

FOCAL's Research Forum on Cuba

Chronicle on Cuba

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Highlights

Domestic Affairs: First tropical storm Fay and then hurricane Gustav inflict severe damages to the island. Former officials of Cuba's government issue a document calling for a "democratic and participative" socialism. In Beijing Olympics, Cuba steps down as the Latin America regional leader. Protests erupt as a Cuban dissident punk rock musician is arrested on charges of "pre-crime social dangerousness".

Economy: Russia and Cuba are to make efforts to boost bilateral cooperation in all spheres. Cuban creditors and suppliers are worried about Cuba's new cash crisis. Vietnam and Cuba sign important cooperation agreements.

Foreign Affairs: Prime Minister Vladimir Putin says it is time for Russia to rebuild links with Cuba. Cuban defectors in Canada prompt an ire response from Fidel Castro. A Cuban delegation visits Angola. Cuban Vice Presidents participate in the swearing-in ceremonies of Paraguayan and Dominican presidents. Cuban President Raul Castro meets with the Prime Minister of Barbados and South Africa's Foreign Affairs Minister.

Security: Russian officials renew the idea of military cooperation with Cuba.

US-Cuba Relations: A veteran spy catcher adds fuel to the debate about the Cuban government's interest in spying in South Florida. Junior baseball teams from Cuba and the US play in the island. A federal judge decides against a controversial Florida state law that banned academic travel to Cuba.

Lo más relevante

Asuntos domésticos: Primero la tormenta tropical Fay, y después el huracán Gustav, ocasionan severos daños a la isla. Ex funcionarios del gobierno de Cuba dan a conocer un documento que llama a un socialismo "democrático y participativo". Cuba desciende como líder regional de América Latina en las Olimpiadas de Beijing. Afloran protestas al ser detenido un músico disidente de una banda de rock punk bajo cargos de "peligrosidad social predelictiva".

Economía: Cuba y Rusia harán esfuerzos para incentivar la cooperación en todas las esferas. Abastecedores y acreedores están preocupados por una nueva crisis cubana de efectivo. Vietnam y Cuba firman importantes acuerdos de cooperación.

Asuntos exteriores: El Primer Ministro Vladimir Putin dice que es hora de reconstruir las relaciones entre Rusia y Cuba. Desertores cubanos en Canadá provocan una furiosa respuesta de Fidel Castro. Una delegación cubana visita Angola. Vicepresidentes cubanos participan en la ceremonia de toma de posesión de los presidentes de Paraguay y Dominicana. El Presidente Raúl Castro se reúne con el Primer Ministro de Barbados y con la Ministra de Relaciones Exteriores de Sudáfrica.

Seguridad: Funcionarios rusos renuevan la idea de la cooperación militar con Cuba.

Relaciones Cuba-Estados Unidos: Un veterano cazador de espías atiza el debate acerca del interés del gobierno cubano de espiar en el sur de Florida. Equipos de Estados Unidos y Cuba de las ligas de menores juegan en la isla. Un juez federal decide contra una ley del estado de Florida que prohíbe los viajes de académicos a Cuba.

Domestic Affairs

August 1: The discussion by all Cuban workers of a draft bill on social security proposed during the First Period of Sessions of the Cuban Parliament, held last month, will strengthen the legislation. Over 4, 500 union leaders will guide the discussion process. Addressing the provincial plenary session of the Cuban Workers Federation (CTC) in the province of Havana, Federation secretary general Salvador Valdes Mesa underscored the importance of the discussion process and noted that it will include 80 key questions and answers. The text of the draft bill has been printed for all union organizations in work centers; also printed is the statement given by Cuban President Raul Castro during the Period of Sessions, which Valdes Mesa described as the best political support to the modifications included in the draft bill (*ACN*, 2/8/08).

August 1: Some 1,120 health professionals graduated from the Carlos J. Finlay Higher Institute of Medical Sciences, in the central province of Camagüey, for the 2007-2008 school year in the specialties of Medicine, Dentistry, Infirmary and Health Technology. Among the graduates are 152 foreigners from 19 Third World nations (*ACN*, 1/8/08).

August 1: Cubans may not know the ultimate resting place of Fidel Castro, but there is no mystery surrounding the future repose of his brother and successor as president, Raul Castro. The 77-year-old current head-of-state of this communist island has already prepared his tomb: a 130-tonne public mausoleum in the eastern mountain town of Santiago de Cuba. It is dedicated to the "heroes of the revolution" he and Fidel led five decades ago. It is here that General Raul Castro's ashes will be deposited after his death and cremation. They will lie alongside the urn of his wife and comrade-in-arms, Vilma Espin, whom he married days after the revolution's triumph in 1959 and who died last year. The couple had four children. In front of the monolith that will eventually house Raul is the tomb of Antonio Gades, a Spanish communist choreographer and flamenco

dancer, built from the trunk of a palm tree and stone from his native city of Valencia. In a discreet corner of the mausoleum, in shadow as befits his reputation, is the tomb of Manuel Pineiro, a revolutionary better known as "Red Beard" who headed Cuba's intelligence service in the early 1960s before helping organize leftist insurgencies in several Latin American countries. For Cubans, the big mystery is what will happen to the body of Fidel Castro (*AFP*, 1/8/08).

August 3: Cuba will go into the defence of its baseball title knowing that another gold medal will be of even greater significance than usual given the country's national sport is being stripped of its Olympic status. "Baseball is Cuba's national sport, and Cuba is the reigning Olympic champion, so we must do it again this time," Cuban team manager Antonio Pacheco told the press. "But these Olympic Games are going to be the most difficult ones from a historic standpoint, with so many strong teams in competition." The Cubans, who have won three of the four baseball golds contested since the sport first entered the Games at Barcelona in 1992, demolished the Netherlands 10-0 in a warm-up in South Korea and Pacheco knows nothing less than a fourth gold will satisfy the fans at home. "I feel a great responsibility on my shoulders. But we have made many sacrifices in order to reach that goal" (*Reuters*, 3/8/08).

