes. "USM is interested in working with Cuba in medical biotechnology, which includes diagnostics, vaccinology, pharmacogenomics, stem- cell engineering and biomaterials. We also want to collaborate in neuro-science and aquaculture," she said. (*New Sunday Time*, 8/8/04)

August 9: Cuban energy authorities insisted that "it is indispensable" to fully observe a group of special measures adopted recently aimed at conserving electricity and curtailing consumption. (*Efecom*, 9/8/04)

August 9: Cuban trade unions have urged their members to join a voluntary work drive, to step up the country's economic performance in various sectors. The call by the Cuban Workers' Confederation (CTC) is aimed at boosting the sugarcane, tobacco and coffee harvests and other agricultural activities, as well as industrial production and construction of social works. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/8/04)

August 9: Cuban anti-cancer vaccines are gaining a place in the international market, according to AIN News Agency. One of these vaccines is the EGF-P64K which is a biomedicine based on the human epidermal growth factor and used for the treatment of different types of skin cancer, according to the Cuban weekly newspaper Opciones. Commercial manager of the Cuban Center for Molecular Immunology, Mauro Alfonso, commented on the large number of countries interested in the product. Agreements have been signed with an Indian firm and negotiations are underway with other nations. Some of the contracts include partial technology transfers while others cover marketing rights and cooperative production. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 9/8/04)

August 10: The intense drought parching eastern Cuba since last year has severely damaged its ranching and agriculture, notably the sugar cane crop. Holguin, one of the provinces hardest hit by the drought, required an investment of \$15.2 million last year to alleviate the situation, provincial deputy director of finance Raul Topes told the local press. "The amount," the official noted "could increase if the lack of precipitation persists, with resulting low levels of water in reservoirs." According to an Agriculture Ministry report cited by state-run Prensa Latina news agency, more than 2,200 head of dairy cattle have died, leading to a 418,000-liter (110,430-gallon) decrease in milk production over the past year. (*EFE*, 10/8/04)

August 10: Foreign investment in Cuba dropped last year for the first time since the communist-led island began opening to business more than a decade ago. Havana authorized fewer new ventures with foreign companies, and a record number of existing ones dissolved. That resulted in a 15 percent decline in the number of foreign economic associations, to 343 at the end of 2003, according to a study presented at a just-concluded conference in Miami. The drop comes as Cuba gets more selective about the foreign ventures it will allow, souring even more overseas companies on doing business with the island. That's a reversal of Havana's more open attitude toward business in the early 1990s just after the collapse of the Soviet Union and demise of Soviet largesse. "In the past year, there's been a clear trend toward re-centralization of the economy," said Paolo Spadoni, a doctoral student at the University of Florida who has been researching foreign investment in Cuba for years. (*Sun Sentinel*, 10/8/04)

August 12: Fidel Castro said the capital city was thoroughly prepared to face Hurricane Charley, thus providing Havana the opportunity to considerably minimize losses. Castro referred to the rapid movement of the hurricane, which within 24 hours moved from the sea off eastern Guantánamo province to areas just below western Cuba. "We were hoping it would not hit the capital city, that it would turn east or west, but meteorological forecasts have been made; we will see-once it passes through-what damage it has inflicted", commented Castro. This situation is occurring while the country is still hard at work recovering from two previous hurricanes that hit the country just a couple of years ago, particularly Michelle, which was very destructive, explained the Cuban leader. He said he was concerned about similar damage that could be inflicted by strong winds hitting areas of the capital city. (*AIN*, 12/8/04)

August 12: The tobacco leaves harvested in the Cuban western province of Pinar del Rio, the first in the country, have been secured against the approaching gusts of Hurricane Charley. Juan Carlos Pozo, from the Ministry of Agriculture, told the press measures include speeding up the harvesting of 26,000 tons of leaves, while sheltering them all in safe places. (*Prensa Latina*, 12/8/04)

August 12: Hurricane Charley has passed through Cuba after gathering strength in the Caribbean and headed north towards the American state of Florida. In Havana, authorities created shelters to evacuate 20,000 people from low-lying areas and from several buildings for fear they will collapse, like in Old and Central Havana's historic districts. In Pinar del Rio, Cuba's biggest tobacco-producing province, 52,000 people were evacuated and 50,000 tons of tobacco have been secured. More than 1,300 tourists were evacuated from Cayo Largo del Sur to the resort town of Varadero in Matanzas province, some 140 kilometers (87 miles) from the capital. Tourism officials in Varadero told the press that around 18,000 visitors stayed in the area's hotels and authorities were able to accommodate evacuees in vacant rooms. In addition, mobile civil-defense units were on the streets giving instructions on safety precautions in Cuba's main resort area. The entire fishing fleet on the Isle of Youth off the southern coast of Cuba proper was safely in port and the cargo at the docks were transferred to safe places, according to the official newspaper Juventud Rebelde. Havana residents waited in long lines at stores and gas stations to gather basic provisions and fill their cars' gas tanks up with gasoline, while many churches began selling candles in preparation for the electricity going out in the storm. (*EFE*, 12/8/04)

August 17: Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage told reporters that a complete report on damage to food production, services and housing caused by hurricane Charlie has not yet been submitted. Lage called on local authorities to step up recovery efforts, noting that people in some areas are still without electricity after four days. Brigades of electricians

and other experts from Cuba's central and eastern provinces have been volunteering in the capital and in the province of Pinar del Río -- in an effort to restore all services to area residents as quickly as possible. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 17/8/04)

August 19: The International School of Cinema in San Antonio de los Baños, one of the most prestigious institutions in the world of filmmaking, was hit by Hurricane "Charley" in his path through Cuba. Dozens of palm and coconut trees were pulled up by the roots and scattered all over the grassy areas surrounding the school, while hundreds of aluminium roof covers were lifted and glass windows were shattered by the winds. The Hurricane also destroyed walls and ceilings of some classrooms. (*EFE*, 19/8/04)

August 21: Cuba, whose merchant fleet shrank during the economic crisis of the 1990s, has over a thousand seamen working in foreign vessels as part of a policy that seeks to have 10,000 of such contracts by 2010. The initiative is seen as an "important source" of income, reported the weekly "Opciones." (*Europa Press*, 21/8/04)