August 4: Thirteen dissidents gathered to create the municipal chapter of the Cuban Democratic Unity Party, in Palma Soriano, Santiago de Cuba. Tania Montoya Vázquez was elected president. Montoya said that after singing the National Anthem, discussions on the Party's activities were held. The party is of Christian and centrist leanings and was founded in Havana last May (*Cubanet*, 13/8/08).

August 4: More than 20,000 Cubans living "illegally" in this capital have been forced to return to their hometowns since 2006, the official *Juventud Rebelde* newspaper reported. The newspaper said Law 217 was enacted in 1997 to regulate and control migration to the capital, but the flow of people has not stopped and 46 "illegal" settlements have sprouted in the 15 municipalities of Greater Havana. The figures cited by *Juventud Rebelde* were provided by local government official Luis Carlos Gongora. Officials have not been able to determine the number of people who have arrived in the capital in recent years in search of a better life and economic opportunities. Gongora said the problem of the illegal settlements has been studied and the idea was "to try to keep them from growing," adding that it would probably be dealt with "in the long-term" because Havana had more pressing problems. Psychologist Rosa Oliveras, a member of the city's development board, said regulations slowed but did not halt the flow of migrants into Havana because "life proves that there is no decree that can contain them." Las Piedras, where nearly 2,000 people, most of them from the eastern provinces, live, is one of the illegal settlements (*EFE*, 4/8/08).

August 4: The president of the Christian Liberation Movement, Oswaldo Paya Sardinias, has again denounced the inhuman conditions in which political prisoners and prisoners of conscience are held in Cuba. In a brief statement, Paya described the suffering of the prison population in Cuba, including a lack of medical care, poor nutrition, crowded conditions, censorship, invasive searches, and mistreatment by prison guards. He said the

lack of medical attention leaves prisoners vulnerable to illness and disease. Likewise, Paya said the lack of adequate nutrition results in many prisoners contracting “digestive problems and severe stomach infections.” Other mistreatment suffered by both common and political prisoners includes overcrowding in cells and the lack of potable water. “The plumbing is in very bad shape, and blockage in the lines as well as water leaks in the walls are commonplace, especially in prison cells that are located on the lower floors of the buildings,” Paya said. He also noted the censorship to which the prisoners are subjected, pointing out that their freedom of expression is suppressed as well as their access to literature ([Condiciones inhumanas en cárceles cubanas](#); CNA, 4/8/08).

August 5: Fidel Castro sent a message of encouragement and support to the island’s 165 athletes participating in the Beijing Olympic Games. Jose Ramon Fernandez, president of the Cuban Olympic Committee, passed on the message at a meeting with members of the Cuban delegation immediately after arriving in the Chinese capital. Before their departure from Havana for Beijing, Castro made sure that a personal card reached every athlete with the message “Never forget that in your heart, you carry the honor of your people.” The dedication reads “to the hard-working athletes of the Cuban Olympic delegation”, and encourages them to focus and “to do what they know the best”, to compete bravely and with dignity. “The Cuban athlete slogan must be like the ancient Spartans’: with the shield or upon the shield” concludes the appeal (*ACN*, 5/8/08).

August 5: With an attractive show, the Circuba International Circus Summer Festival began at the Trompoloco Marquee in Havana. All of the performances were characterized by high technical and artistic rigor, with a quiet impressive act performed by the Solcuba Company and its young acrobats, who featured a death-defying jump through a hoop on fire. From Mexico, the musical group Beluchio closed the evening with a piece played with bottles full of liquid. Participating in this year's Circuba Festival are around 100 artists from nine countries, most of them from Mexico. The festival will run until August 17 at the Trompoloco Marquee and at the Karl Marx Theater, where the awards ceremony will be held (*ACN*, 6/8/08).

August 6: A Cuban political prisoner who sewed his mouth shut last month as part of a hunger strike was forced to end his protest when prison authorities undid his stitches, human-rights activists said. Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta, 42, is a journalist serving 20 years at the Holguín Provincial Prison after being swept up in the 2003 crackdown on dissent. He began a hunger strike July 18 to demand that prison authorities transfer him to a facility closer to his home in Guantánamo province. Many political prisoners in Cuba are serving time in facilities far from their homes, forcing their families to take days-long journeys to visit them. Herrera's teenage daughter died in a car accident earlier this year while making the trip to visit him. Havana human-rights activist Juan Carlos González Leiva spoke to Herrera by telephone and distributed a transcript of a statement from Herrera in a communiqué distributed by the exile group Democratic Directorate. Herrera said that after two weeks of his strike, military and prison authorities subdued him July 31 and undid the sutures. Former political prisoner Jorge Luis García Pérez, known as "Antúnez," said prisoners routinely sew their mouths shut to protest poor prison food, lack of medical attention, and other issues. "They find cables or wires laying around in

the prison yard and strip it down like sugar cane so that it's sharp and not as rusty," García told the press from Villa Clara, in central Cuba. "They insert in one end of the mouth and pull it to the other side of the mouth, wrapping it like three times," he said. "It's now become a daily experience in Cuban prisons. I've seen it done dozens of times" (*The Miami Herald*, 8/8/08).