August 21: Cuba's National Centre for Protected Areas received a major boost when the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) confirmed it will fund several new projects on the island. The UN assistance will be used to fortify conservation efforts in three important ecological zones: dry, pine forests and wetlands specialist Pedro Ruiz, told the press. The Cuban conservation specialist added that his centre is currently focused on forest management and the promotion of environmental awareness. UNEP already cooperates with a bio-diversity and sustainable development program in the Sabana-Camaguey ecosystem. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 21/8/04)

August 24: Hurricane Charley caused more than \$1 billion in damage to Havana and its surrounding provinces when it roared through western Cuba on August 13, killing four people, a leader of the ruling Communist Party said. The storm demolished 4,177 houses and damaged almost 70,000 other homes, Politburo member Pedro Sáez said in Round Table program -- broadcast live on Cuban radio and TV. He said that 798 schools and 312 health clinics and hospitals were also damaged by the hurricane. Charley has been nicknamed the "lumberjack" hurricane because its 105 mph (169 kph) winds uprooted or snapped more than 8,000 trees in Havana, and destroyed 300 hectares (7,400 acres) of tree plantations outside the city, he said. It was the worst storm to hit Cuba since Hurricane Michelle in 2001 plowed through the center of the island in 2001, leaving 200,000 homeless and \$1.8 billion in damages. Sáez, the party's first secretary for the City of Havana province, said Charley's most painful impact was to leave 2 million inhabitants without water for days on end because pumping facilities had no power. Large parts of the city's westside, as well as Havana and Pinar del Río provinces had no electricity for 11 days due to the downing of 28 high-voltage towers from a power plant in Mariel. Some 23,000 hectares (56,800 acres) of bananas, citrus and other fruit were flattened in Havana province, where cattle, chicken and pig farms were badly damaged. (*Reuters, Prensa Latina*, 24/8/04)

August 25: The potential breaking-off of diplomatic relations between Cuba and Panama has given rise to concern among businesspeople of the Colon Free Zone. Cuba is not only their main client in the Caribbean but owes them over \$200 million. The breaking-off would have "very negative consequences on the Free Zone and Panama", said Hertsel Levy, president of the (Colon Free Zone) Association of Merchants (AU). He also added that Cuba is one of the top ten buyers of the Free Zone, conducting \$12 billion worth of business a year. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 26/8/04)

August 25: Over 100,000 Cubans are receiving water from tankers in Las Tunas province, due to a harsh drought that has been affecting eastern Cuba for ten years now. Nearly 140 communities in that territory of 2542 square miles and over 532,000 inhabitants are deprived of running water, which is getting scarcer, and into low level reservoirs, now at 30 percent of their capacities. Provincial authorities have estimated losses in 2004 in \$26 million, prompted by damages to agriculture and stockbreeding, besides the resulting soil degradation. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/8/04)

August 27: Interests in Cuba as a tourist destination continue to grow, this time with Chinese vacationers. This was evident during a meeting at the Cuban embassy in Beijing, with the participation of some 40 tour agency

representatives and the Chinese press specialized in tourism. Omar Pereira, in charge of Consular Affairs at the Cuban diplomatic mission in the Chinese capital, said that the island's tourism industry was increasing. He noted that Cuba plans to welcome a record number of visitors this year - over two million. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 27/8/04)

August 27: Panama requested Mexico to take on its commercial representation in Cuba after the governments of Mireya Moscoso and Fidel Castro broke diplomatic relations, indicated Mexico's Foreign Minister, Luis Ernesto Derbez. Derbez said that "all necessary steps are currently being taken so that Mexico can represent Panamanian interests on the island." (*Europa Press*, 27/8/04)

August 28: Argentina and Cuba signed a trade agreement in Buenos Aires, to achieve bilateral exchanges worth \$200 million per year. The accord was signed by Argentine Health and Foreign Ministers, and Cuba's Alimport (Cuba Food Importing Company) Argentina will purchase biopharmaceutical products and Cuban medical technology. Alimport will import Argentinean products, according to the document expiring in 2007. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/8/04)

August 30: Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification UNCCD, Hama Arba Diallo, said the UN is ready to analyze how the international community can cooperate in the implementation of strategies of all Cuban eastern provinces to combat the negative effects of drought. The UN representative praised the measures taken by authorities in Las Tunas, Holguin and Camagüey to counteract drought's effects. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/8/04)

August 30: Cuba enjoyed almost an 11 percent increase in tourist visits during the busiest part of its high season, government officials said. The island this summer also broke its one-day record for hotel guests accommodated, with 44,415 on August 10 compared to 2003's one-day total of 40,026, the financial weekly *Opciones* reported. Jardines del Rey, Holguin, Varadero and the city of Havana remain the favorite haunts of tourists who last year hailed largely from Canada, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy, the publication said. Cuba has some 40,000 rooms distributed among 273 hotels, 60 percent of which are in the four- and five-star categories. The government expects to reach its goal of receiving more than 2 million tourists this year. (*EFE*, 30/8/04)

August 28: Cuba continues to strive to restore power in some areas after Hurricane Charley hit the western part of the country two weeks ago. Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage said there are many hard-working days ahead before reestablishing power services completely in western Pinar del Río and Havana provinces. It is time to resort to experience and professionalism to restore electricity to 30,000 houses lacking that service in the region since the hurricane hit the island on August 13, he said. The Cuban leader noted that 23 percent of the population in the 11 (out of 19) most affected municipalities of Havana province still lack power, adding that workers will have to complete the recuperation of high-tension towers brought down by the hurricane. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/8/04)

Exile Community

August 1: Hundreds of Cuban Americans have been returning to the US, as tough new curbs on travel to Cuba imposed by Washington come into effect. Cuban Americans will only be allowed to go back to the island once every three years instead of once a year. The Havana airport departure lounge was packed with tearful Cuban families getting together for a long, emotional farewell. (*BBC*, 2/8/04)