August 6: Cuban television plans 24-hour-a-day coverage of the Beijing Games. The official press has been publishing inspirational notes to the athletes from ailing former president Fidel Castro, and messages of gratitude to him from them. And the people are enjoying an upsurge in patriotism. In a cobble-stoned Old Havana alleyway, four domino players debated the outcome of the Olympic baseball showdown between Cuba and United States. "For the Olympics, we're not communists or capitalists or speculators, we're all Cuban," Miguel said, his friends nodding in agreement. With a population of 11 million people, Cuba has won 170 Olympic medals, including 65 gold. Under a Soviet-style sports system that seeks out the best athletes early and trains them in special schools, the island has excelled in sports such as track and field and boxing. But the Old Havana domino players laughed when asked if they expected defections in Beijing, where Chinese officials would likely turn over the athlete to their Cuban ally. "They're all coming back from these Olympics," Miguel said. "Forget about political asylum. They're all back – with Chinese TVs, computers and refrigerators, of course." (*Sun Sentinel*, 7/8/08)

August 6: Members of the Central Dissident Coalition were detained in Placetas, Villa Clara, while marching in support of political prisoners and in remembrance of the August 5, 1994 events -- known as the "El Maleconazo"-- when thousands of Cubans took part in an unprecedented riot in the streets of Havana, during one of the most difficult times of the economic crisis. The activists set out from the house of former political prisoner Jorge Luis García Pérez (Antúnez), "their arms crossed in a gesture of peace and wearing white T-shirts," said independent journalist Guillermo Fariñas. After about 100 meters, they were cut off by around 90 police officers and members of the Rapid Response Brigades," added Fariñas (*Cubaencuentro*, 7/8/08)

August 6: In Havana, Pablo Milanés sang the critical lyrics of his new record criticizing emigration and travel restrictions. The more than 1,500 spectators attending the concert at Mella Theatre gave a standing ovation when he sang "Two questions for a day", one of ten songs on his recent album "Regalo". The controversial refrain: "Has it been worthwhile? - I ask - I do not know... Has it been worthwhile? - I answer - I do not know," resounded in the theatre. The elimination of the permit to travel, the so-called "white card," is one of the most awaited measures since Raúl Castro took over as president six months ago. The daughter of Raúl, Mariela Castro, Silvio Rodríguez and other artists and intellectuals, as well as ordinary citizens support the elimination of this requirement (*EFE*, 7/8/08).

August 7: Dissidents with several organizations presented a document to the Cuban national legislature in which they ask the island's communist government to publish two UN human rights pacts it signed in February. The head of the National Liberal Party,

Leon Padron, told the press that the publication of the international agreements on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on Civil and Political Rights is a "necessary" step. Padron said that the initiative arose because of the "paralysis" in which, in his opinion, the government finds itself by not taking the "second step" leading to publishing the pacts in the official gazette and in the entirely state-controlled news media. He said that the police visited them the day before to learn the details of the petition, but he added that "it was nothing abrupt," and a secretary of the National Assembly received the proposal "nicely." The signatories, some 50 people representing 13 dissidents groups, propose in the text that several extracts of the pacts be published and submitted to a "national debate among all Cubans" (*AFP*, 7/8/08).

August 8: A postcard and a hand written message by Fidel Castro were given to 71 Cuban athletes in Beijing, who had not received the message before for having been training in other countries or participating in other competitions. In a solemn act in front of the building hosting the Cuban delegation in the Olympic villa, vice-president of the Cuban Council of Ministers Jose Ramon Fernandez said he brought an exceptional message from Fidel, who has been a permanent promoter of the development of sports in Cuba and with his internationalist spirit has also helped develop sports in other nations. Few hours before the inauguration of the Beijing 2008 29th Olympic Games, Jose Ramon Fernandez told the athletes that Fidel called on them, with respect and recognition, to fight with patriotism and honor in defense of the Cuban Flag (*ACN*, 8/8/08).

August 9: Cuba won its first medal at the Beijing Olympics, thanks to judoka Yanet Bermoy who won silver after losing against Romanian Alina Dimetriu. In an interview to the Cuban press a few minutes after the medal ceremony, Bermoy, bathed in tears, said she was not happy because, though she understood that winning a silver medal is something to be happy about; her expectations were to win Cuba's first gold medal. "I was not over-confident but she surprised me. I thought I could win, or if I were to lose it would be by a close call. I am very sad" she added (*ACN*, 9/8/08).

August 11: After ruling Cuba unopposed and uninterrupted for nearly 50 years, Fidel Castro turns 82 far from the limelight he cherished, but still exerting influence behind the scenes with newspaper articles and editorials. There will be no official birthday bash on August 13 for the aging leader, who has not been seen in public since he took ill two years ago, but some revolutionary women's groups and labor organizations have planned to honor him doing volunteer work for a few days. A group of Yoruba babalawos, or priests, have planned a ceremony on August 13 to ask the "Orishas" (Gods) to keep Fidel Castro in good health. "We'll plant a ceiba tree on the day of the Comandante's birth, and the babalawos and santeros from around the country will make animal sacrifices and beat their drums," said Yoruba priest Victor Betancourt. He said the Bahia town leaders have allowed the tree-planting ceremony, central to all Yoruba sacred rites. "The government doesn't have to believe, but they respect religion." "Two years ago, we practiced a rite for the Comandante's health, and it looks like it worked" (*AFP*, 11/8/08)

August 12: A Cuban group painted a grim picture of the human rights situation in the island nation, saying in a report it was "very unfavorable" and not likely to get better

soon. The Cuban Commission on Human Rights said the number of known political prisoners had fallen by 15 to 219 in the first half of 2008, but that short-term detentions of dissidents had increased dramatically. "At least 640 arbitrary detentions of political dissidents have taken place so far this year," said the commission, which is illegal in Cuba but tolerated by authorities. That compared to "at least 325 short-term detentions" in all of 2007, according to the report, signed by commission president and former political prisoner Elizardo Sanchez. Government opponents recently have accused authorities of stepping up harassment by taking them into custody for short periods of time. According to the report, which comes out every six months and is the only one of its kind in Cuba, rights had not improved since Raul Castro took power when his brother and long-time leader, Fidel Castro, fell ill two years ago. "Two years after certain rearrangements in the highest circles of government, the situation of civil, political and economic rights continues being very unfavorable," the report said. "Social repression is part of the daily life of the citizenry," it said, citing arbitrary police searches and government scrutiny as part of the authorities' "enormous capacity of social control." With "the incessant perfecting of the structures and methods of repression, it's unlikely that the situation will improve (...) at least in the short run," it said ([Informe de la CCDHRN](#); *Reuters*, 12/8/08).