August 2: Hundreds of Cuban Americans took to the streets of Miami to protest US President George Bush's latest attempts to cut their family ties with Cuba, the daily *Granma* reported. *Granma* said more than 500 demonstrators picketed the offices of anti-Cuban Congresswoman Ileana Ross Lehtinen. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 2/8/04)

August 5: Michael Moore's "Fahrenheit 9/11" is generating a new wave of attention -- this time from Cuban Americans. In Miami and elsewhere, Cuban Americans who support Bush are vilifying Moore on Spanish-language radio, the Internet and in e-mails. Their objection, beyond the new film: inflammatory pieces Moore wrote about Cuban exiles in 1997 and 2000 in which he called them "Batista supporters" and "wimps" who were wrong not to immediately send home child-boater Elián González. The controversy has put Cuban-American Democrats in a sensitive spot: Moore's writings about Miami exiles are sure to offend some of them, but the filmmaker's anti-Bush message resonates strongly with Democrats eager to reclaim the White House. Miami Cuban-American Gus Garcia, a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in Boston, said he skipped the Florida delegation's July 28 breakfast with Moore because a relative called and read him an e-mail quoting Moore's writings. (*The Miami Herald*, 6/8/04)

August 5: The University of Havana has announced several summer courses in September for Cubans and their children overseas, indicated the local press. The announcements coincide with statements made during the Third Conference "the Nation and the Emigration," which gathered 200 Cuban émigrés from 40 different countries for a dialogue with Cuban authorities in Havana. (*EFE*, 5/8/04)

August 7: The influential Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) has rejected the "racist and intolerant" comments from U.S. filmmaker Michael Moore, director of "Fahrenheit 9/11", against the Cuban-American community. "The Cuban American National Foundation completely rejects Mr. Moore's bigoted comments against the Cuban-American community and this organization in particular," said that organization in a note released in Miami. [[CANF Reacts to Michael Moore's Comments](#)] (*El Nuevo Herald*, 8/8/04)

August 16: The Democracy Movement, a Miami-based organization of Cuban exiles, requested President George W. Bush to temporarily lift the sanctions against Cuba to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the island in the wake of the damages caused by Hurricane Charley. The organization asked the White House for an "emergency exception" of the sanctions for 30 to 60 days. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 17/8/04)

August 20: Two local Cuban solidarity organizations want to remind South Floridians that Cuba also suffered in the path of Hurricane Charley. In a news conference, the Christian Women Association in Defense of Cuban Families and Jewish Solidarity asked the community to contribute food and supplies for areas of Cuba hit hard in last week's hurricane. "We have not divorced ourselves from families and friends on the island," said Jewish Solidarity chairman Eddie Levy. "We show solidarity to friends in need." (*The Miami Herald*, 20/8/04)

August 24: Cuban exile groups praised the US government for using a C-130 military cargo airplane to circumvent Cuban electronic jamming and broadcast US-funded Radio and TV Marti into communist-run island. One of the leading Cuban exile groups in Florida, the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), issued a statement praising the Bush administration for the operation. The TV station "is irrefutably one of the most critical tools at the disposition of US policy to help precipitate a democratic transition on the island," said CANF head Joe Garcia. Feliciano Foyo of another exile group, the Cuban Liberty Council, also hailed the move. "These transmissions will allow Cubans to learn about a world which Fidel Castro has hidden from them, and to learn about the possibilities every human being has in a world where he lives in liberty," Foyo said. (*Chanel News Asia*, 24/8/04)

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Ignacio Castro, said about \$400,000 had been raised. [For more on this, see Foreign Affairs and Terrorism] (*The Miami Herald*, 24/8/04)

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August 26: Brothers to the Rescue, an organization of Cuban exiles, issued a statement supporting a public letter by the Cuban American National Foundation addressed to President George W. Bush, and his opponent in the coming elections. According to the statement, "most relevant" in CANF's letter is "the intention of CANF to condition its vote (...) to the specific measures to be taken against Castro". "The present administration still has time to take these measures without further eroding their credibility in our community", the statement adds. [[Letter to the Presidential Candidates](#)] (*Netfor Cuba*, 26/8/04)

August 31: President Bush's former housing secretary, Mel Martinez, took a surprise lead in a ballot in Florida to pick the Republican party's candidate for a keenly sought US Senate seat. With 54 percent of votes counted in a primary election seen as a test of Florida's ability to put the vote-counting fiasco of 2000 behind it, Martinez led fellow Republican Bill McCollum, a former congressman, by 42 percent to 33 percent, the Florida Department of State said. On the other side of the electoral divide, voters registered with the Democratic party overwhelmingly picked former Florida education commissioner Betty Castor to be their candidate for the Senate seat being vacated by retiring Democratic Senator Bob Graham in November. Martinez' candidacy had been expected to shore up Bush's support among Cuban-Americans, a pivotal constituency in a state Bush won by just 537 votes in 2000, and which is again seen as a key battleground in the November 2 general election. (*Reuters*, 31/8/04)

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Terrorism

August 6: US authorities have allowed journalists to watch the special tribunals at the US detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, surrounded by walls of razor wire, for the first time. Facing criticism over the physical and legal conditions at Camp Delta, US military authorities started the tribunals to review whether the 585 remaining inmates were properly classified as "enemy combatants" when captured. (*ABC*, 6/8/04)

August 14: Cuba warned the Ministry of Foreign Relations of Panama about its responsibility if that government allows terrorists imprisoned in that country since November, 2000 to escape or exarcerate them. The warning is contained in a statement by the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Relations issued on the present situation of the process followed in Panama against terrorists Luis Posada Carriles, Gaspar Jiménez Escobedo, Pedro Remon and Guillermo Novo Sampoll. [[Official Statement](#)] [For more on this, see Exile Community and Foreign Affairs] (*Prensa Latina*, 15/8/04)

August 16: The Government of Panama does not plan to grant amnesty to a group of Cubans accused of plotting to assassinate Fidel Castro in November 2000, said Panama's Foreign Minister. "They will serve their sentences (of 7 and 8 years in prison) in Panama", said emphatically Foreign Minister Harmodio Arias. Last March, Cubans Luis Posada Carriles, Gaspar Jimenez, Pedro Remon and Guillermo Novo were sentenced by a Panamanian court for actions threatening national security and illicit association. [For more on this, see Exile Community and Foreign Affairs] (*AFP*, 17/8/04)