August 12: Prisoners in Cuba who were facing the death penalty but have had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment or 30 years in jail are still being treated like death row inmates, a dissident organisation complained. "The announcement was made five months ago, but they're still being meted out the same punishment," Elizardo Sánchez told the press after the launch of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN)'s six-monthly report on human rights in this socialist Caribbean island nation. Sánchez, the leader of the CCDHRN, said his statement was based on the testimony of family members and even some inmates who telephoned the organisation from jail. "Our Commission had to make inferences to estimate that between 20 and 30 people sentenced to capital punishment had their sentences commuted, and about half of these will serve life sentences," says the CCDHRN report signed by Sánchez, where he is described as a "human rights observer and former prisoner of conscience." The statement, distributed to foreign correspondents in Havana, says it is "disturbing" that prisoners who had their death penalties commuted are still being held under extremely harsh conditions, pointing out that some have been in isolation for more than 10 years ([Informe de la CCDHRN](#); *IPS*, 12/8/08).

August 12: The national coordinator of the Christian Liberation Movement, Oswaldo Paya, has called on Cubans exiles to show their solidarity with those who remain in Cuba and to demand respect for human rights. Paya lamented the "double punishment" of Cubans who have left the island nation and are then neither recognized by the Cuban government nor by their new country of residence as citizens of Cuba. "The respect for the right of Cubans exiles to come to Cuba on the part of the governments of the countries where they live should not be conditioned on changes in Cuba, as that would be to double punishment of the same victim," he said. "But Cubans themselves who live outside Cuba should show solidarity with their fellow countrymen and demand all the rights for us Cubans who live here," he told the *Diario de las Americas* in a reference to the desired right of Cubans to enter and leave the island freely without restrictions from

the Communist government. "If fear has gotten to those who are overseas and they think they must pay with the price of silence, if not with that of feigned complacency, in order to be allowed to enter their own country as 'visitors,' then they are only contributing to the prolonging of the humiliation of all." "If they don't agree," he added, "let them look at the passport they used to leave Cuba and explain why it says: 'definitive departure'." Paya said this is the reason the Christian Liberation Movement has put forth a proposal to the National Assembly that would recognize the rights of all Cubans, both those on the island and those living in exile ([Who denies the Cubans their right to travel ...?; CNA, 12/8/08](#))

August 13: Jorge Marti Martinez has been appointed as the new president of the Havana-based Cuban Friendship Institute (ICAP) to replace Sergio Corrieri Hernandez, who held this post since 1990 until his death last February 29th. According to Granma news daily, Marti Martinez was the Cuban ambassador in Russia (*ACN, 13/8/08*).

August 13: The Cuban sports delegation participating in the Beijing 2008 Olympics sent a message to Fidel Castro on occasion of his 82nd birthday, expressing its will for the victory. The letter was read in front of a representation of those athletes, the direction of the delegation, and in the presence of several of the island's Olympic figures during an act held at the Beijing's Casa Cuba. Council of Ministers vice president and Cuban Olympic Committee president Jose Ramon Fernandez, Sports Institute President Christian Jimenez, and Cuban ambassador Carlos M. Pereira attended the activity (*Prensa Latina, 13/8/08*).

August 13: Cuban Anaysi Hernandez won the silver medal in the women's 70-kilo division of the Olympic judo competition in Beijing, China. Hernandez only fell in the finale against defending Olympic champion Masae Ueno of Japan (*ACN, 13/8/08*).

August 13: Cuban blogger Yoani Sanchez, the winner this year of the Ortega y Gasset Digital Journalism Prize, said that Fidel Castro "will never admit defeat" as long as he has breath in his body. That is the "concept of victory" Castro has always advocated, Sanchez wrote in an article for the Cuban revolutionary leader's 82nd birthday that was published in the Bogota daily *El Espectador*. "For him, in his unquenchable sporting spirit, this game doesn't have a time limit, which allows him not to recognize defeat no matter how unfavorable the score may be," added Sanchez, who received the Ortega y Gasset Prize for her blog *Generacion Y*, which gets about a million hits per month. Sanchez said that things had been that way since the years before the 1959 revolution, when Castro went to prison after his failed 1953 assault on the Moncada Barracks. "Only rarely had the will of one man had so much weight in a country. Never before did the will of one man have so much weight in Cuba. His obstinate personality will be historic," Sanchez said. "On the eve of the 50th anniversary of the triumph of the revolution, with all the merits attributed to it and with all the faults blamed on it, it can be said that there are two great truths about the experiment Castro began in Cuba: that it has not collapsed, as had been predicted by its enemies, and that it has not achieved its promised objectives, as its followers had forecast," Sanchez observed (*EFE, 13/8/08*).

August 14: Judoka Yalennis Castillo gave Cuba another silver medal losing only in the finale of the women's 78-kilo division in a controversial judges' decision that favoured her rival, Chinese Yang Xiuli. After the match concluded with both judokas having a koka (small advantage) on the scoreboard, the judges gave the victory to the local representative in the hand tei (judge's decision) although it had been the Caribbean judoka who always took the initiative in the bout and even scored a koka that was called by the main referee, but was later annulled by the other judges (*ACN*, 14/8/08).