August 26: Panama's president has pardoned four Cuban-exile extremists convicted of plotting to kill Fidel Castro, whose government has said diplomatic relations would be severed if the "terrorists" were so favored. Announcing the pardons just days before she was to leave office, President Mireya Moscoso said she wanted to prevent a future

government from extraditing the four when they finish their terms. She pardoned Luis Posada Carriles, Gaspar Jimenez, Guillermo Novo and Pedro Remon. "We know that if they stay, they would face the possibility of being extradited to Venezuela or Cuba where I am sure they would have been killed," she told a news conference. Posada, a 76-year-old former CIA operative, faces criminal charges in Venezuela as well as Cuba. [For more on this, see Exile Community and Foreign Affairs] (*EFE, AP, 26/8/04*)

August 26: Three Miami Cuban exiles jailed after Fidel Castro claimed they were plotting to assassinate him came home amid cheers and tears at Opa-locka Airport, having been pardoned by Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso. A fourth, alleged mastermind Luis Posada Carriles -- a man Castro once called "the worst terrorist in the hemisphere" -- immediately went into hiding. [For more on this, see Exile Community and Foreign Affairs] (*The Miami Herald, 27/8/04*)

August 26: FBI agents questioned three Cuban exiles shortly after they arrived at Opa-locka Airport following their pardon by Panama's president in an alleged plot to kill Fidel Castro. The information could be used for an investigation into whether the three -- all naturalized US citizens -- violated federal law. The US Neutrality Act bars Americans from trying to overthrow foreign governments not at war with this country. FBI agents interrogated the three to find out more about the Castro claim that they planned to kill him during a 2000 visit to Panama, according to law enforcement sources. Immigration officials also questioned them. Meanwhile, the mystery of the whereabouts of a fourth exile and alleged plot mastermind, Luis Posada Carriles, continued with reports that he was in El Salvador or Honduras. [For more on this, see Exile Community and Foreign Affairs] (*The Miami Herald, 28/8/04*)

August 28: Fugitive Cuban exile Luis Posada Carriles, accused by Havana of multiple terror attacks, sneaked into Honduras using an altered US passport after he was freed from a Panama prison, Honduran officials said. A Honduran immigration worker at the airport in the northern city of San Pedro Sula confirmed that a known photograph of Posada matched a man who landed there, the officials said. "Based on that identification, we believe Posada did enter Honduras, and we have many teams out looking for him," said a top government official who asked for anonymity because of the sensitivity of his job. [For more on this, see Exile Community and Foreign Affairs] (*The Miami Herald, 28/8/04*)

August 30: Honduran president Ricardo Maduro said that if self-confessed anti-Castro terrorist Luis Posada Carriles is found in Honduras, he "will be treated like a criminal." Maduro told reporters that Posada Carriles - along with three other Castro opponents, who later traveled to Miami - arrived in the northern Honduran city of San Pedro Sula "with forged passports and under false identities." "Any person who enters the country without authorization is government will "hold responsible in every sense, even those who traveled on to the United States," namely Guillermo Novo, Pedro Remon and Gaspar Jimenez, who Maduro warned, "will also be prosecuted." "He obviously isn't a common criminal," Maduro said of Posada Carriles, given that he entered Honduras in a private plane, "has money and has the support of some powerful people who helped him obtain forged US passports. That's why we know we're dealing with important international influences." "We're not going to rest for a moment, especially in the case of an internationally well-known illegal immigrant. Once more, I want to make it very clear: he'll be treated like a criminal," said Maduro. (*EFE, 30/8/04*)

US-Cuba Relations

August 1: A heavily promoted Las Vegas show featuring more than 50 Cuban performers was unravelling on the eve of its scheduled opening as red tape and politics bogged down the group's last-minute push for its travel documents. Meanwhile, the show's producers, who were in Havana trying to speed things up, were called by immigration authorities for violating their tourist visas and ordered to leave. Jorge Gonzalez, head of international relations for the

government's National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists, said his organization handled paperwork on the earlier US visas request and was unwilling to repeat the hassle when approval seemed unlikely. In the first official comment on the case, Culture Minister Abel Prieto told the press that the key problem was a break in the previous working relationship between the group and the writers and artists union, known here as UNEAC. "A kind of ghost has appeared (...) an imaginary creature," Abel said, referring to the group's characterization of itself as fully divorced from the government. "The main idea is that suddenly an official UNEAC group has become an independent group and then they miraculously receive the visas they were denied shortly before." (AP, 1/8/04)

August 1: Katrien Demuyne and Marc Vandepitte, two Belgians in their country's Committee of Solidarity with the Cuban Five, visited Cuban prisoner Gerardo Hernandez, in the US federal prison of Lompoc. According to Radio Havana Cuba station, the two Belgians joined US citizens Alice Jrapko and Bill Hackwell, coordinators of the National Committee to Free the Five, in visiting the inmate. (*Prensa Latina*, 1/8/04)

August 1: If thousands of Cubans again took to the seas as they did in the summer of 1994, they probably would not come straight to the United States. Today, the US Coast Guard repatriates any Cubans caught at sea who immigration authorities determine do not have a credible fear of persecution if returned to Cuba. Those who show they have a credible fear are sent to the US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, where they undergo further interviews. Most pass those interviews and then wait for another country to accept them. The United States will not take them in, however. That would send the wrong signal, said a State Department official who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "It would be incoherent for us to then bring these people to the United States because, again, the message here is safe, orderly, legal migration," he said. The policy also serves as a deterrent to mass migration, the official said. "I think it sends a signal to the Cuban people that the United States and Cuba, despite their many disagreements on many things, agree this is the only type of migration that should take place," he said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 1/8/04)

August 2: John Kerry and John Edwards are aiming to pick up some votes from the Cuban-American community after recent polls suggested that a portion of the traditionally Republican voting bloc may be up for grabs. Edwards, the Democratic vice presidential candidate, spent private time with some members of Miami's Cuban-American community. Democrats say President Bush's get-tough policy on Cuba has backfired. Designed to choke off Fidel Castro's government, the tight restrictions and limits on remittances have angered Cuban-Americans with family back on the island. (*Fox News*, 5/8/04)