August 14: Cuban sports shooter Eglys Cruz gave Cuba its second bronze and fourth medal overall as she placed third in the women's 50-Meter 3 Position Air Rifle event of the sports shooting competition of the Beijing Olympic Games. Cruz rounded up a remarkable performance and finished in the third spot with 687.6 units in an event that was dominated by Chinese Du Li (*ACN*, 14/8/08).

August 14: Cuba's Mijain Lopez won the Olympic gold medal in greco-roman wrestling's heaviest division, the 120kg class, at the Beijing Olympic Games. Khasan Bareov of Russia won the silver. Armenia's Yuri Patrikeev, and Mindaugas Mizgaitis of Lithuania, won bronze medals (*Reuters*, 14/8/08).

August 16: The government of Cuba issued a hurricane watch as Tropical Storm Fay threatened to strengthen as it moved away from Haiti, the US National Hurricane Center said. The hurricane watch, which means hurricane conditions can be expected within 36 hours, was issued for the provinces of Camaguey, Ciego de Avila and Sancti Spiritus, the Miami-based hurricane center said (*Reuters*, 16/8/08).

August 17: Tropical Storm Fay raked Cuba's southern coast with gusty winds and heavy rains and was expected to move ashore before heading to Florida as a likely hurricane. Hurricane watches were posted along much of Cuba's central and western coast, including Havana, but Jorge Rubiera, chief of Cuba's weather center, said he did not expect Fay to become a hurricane, which has minimum winds of 74 miles per hour (118 km per hour). Heavy rains were reported in some Cuban coastal provinces but so far only minor flooding and damage had occurred, officials said. People in flood-prone areas had been evacuated, along with foreign tourists staying at coastal resorts in the storm's path, they said (*Reuters*, 17/8/08).

August 18: Yarelis Barrios won the silver medal with a 63.64 meter shot, the first medal for Cuba in the Athletics championships of the XXIX Olympic Games. Barrios, 25, had her best shot in the second round, enough to secure the runner-up position behind American Stephanie Brown, who had had a 64.74 first shot (*ACN*, 18/8/08).

August 18: Yoanka Gonzalez achieved the best result ever of Cuban cycling when she won the silver medal in a tough race by points in the Laoshan Velodrome in Beijing. The Cuban cyclist, 32, substantially improved her performance in Athens four years ago, when she finished 10th (*ACN*, 18/8/08).

August 18: Cuban Ibrahim Camejo won the bronze medal in the long jump event turning in a leap of 8.20 meters, a competition that gave Panama the first Olympic gold in its history thanks to Irving Saladino (*ACN*, 18/8/08).

August 18: A top Cuban dissident abruptly left an activist support group she helped found for mothers and wives of Cuban political prisoners, saying she would rather focus on her work as a journalist. Miriam Leiva said she will continue to support the "Ladies In White" but will no longer participate in the group or its decision-making processes, or speak on its behalf. The announcement came amid rumors of a split within the organization between Leiva and fellow moderate Ladies in White members, and other members who have called on the group to step up public protests and more openly oppose the communist government. Leiva skipped an April sit-down protest when other Ladies in White slipped into Revolution Plaza near where President Raul Castro has an office. Police broke up that peaceful demonstration. Leiva's cramped apartment in Havana's Playa district was deserted and she could not be reached for comment. But in a statement, she wrote, "I will not continue active, customary participation in the Ladies in White movement and for that reason I will not be bound to its declarations and pronouncements." She said she will "continue considering myself one of the founding members of the Ladies in White with pride and I wish it success in its human and peaceful pursuits." Cuba's government controls all official news media, but Leiva has worked as an "independent" journalist since 1996, and said she will spend more time writing (*The Miami Herald*, 18/8/08).

August 18: Tropical Storm Fay roared across Cuba with torrential rains and heavy winds, forcing thousands to evacuate low-lying areas. In Villa Clara province, firefighters used rowboats to rescue dozens of stranded residents, including elderly women and children, after two rivers overflowed. In the end, though, flood warnings for Havana's seaside Malecon never materialized, and as Fay headed north into the Florida Straits it appeared to have spared Cuba any major damage or injuries. The threat, however, wasn't over. Jose Rubiera, Cuba's chief meteorologist, told state television that the island's midsection would likely see additional rain through the night. "Those rains can still be dangerous," Rubiera said. "This is one potential danger that is still with us even as Fay moves away." The storm pummelled parts of Cuba with 50 mph winds and dumped as much as eight inches of rain as it crossed the island. Authorities in four provinces evacuated nearly 5,000 residents from low-lying communities (*Sun Sentinel*, 19/8/08).

August 20: Peaceful dissident Iris Tamara Pérez Aguilera was found guilty of contempt and resisting arrest by the Popular Municipal Court of Placetas. Pérez Aguilera was acquitted of the crime of disobedience and ordered to pay 250 pesos for the other two crimes. Attending the hearing were 39 dissidents from the provinces of the City of Havana, Matanzas, Sancti Spíritus and Villa Clara. Peaceful dissidents Yesmy Elena Mana, Pedro Yordy Tápanes, and Fidel Rodríguez García were detained by members of the political police at the bus station in Santa Clara and held in police stations until the hearing was over. The same happened to Amado Ruiz Moreno in Placetas (*Cubanet*, 22/8/08).

August 20: Cuban Dianellys Montejo won a bronze medal in the women's 49-kilo division of the taekwondo Olympic tournament. The title of the division was for Chinese Wu Jingyu (*ACN*, 20/8/08).