August 2: The US government has repatriated 23 Cubans who tried to reach the shores of Florida in late July in a boat allegedly piloted by migrant traffickers, an official reported. Miami Coast Guard spokesman Luis Diaz said the migrants were returned to Bahía de Cabañas, in Cuba, after being intercepted at sea in late July in a nine-meter (38-foot) boat. (*EFE*, 5/8/04)

August 2: The Weisman Art Museum canceled an exhibition of conceptual art from Cuba because of international tensions and visa problems, the director of the museum at the University of Minnesota said. Museum director Lyndel King and two curators in Cuba had been working on the show, which was scheduled to open early next year, for four years. Nine artists were chosen and were expected to oversee the installation of their work and present talks in Minneapolis. Some of the artists also planned to create new artworks on site. But King said tensions between the United States and Cuba are running so high that the museum concluded it was impossible to do the show. (AP, 2/8/04)

August 4: Despite US efforts to strangle the flow of dollars to Cuba and fresh exchanges of acrimony between Presidents Bush and Fidel Castro, the cash-strapped Cuban government intends to make record US food purchases this year, according to its chief international shopper. "By the end of August, Cuba will have purchased in eight months as much as it did in the whole previous year," said Pedro Alvarez, head of Alimport, the government's food procurement enterprise. Cuban purchases from what is now the nation's biggest food supplier, already nearing the \$300-million mark by the end of July, are set to exceed \$440 million this year, Alvarez said in an interview. That would represent at least a

25% increase over last year's purchases from U.S. producers. More significant, say analysts in both countries, the expanding food trade represents broader spending by the Cuban government on vital staples for the monthly food ration on which most in this country of 11.2 million depend for survival. (*Los Angeles Times*, 4/8/04)

August 4: Controversial documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11* will be eligible for next year's US Academy Awards, after a pirate version screened in Cuba was ruled "not authorised". According to Oscar rules, documentary films are disqualified from the awards if they are shown on TV or the internet within nine months of release - so film makers were mortified when the movie appeared on Cuban TV. But *Fahrenheit 9/11*'s American distributor has insisted the broadcast was "not authorised" and it has been given the all clear by the Academy of Motion Pictures and Sciences spokesperson John Pavlik. Pavlik says, "If somebody steals your movie and puts it on TV, we're not going to penalize you for it." (*World Entertainment News Network*, 4/8/04)

August 5: Fidel Castro has lost his "prophetic, charismatic and inspirational abilities," leaving the island's political stability uncertain, the CIA's former top Cuba expert said. Castro is "no longer invincible," said Brian Latell, now with the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies. He was addressing the annual meeting of the Miami-based Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE). Latell said Havana's leader, who will turn 78 on August 13, has "lost his prophetic, charismatic and inspirational abilities," and as a result has become more constrained by aides, who now even write some of his speeches. That implies that Cuba's political stability is uncertain, and that its people could even face chaos or a "conspicuously military regime" if Castro's leadership continues to deteriorate, Latell said. Latell was among four panelists who addressed the opening session of ASCE's three-day conference in Miami. ASCE is largely made up of academics and business people interested in Cuba issues. (*The Miami Herald*, 5/8/04)

August 5: US Reverend Lucius Walker has announced that his government has reached an understanding to allow US students attending the Latin American School of Medicine in Havana to continue their scholarship program. In a letter to students, parents, friends and supporters of the Latin American Medical School scholarship program, Walker said the permission resulted from persistent hard work, calls and letters and faxes to the State and Treasury Departments. He also cited the caring and strategic interventions by members of the Congressional Black and Hispanic Caucuses; the specific intervention of Secretary of State Colin Powell; the avalanche of concern expressed by parents and friends of the medical students, and by members of IFCOs national network of supporters. (*Prensa Latina*, 5/8/04)

August 5: A recent report from the RAND Corporation offers some insight into some of the post Castro scenarios in Cuba. Authored by researchers Edward González and Kevin McCarthy, the 154-page study identified five potential problem areas in particular, including an aging population, a growing racial divide, a stunted economy, and an alienated younger generation. The report contains some potentially controversial contentions, including the observation that the military may be the institution to take control of the country after Castro leaves power in the island. It includes eight chapters in total, including one that deals with the pressing need for industrial restructuring in Cuba, one on the changing demographics of the country, and an executive summary for those looking for a general overview of the author's findings. (*Cuba-Info*, 5/8/04)

August 8: A shipment of 15,000 tons of field peas arrived in Cuba from the US state of Illinois. The peas are sent from several locations in partnership with the Illinois International Trade Center. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 8/8/04)

August 8: US theater personality and social activist Julie Belafonte, wife of popular performer, Harry Belafonte, inaugurated Havana's First International Audiovisual Festival for Children and Adolescents. In the opening event, Julie Belafonte, who was named the Festival's Honorary President, said that the gala will be held every two years. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 8/8/04)

August 10: Four Cuban migrants traveling on a homemade boat came ashore at a Hilton hotel pier, the US Border Patrol said. The four men landed at the pier in Key West, four days after they told authorities they departed from the province of Havana. They came on a homemade wooden boat powered by an American-made tractor engine, officials said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 10/8/04)

August 10: The US Department of the Treasury took further action against Fidel Castro's regime by identifying Melfi Marine, a shipping company controlled by the Cuban government, as a Specially Designated National (SDN) of Cuba. "With this step, we continue to restrict the Cuban government's access to capital by identifying and isolating companies controlled by Castro," said Juan Carlos Zarate, Treasury's Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing. "The Castro government uses money to enrich itself and perpetuate its totalitarian regime at the expense of the Cuban people." Melfi Marine was incorporated in Panama in 1981 and is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Cimex, identified by the Treasury Department in February 2004 as a SDN of Cuba. (*Office of Public Affairs*, 10/8/04)

August 10: The UN High Commission for Human Rights (UNHCR) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has sent a report to the US State Department, outlining the reasons why it believes that the five Cuban political prisoners jailed in the United States are being arbitrarily detained. According to reports received in Havana, the US State Department has responded to the report. The UN group will study this response and announce its considerations during the next period of sessions, which run from September 13th through the 17th in Geneva, Switzerland. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 10/8/04)

August 10: Porter Goss, recently designated US CIA director, has never spoken publicly about the decade he spent with the CIA, except to say that he was deployed in Miami during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. "I had some very interesting moments in the Florida Straits," he told *The Washington Post* in 2000. It is not known how long Mr Goss stayed in Miami or whether his CIA role went beyond the missile crisis. It appears, however, that his service began after the CIA's clumsy first attempts to explore ways of assassinating Fidel Castro. Then the agency is said to have contacted the Mafia for advice. (*The Times*, 10/8/04)

August 11: Sysco Corp, the largest US food services distributor, signed an agreement with Cuba to increase food sales, which go primarily to the island's tourist trade. As part of the agreement, David Dickson, president and CEO of Sysco Food Services of Central Alabama, signed a letter of intent with the Cuban food import agency Alimport and pledged to lobby for the lifting of US trade sanctions against the communist-run country. Since entering the Cuban market in November, Sysco Alabama has sold \$500,000 worth of 195 food items to Cuba, including canned fruit and vegetables, tomato puree and other products. Dickson declined to say how much the sales would total. In June, Sysco acquired International Food Group Inc. of Plant City, Fla., to expand its presence outside of North America. (*Reuters, Houston Business Journal*, 11/8/04)

August 11: Three Cuban American members of Congress accused a San Francisco charity of helping "finance Fidel Castro's Internet network" with funds provided by the philanthropic foundation of Teresa Heinz Kerry, the wife of Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry. The charity vehemently denied the accusation. The three Republicans -- Florida Representatives Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Mario Diaz-Balart, his brother -- stressed the link between the Heinz Endowments and the Tides Foundation, a charity in the Presidio that funds more than 200 environmental and social justice projects. The Heinz Endowments doled out \$8 million in grants between 1994 and 2003 to the Tides Foundation and its affiliate Tides Center. The link to Cuba, the legislators say, is through the Institute for Global Communications, another San Francisco organization that brings Internet and computer networks "to grassroots organizations worldwide working for peace, human rights, environmental sustainability, women's rights, conflict resolution and worker rights." The institute had hired the Tides Center to manage its financial and administrative affairs. Christopher Herrera, communications director for the Tides Foundation, says that the Heinz grants were used only for environmental projects and that no one from the three legislators' offices contacted the foundation to verify their accusations. (*The San Francisco Chronicle*, 11/8/04)

August 11: Treasury Secretary John Snow said that his department was in the process of reviewing the many comments it had received over its new, tighter policy on Cuba travel. "I think the Cuban community is divided," Snow told the Sun-Sentinel during an interview. "Some feel strongly for the new regulations, some have reservations," said Snow, whose department oversees the Office of Foreign Assets Control, or OFAC, which issues licenses for US travel to Cuba. The Treasury Department has received more than 2,000 comments on the new regulations, which may be tweaked before a final rule is published this fall. Snow said it would be inappropriate to say whether the rules might be changed, but said people's comments would be "well-considered in the final actions that are taken." "An awful lot of the money that ends up flowing down there is used to sustain and strengthen the regime," said Snow, although he said he had not yet seen any data on what economic impact the new restrictions were having. (*Granma International*, 11/8/04)

August 13: Fidel Castro sent a special birthday greeting and warm embrace to Rene Gonzalez, one of five Cuban prisoners jailed in the United States. It is an honor for me to have been born on a day like today, said the Cuban leader, who celebrates his 78th birthday on August 13th, the same date as that of Rene's. (*AIN*, 13/8/04)

August 16: John Edwards visited a family farm outside Springfield, Missouri, to assure rural voters of the Democratic presidential ticket's plans to assist farmers, but that does not mean allowing grain exports to Cuba, as some US farmers have sought. Touting a plan called "Hope for the Heartland," the North Carolina senator promised to provide seed money for new businesses, expand high-speed Internet access and make money available for more police officers and equipment to fight methamphetamine production and dealing in rural areas. Edwards said in response to a question that he did not support lifting embargos on Cuba. "We believe that [Fidel] Castro is a brutal dictator and we have to maintain pressure on Castro," he said, referring to the Cuban president. "We do believe in principle travel and allowing medical supplies into Cuba is a good idea and some of the policies that the administration has been engaging in recently, where they've cut off and restricted some of that, is a mistake. But we also think it's very important to keep the heat on Castro." (*Washington Post*, 17/8/04)

August 17: In a rare display of amity toward communist Cuba, the United States offered its longtime foe 50,000 dollars in disaster assistance and urged US-based humanitarian groups to send aid to the island after it was badly hit by Hurricane Charley. "The United States regrets the damage caused by Hurricane Charley and expresses its solidarity with the Cuban people, stated deputy State Department spokesman Adam Ereli. "The Cuban people can count on America's support in these difficult times," he said in a statement. "We are working to assist the Cuban people with the humanitarian crisis they now face." (*AFP*, 17/8/04)

August 18: The United States sent 26 Cubans who attempted to reach the Florida coasts illegally back to Bahía Cabañas. The migrants were intercepted in six different groups. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 18/8/04)

August 19: Despite denials by US officials, Cuban parliamentarians insist it would be naive to discard the possibility of a US military aggression against the island -- with the aim of destroying the Cuban Revolution and imposing a so-called "transition." Jorge Lezcano, a top adviser to Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power, also known as the Cuban Parliament, told Prensa Latina News Agency that recent US government statements reveal a concerted policy stemming from an annexionist way of thinking. As examples, Jorge Lezcano referred to a message from the US Department of State sent to the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, warning that the US would adopt measures to counter any flow of immigrants from the island to Florida -- calling it a threat to its "national security." (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 19/8/04)

August 19: Fourteen Cuban migrants traveling on a wooden boat landed on Puerto Rico's Mona Island, officials said. The six men and eight women turned themselves in to Puerto Rican rangers who patrol the island, said Leila Andreu, spokeswoman for the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources. (*Sun Sentinel*, 19/8/04)