August 20: Cuban Vice-president Carlos Lage visited areas hit by the recent passage of tropical storm Fay. Lage inquired about the work to salvage 60 houses submerged by the flooding of the Agabama River, which reached unexpected levels after the fall of 462 millimetres of rain in the area. The town of Agabama has 964 houses and 2,434 inhabitants, and is located on the banks of its namesake river, one of the largest of the central region. Lage said that damage has now been assessed in order to deliver the needed supplies as soon as possible (*ACN*, 20/8/08).

August 21: A thirty-two strong Cuban delegation departed for China to participate in the Paralympic Games, scheduled to take place September 6-17 in Beijing. The Cuban delegation is made up of members of the Cuban Association of the Physically Impaired (ACLIFIM) and the Cuban Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired (ANCI) (*ACN* 21/8/08).

August 21: Dayron Robles won Cuba's second gold medal of the Beijing Olympic Games with a dominant performance in the men's 110m hurdles. The world record holder got within 0.06 secs of his own personal best as he tore apart the rest of the field, which included the impressive American pairing of David Payne and David Oliver. The final was notable by the absence of Chinese crowd favourite Liu Xiang. However, the 2004 Olympic champion would have struggled to stay with the pace of the Cuban, whose form in the build-up to Beijing has been blistering (*In the news.co.uk*, 21/8/08).

August 21: Relying on their least-experienced squad in years after a spate of defections has not stopped Cuba from extending its dominance of Olympic boxing. The powerhouse of the sport for decades, Cuba has placed eight of its 10 boxers in the Beijing semi-finals and is already certain to match the eight medals it brought home from the 2004 Athens Games. "We can now tell people in Cuba that they can trust again in our team because even with defections and betrayal, Cuban boxing will never disappoint," Cuba coach Pedro Roque told reporters ahead of the medal bouts. Such success was far from obvious before the Games started. Cuba collected five golds, two silver and one bronze in Athens but none of its champions came here to defend their two titles after four fled the country to turn professional and one retired. After skipping last year's world championships in Chicago in fear of more defections, Cuba headed to Beijing with a young team untested at top level. That did not stop nearly all of them from showing off their skills to beat some of the world's best (*Reuters*, 21/8/08).

August 21: Cuba's minister of education said that in the next school year there will be a "new (teaching) model" according to which "comprehensive general professors" - young people who teach all subjects - will have more time to get supervised training. Ena Elsa Velazquez made the announcement after the island's communist government admitted that education, one of the key elements of Fidel Castro's revolution, was facing training problems for teachers, the exodus of teachers from the field and low salaries. The concern

moved current President Raul Castro last month to call back into the classroom high school teachers who have retired or gone on to other jobs, telling them that they must return to the academic environment. The basic high school teachers, many of whom are quite young and have not finished their own studies, starting in September will have two training sessions per week and in "every quarter, they will contribute to courses in an area of knowledge" they possess, Velazquez said in comments published by Communist Party daily Granma. In each school, there will be two veteran teachers tasked with training those teachers, who were hired in 2000 due to the scarcity of teachers. The move was touted at the time as a new "educational revolution" led by Fidel Castro. The "comprehensive general professors" will teach the entire course load to groups of 15 students, except for English and Physical Education, helped out by televised classes, but there have already been numerous complaints over the results (*EFE*, 21/8/08).

August 22: Cubans' expectations after Raúl Castro took over power six months ago are "very unlikely" to be fulfilled since the authorities are only interested in maintaining their power, said local dissidents. A document of the Cuban Democratic Project (PDC) points out that there are divided opinions about the influence that former leader Fidel Castro-- removed from power two years ago due to illness -- exerts on the new government, although he is consulted on and publishes frequent newspaper articles. "Up to now reforms have fundamentally focused on the economic domain rather than the political one," hence the document calls on increasing pressure in this regard (*El Nuevo Herald*, 22/8/08).

August 23: Hyunjin Ryu pitched effectively into the ninth inning to lead Korea to its first gold medal in baseball at the Beijing Olympics. The Koreans beat Cuba 3-2, though they nearly blew it as the game drew to a close. The Cubans, who loaded the bases with one out in the ninth but failed to push across the tying run, have still won three of the five golds since baseball was introduced at the 1992 Games (*National Post*, 23/8/08).

August 23: Cuba's Angel Matos deliberately kicked a referee square in the face after he was disqualified in a bronze-medal match, prompting the World Taekwondo Federation to recommend he be banned for life. "We didn't expect anything like what you have witnessed to occur," said WTF secretary general Yang Jin-suk. "I am at a loss for words." Yang also recommended Matos' coach be banned. Matos was winning 3-2, with 1:02 left in the second round, when he fell to the mat after being hit by his opponent, Kazakhstan's Arman Chilmanov. Matos was sitting there, awaiting medical attention, when he was disqualified for taking too much injury time. Fighters get one minute, and Matos was disqualified when his time ran out. Matos angrily questioned the call, pushed a judge, then pushed and kicked referee Chakir Chelbat of Sweden, who will require stitches in his lip. Matos spat on the floor and was escorted out (*Globe and Mail*, 23/8/08).

August 23: In relation to the incident involving the Cuban taekwondo athlete, Angel Matos, during the Olympic Games of Beijing, the Cuban Delegation to the Games released the following statement: "Angel Valodia Matos, of the sport of taekwondo, was fighting in a preliminary match for the Olympic title. He was winning the fight 3-2 when he incurred an injury to one foot. As the doctor and medical personnel approached to

offer assistance, the referee declared his rival the winner, upsetting Valodia, who attacked the referee. When another judge intervened to try and settle the situation, he attacked him as well. These actions are a violation of the rules and a serious breach of ethical and sporting norms. Consequently he was banned for life from the sport. Regardless of whether the decision was unfair or not, nothing justifies the attack against the referee," concludes the note (*Juventud Rebelde*, 23/8/08).