August 20: Food imports from the United States exceeded 960 million USD according to Alimport enterprise, since sales of produce were authorized by Washington on December, 2001. Cuban authorities have so far paid 830 million USD, while the rest will be paid in the same way when merchandise is ready to be shipped to Havana. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/8/04)

August 20: The US Interest Section in Havana has stated that the US government does not have the intention to apply military measures against the Cuban government. In an official statement, James Cason, chief of the USIS denied that Washington is thinking about such measures. Cason reminded that president Bush has said that Washington wants a peaceful transition in the island, and wants the Cubans to be the ones who build it. (*USIS Press Release*, 25/8/04)

August 21: Cuban-American lawmakers cheered as US military aircraft transmitted Radio and TV Martí to Cuban audiences -- one of the Bush administration's new tactics to undermine the Castro regime. "For the people of Cuba to get an unfiltered transmission of information is a great thing," said US Senate candidate Mel Martínez, who co-chaired the presidential commission that recommended the flights. "It's a wonderful day for the enslaved Cuban people, and I'm sure Castro is enraged and finding new and devious ways to block the transmissions," said US Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, (Republican-Miami). (*The Miami Herald*, 21/8/04)

August 21: While the US government's TV Martí broadcast from an airborne C-130 cargo plane to the island for the first time, it was not likely seen by many amid ongoing electricity problems after Hurricane Charley. According to a survey, in various municipalities in the capital, the first attempt to introduce the channel to the island has not yielded the results its proponents had hoped for. Of the 43 neighborhoods in Havana, only Centro Habana and a small area of El Vedado had clear reception for less than four hours. "Some friends in Centro Habana called (...) to let me know they were watching TV Martí on channel 13," dissident Vladimiro Roca explained to *Reforma*. "They said they were broadcasting a very interesting debate program featuring Luis Zuniga, a Cuban American and member of the Cuban Liberty Council. But in Nuevo Vedado, where I live, there was only audio, no visual," Roca added. The broadcast went practically unnoticed due to the blackouts covering much of western Cuba as a result of Hurricane Charley, as well as the draw satellite broadcast of the Olympic Games in Athens, which is keeping awake those who have electricity. (*AP, Reforma*, 22/8/04)

August 23: Cuba rejected the US government's offer of \$50,000 in post-hurricane aid, calling the gesture hypocritical, and the amount humiliating. "This cynical and hypocritical offer by the government of the United States to ease Hurricane Charley's effects ignores the damage caused over more than four decades by the economic war of successive [American] administrations against our country," Cuba's Foreign Ministry said in a statement published in the Cuban official media. The offer was announced by the US State Department in Washington on August 13, the same day Hurricane Charley battered western Cuba on its way to Florida. [[Official Statement](#)] (*AP*, 23/8/04)

August 23: The Houston-based Sysco Corp., the nation's largest food distributor, has scrapped plans to do more business with Cuba. On August 11, a Sysco subsidiary in Alabama signed a letter of intent to increase food sales to the island, but that letter has since been retracted because it contained language conflicting with corporate policy, Toni Spiegelmyer, a company spokeswoman said. The letter included a statement that both parties would work to normalize trade relations between Cuba and the United States. Sysco subsidiaries are not authorized to make political or government policy statements, Spiegelmyer said. (*Houston Chronicle*, 24/8/04)

August 23: A federal judge has thrown out a lawsuit claiming federal agents used excessive force in an armed raid to seize Elian Gonzalez at the home of his Miami relatives four years ago. An order issued by US District Judge Marcia Cooke concluded the six agents who conducted the raid were legally immune to the lawsuit, and she found no constitutional violations. "We're pleased with the judge's decision," said Charles Miller, a Washington spokesman with the Department of Justice. (*CNN*, 26/8/04)

August 24: Cuban experts are working to restore over 1500 documents that once belonged to US writer Ernest Hemingway and which have been kept for years at his former residence of La Vigia, located on the outskirts of the Cuban capital. An agreement between the US Social Science Research Council and Cuba's National Council of Cultural Heritage provides for the restoration of Hemingway's letters, photographs and the originals of some of his most famous literary works. According to experts, the most common damage to documents include acidification and damage resulting from the hot and humid climate. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 24/8/04)

August 24: A Cuban woman tucked herself inside a wooden crate the size of a small filing cabinet and had herself shipped from the Bahamas to Miami aboard a cargo plane. The woman, whose name was not released, will be allowed to stay in the United States. A cargo crew found her curled up inside the crate after unloading it at the Miami airport. "Certainly she's lucky to be alive," said Zach Mann, spokesman for Customs and Border Protection. (*CNN*, 24/8/04)

August 25: A Miami state legislator wants to crank up the punishment for exiles who visit Cuba by taking away their health insurance and food stamps. The proposal by Florida Republican Representative David Rivera would not only cut off Medicaid and food stamps it would end housing assistance for a year. His bill is aimed at stopping recent arrivals who come to the United States, file applications for benefits and then visit Cuba. Rivera said the money spent on the trips only helps the Fidel Castro regime. (*UPI*, 25/8/04)

August 25: Elizabeth Edwards, the wife of democratic candidate to the US vice presidency, senator John Edwards, made comments on president's Bush recent measures restricting travels and remittances to Cuba. "To restrict visits among relatives damages the families and doesn't hurt Fidel Castro", Edwards said. "Those person to person contacts are essential, and are the basis on which the new Cuba will be built", stated Edwards during an interview with the press, after a dinner at Hotel Biltmore organized to collect funds for the electoral campaign. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 26/8/04)

August 26: Six Cubans who spent two months at sea trying to reach Mexico to cross into the United States landed on Mustang Island on the Texas coast, the US Customs and Border Protection said. "They were somewhat malnourished and dehydrated," Eddie Flores, a spokesman for the agency's McAllen sector, told the press. Five of the six were treated and released from a Corpus Christi hospital. After being processed by the Border Patrol and having hearing dates set for Harlingen in a couple of months, two of the men were released to relatives from Dallas and three were placed on a bus to join relatives in Miami. The sixth person, a woman, remained hospitalized in stable condition. Border Patrol agent Felix Cantu said that the six left Manzanillo, Cuba, on a raft on June 25. He said they purchased their 30-foot boat, water and fuel in the Cayman Islands five days later. The trip took them hundreds of miles across the Gulf of Mexico. (*AP*, 26/8/04)

August 26: Bush administration officials denied any role in the pardon of four Cuban exiles by the outgoing Panamanian government. In Panama, Moscoso — who has been close to the Bush administration — also denied that she had been influenced by the United States. "No foreign government has pressured me to take the decision," she told reporters. Reflecting the political sensitivities of the case, US officials declined to condemn the actions of the four men — who authorities said had planned to use 33 pounds of explosives to kill Castro — even though Bush has said the war on global terrorism is his top priority. "These are bad guys. The absence of a statement says a lot," said Julia E. Sweig, a Cuba expert at the Council on Foreign Relations. "It is the most preposterous violation of what this administration stands for." Sweig said direct White House involvement in the pardons was perhaps unnecessary. [For more on this, see Exile Community, Foreign Affairs, and Terrorism] (*The Washington Post*, 27/8/04)

August 26: Seeking to dispel any concerns that Cuban-American voters will stray from his side, President Bush pledged to push for democracy in Cuba before a Miami crowd chomping at the bit for a mention of the island. "The people of Cuba should be free from the tyrant. And I believe that enforcing the embargo is a necessary part of that strategy," Bush said. "My opponent has a different approach." It was Bush's second visit to Florida in two weeks, indicating how close the race is likely to be in the state. President Bush accused Senator John F. Kerry of abetting Fidel

Castro's repression of Cuban dissidents. Bush charged that Kerry had once "even criticized some of the dissidents" and "said their efforts to promote democracy were counterproductive." Bush did not mention that Kerry had also said, in that interview, that he does not want to hurt the dissidents. As boos filled the partly empty Miami Arena, Bush added, "And he said they had brought down the hammer on themselves." Bush mocked Kerry for voting in favor of two versions of the Helms-Burton act of 1996, which tightened sanctions against Cuba, and then opposing the measure on final passage. "In other words, he voted for it before he voted against it," Bush said, repeating Kerry's explanation for his votes on an \$87 billion budget bill to fund military operations in Iraq. For good measure, Bush repeated the line in Spanish: "*Voto si, y despues voto no.*" (*The Washington Post, The Miami Herald, 28/8/04*)

August 26: Phil Singer, a John Kerry campaign spokesman suggested that Bush is lashing out against Castro because he's nervous about eroding support within a key voting bloc in the state that delivered him the presidency by just 537 votes in 2000. "For 3 ½ years, he did nothing on Cuba, waiting until an election year to enact a policy that will do nothing to bring down the Castro regime but will hurt the Cuban people," said Kerry spokesman Phil Singer. "His policy has backfired, his support among Cuban Americans has dropped, so now he's launching negative attacks." Kerry spokesman said the senator "has never criticized the dissidents" and believes that supporting them is vital to restoring democracy in Cuba. (*AP, The Miami Herald, The Washington Post, 28/8/04*)

August 28: An American physician who bought wild dolphins from Cuba for aquatic parks in the Caribbean is facing a \$70,000 fine by the US Treasury Department for violating the trade embargo against the communist nation. "I've admitted the thing to the government and am paying a settlement." Dr. Graham Simpson, now living in Reno, Nevada, said. He said he was "negotiating a fine of up to \$70,000" but declined to comment further. (*The Miami Herald, 28/8/04*)

August 29: The front-running Republicans in the US Senate race found one last area of disagreement: Democracy in Cuba. Standing at the Versailles Restaurant with exile community leader Rafael Diaz-Balart, former Congressman Bill McCollum bashed opponent Mel Martinez for his "support" of the Varela Project, a nascent Democracy movement in Cuba sanctioned by Fidel Castro. McCollum, speaking in the county that could give Martinez the edge if Hispanic turnout is heavy, called the Varela Project "a terrible undemocratic policy that I would never support." But Martinez said he doesn't favor the Varela Project. He said his opponent was misrepresenting a White House-sanctioned speech in which he spoke favorably of the movement but failed to condemn its founder, who opposes the embargo against the island. "I have the same position as McCollum," Martinez said. "The Varela Project is not the answer to Cuba's problems." (*The Miami Herald, 30/8/04*)

August 30: The National Summit on Cuba, an educational forum where US leaders discuss the state of current relations with Cuba, will be held in October. "Tremendous opportunities exist for Florida and Gulf Coast businesses interested in exploring trade with Cuba. The Summit provides an opportunity for these businesses to learn about current trade opportunities, to analyze the effectiveness of the trade and to seek ways to improve trade policy in the coming years," said Antonio Zamora, director of the Florida-Cuba Business Council, one of the Summit sponsors. "The commercial interest, combined with the rapid and fundamental changes occurring within the Cuban American population and the near elimination of family travel, make Cuba a key crossover issue in a battleground state." (*PRNewswire, 30/8/04*)

August 30: President Bush's controversial crackdown on travel to Cuba is applauded in the approved 2004 Republican party platform, underscoring the campaign's belief it will help motivate Cuban-American voters. The document, which presents the party's overall principles, praises Bush's most controversial measures -- cutting back travel to the island from once a year to once every three years, as well as limiting gift parcels to immediate family members. The platform says the Bush panel that devised the measures "provided a plan for agile, effective and decisive assistance to the people of Cuba." The Republican platform also declares that "Republicans understand that the Castro regime will not change

by its own choice." And the document backs more money for Bush's plan to launch regular airborne broadcasts to Cuba and democracy-building efforts on the island. (*The Miami Herald*, (30/8/04)

August 31: Six Cubans who said they left the north coast of Cuba in a small motorboat were taken into custody after they came ashore at Key Biscayne's Crandon Park Beach. Sunbathers called authorities after spotting the six persons -- three men, two women and a 3-year-old boy. The six told the press that they were from Yaguajay, Sancti Spiritus, a small town on Cuba's north coast. (*The Miami Herald*, 31/8/04)