August 23: Prisoner of conscience of the Group of 75, Alfredo Domínguez Batista, was transferred from the provincial prison of Holguín to a prison in Las Tunas, his province of residence. At least four other members of the group of 75 dissidents given long prison sentences in the spring of 2003 have received similar transfers in the last 15 days, according to the Internet site PayoLibre.com. Domínguez Batista, 46 and member of the dissident Christian Liberation Movement, is serving a 14-year jail sentence (*Cubaencuentro*, 26/8/08).

August 24: Cuba's boxers promised a comeback in 2012 after coming away from an Olympics without gold for the first time in 40 years. Cuba was forced to field its least experienced squad in years after a string of defections, and won four silver and four bronze medals. "We think we've done well," coach Pedro Roque told the press.. "This is the starting point for the Games in 2012. "I am sure we are going to win some Olympic golds, and put Cuba in the position it deserves. "We will prepare these boxers and some other young ones that we have back in Cuba and definitely make a comeback." Ignoring the 1984 and 1988 Games, which they boycotted, Cuba had not left without a boxing title since the 1968 Olympics in Mexico. Cuba had won five gold medals four years ago in Athens, but none of their champions were defending their titles in Beijing after four defected and one retired (*Reuters*, 24/8/08).

August 24: Cuba said goodbye to the Beijing Olympics with a feeling of bitterness and powerlessness: its sport is no longer the regional leader in Latin America, its boxing still needs time to recover and its baseball is not infallible. 'There is no doubt: in terms of numbers that these Games were not good for Cuba,' an official of the Cuban National Sports Institute (INDER) told the press. Brazil ended four decades of Cuban medals supremacy in Latin American sport. The final medals table at the Beijing Olympics left Cuba in 27th place with 24 medals but only two golds. Brazil is in 22nd place with 15 medals including three golds. Four years ago, in Athens 2004, Cuba ended in 11th place, with 27 medals including nine golds while Brazil had finished 16th, with 10 medals including five golds. In Beijing, Cuba failed miserably in the boxing competition with the wave of defections - in which four Olympic champions left the country 2006-2007 - bringing about a talent drain. It won only four silvers and four bronzes in the sport following the five golds of Athens 2004. To make matters worse, Cuba lost the Olympic baseball final to South Korea, and one thing is clear: an Olympic Games without boxing and baseball gold can never be a happy one for Cuba (*DPA*, 24/8/08).

August 25: Fidel Castro defended the Cuban taekwondo athlete who kicked a referee in the face at the Beijing Olympics, saying that Angel Matos was rightfully indignant over his disqualification from the bronze-medal match. Taekwondo officials want Matos and

his coach barred for life from the sport. But Castro expressed "our total solidarity" for both Matos and his coach, Leudis Gonzalez. Matos was winning 3-2 in the second round when he fell to the mat after being hit by his opponent, Arman Chilmanov of Kazakhstan, and was disqualified for taking more than his one minute of injury time. Matos angrily questioned the call, pushed a judge and then pushed and kicked referee Chakir Chelbat of Sweden, who needed stitches to repair his lip. Matos then spat on the floor and was escorted out. Taekwondo officials called Matos's behaviour an insult to the Olympic vision. Matos's coach countered that the match was fixed and accused the Kazakhs of offering him money. Castro said the alleged bribery attempt gave Matos good reason to expect the judges to treat him unfairly. "They had tried to buy his own coach," Castro wrote in his essay, published in state media. "He could not contain himself." "For our taekwondo athlete and his coach, our total solidarity," Castro said. ([Para el honor, Medalla de Oro](#); *AP, Reuters*, 25/8/08).

August 25: Cuban President Raúl Castro received the last members of the delegation that represented Cuba at the 29th Olympic Games, which concluded in Beijing, China. Proud of having represented Cuba with dignity at the summer event, the athletes who participated in track and field, baseball, boxing, volleyball, diving, canoeing, and taekwondo, arrived at Havana's José Martí International Airport. Also participating in the warm reception were Cuban Communist Party Politburo member Ramiro Valdés; Lázara Mercedes López, a member of the Secretariat of the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee; and Julio Martínez, the first secretary of the National Committee of the Young Communists League (*ACN*, 26/8/08).

August 25: Former officials of Cuba's communist government say that a "democratic and participative" socialism represents the only hope for saving the revolution and restoring the faith of the island's "frustrated, alienated and despairing" people. Felix Sautie, a Communist Party member who used to direct state-run Juventud Rebelde in the 60's, told the press that he was among those who signed the plea for democratization drafted by former diplomat Pedro Campos and posted on the Internet. The document contends that Cuba's younger generations do not share their elders' commitment to the government's agenda, described as a "poor socialism" with dim prospects for the future. The island now faces "a rare species of 'revolutionary situation' that could erupt unexpectedly and whose evolution the enemy (the United States) could exploit," the manifesto said. "Cuba is living a continuing economic, political and social crisis as a consequence of the stagnation of socialization, generated by the absolute bureaucratic state control (...) and by the permanent and criminal imperialist blockade," the former officials said, alluding in the latter case to the US economic embargo. "To preserve the revolution demands progressing from statism to socialism," the statement said, calling the current regime Stalinist ([Propuestas Programáticas](#); *EFE*, 25/8/08).

August 25: Cuban police have arrested dissident musician Gorke Aguilera on a charge of "dangerousness," fellow band members said. Hebert Dominguez, the bass player in Aguilera's punk rock band, Porno para Ricardo, said police detained Aguilera at his home. Aguilera, the lead singer, was arrested as he was about to record the final songs of the band's next record, according to a statement on the band's Web site. "This new episode of

harassment and persecution is occurring just as Porno para Ricardo is in the middle of recording its new record, which eliminates any possibility that this repressive escalation could be described as a 'coincidence,' " the statement said. "In Cuba, the voice of the brave is silenced by the regime, which doesn't hesitate to use intimidation and force." An official at the state-run press office said Cuba had no comment on the arrest. Aguila, 39, is an outspoken critic of Cuba's government. "Communism is a failure," he said in a 2007 interview with the press. "A total failure. Please. Leftists of the world -- improve your capitalism." Police told the group's guitarist, Ciro Diaz, that Aguila faced a possible sentence of one to four years in jail. In 2003, Aguila was jailed on drug charges in what he said was an attempt to silence him. He said a woman working for police posed as a fan and baited him into giving her amphetamines. He admitted to the press that he gave her two pills, but he called it entrapment (*CNN*, 26/8/08).

August 26: As hurricane Gustav approaches Cuba, the island's national civil defense council issued a hurricane watch for the eastern provinces of Las Tunas, Granma, Hogoquin, Santiago de Cuba and Guantanamo. The central region covering the territories of Camaguey and Ciego de Avila were asked to monitor the hurricane closely (*ACN*, 26/8/08).

August 26: A Cuban opposition leader said she has filed a criminal complaint against the communist government for airing on state television evidence it collected by bugging her phone, going through her garbage and secretly filming her. The evidence was used by Cuba's government to build a case that Martha Beatriz Roque allegedly took cash brought to the island by the former top US diplomat in Havana. Roque said that while Cuba's constitution allows state security agents to spy on citizens, it prohibits them from making public the evidence they collect. In a news conference, Roque claimed that much of the evidence presented three months ago was taken out of context or fabricated, but she repeatedly refused to confirm or deny whether she took money carried by former head of the US Interest Section In Havana, Michael Parmly, or to say if any cash came from a group linked to Cuban exile Santiago Alvarez, convicted in the US of conspiring to collect military-style weapons to overthrow Fidel Castro's government. "I don't have an answer for that," Roque said. She added that she would not address the charges unless Cuban authorities allow her to appear on the government's nightly round-table program, which publicized the case against her in May. She said she filed the complaint on August 25 with Cuba's Ministry of Justice, charging top officials, including Randy Alonso, host of the government round-table program, with criminal conduct (*AP*, 27/8/08).

August 26: At a news conference in Havana, human rights activist Elizardo Sanchez said dissident musician Gorki Aguila was arrested on the charge of "dangerousness." The government uses the charge to arrest suspects it believes may eventually commit crimes. Aguila, 39, has been an outspoken critic of Cuba's government and is the lead singer of the rock band Porno para Ricardo, which was banned from official airwaves after criticizing life on the island in its songs. Cuba's international press office would not comment, but Aguila's band's Web site reported that he was arrested on August 25, as he was finishing the band's latest album. "We are in the process of finding a lawyer willing to help him," said Sanchez, who said he had spoken with Aguila's family. "If there's a

trial on August 30, we will try to be present for that, if we can." Sanchez is head of the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation, a leading authority on political prisoners being held on the island. (AP, 27/8/08)

August 27: Elizardo Sanchez, head of the independent Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, released a statement calling for the trial of a punk-rock musician to be held in public. He said Gorqui Aguila, the lead singer of the rock band Porno para Ricardo, has asked "diplomatic observers" to attend, apparently hoping they will be allowed to get a glimpse of a legal system seldom seen by foreigners in this closed society. Sanchez's statement said that after investigating, the commission determined that "Gorki Aguila has not committed any specific crime as defined by the current criminal code." Aguila was arrested in 2003 on what he says was a trumped-up drug charge. His four year prison sentence was reduced to two and a half years after intense international pressure. But time in the Pinar del Río prison changed Aguila -- and his music -- forever. "His first three CDs are not really anti-government. They had elements of criticism, but using metaphors," said Laura García, a Mexico City graduate student who wrote her doctoral dissertation on resistance movements like Aguila's. "They mocked Russian culture, prostitution and what was happening in society. It was a strong social critique. But when he gets out of prison, he says: 'No more metaphors. We are going to call things by their name'" (AP, 27/8/08).

August 27: Cuba's First Vice President José Ramón Machado Ventura, acknowledged precaution measures in eastern Guantanamo province to face tropical storm Gustav, which was approaching areas between Jamaica and South-eastern Cuba. Machado Ventura was briefed by local government authorities on all the measures implemented in that territory, including the evacuation of over 900 people, who found shelter in the homes of relatives and neighbours. The Cuban First Vice President stressed the need of protecting human lives, and called on Guantanamo residents to preserve material and economic resources in all actions to be undertaken. The president of the Provincial Civil Defense Council Luis Torres warned on the main dangers posed by the natural phenomena, which was expected to approach Guantanamo with winds of up to 80 kilometers per hour and higher gusts (ACN, 27/8/08).

August 28: Cuban writer Polina Martinez Shvietosova won the 7th Julio Cortazar Ibero-American Short Story Prize, while two Argentines and two other Cubans won honorable mention, Casa de las Americas officials told the press. Martinez won the prize for her story, "Skizein (Decalogo del año cero)," while Argentina's Oliverio Coelho received the first honorable mention for "Sun-Won." The other three honorable mentions went to Argentina's Carlos Alberto Costa for his story, "Un día cualquiera," and Cubans Patricia Jimenez and Anisley Negrin for "La diabla en Paris" and "Isla y mediodia," respectively. Martinez Shvietosova, who was born in the eastern city of Camaguey in 1976, has published the poetry collections "Gotas de fuego" (2004) and "Tao del azar" (2005) in Cuba. The prize, which was created by the late writer and editor Ugne Karvelis, the second wife of acclaimed Argentine writer Julio Cortazar (1914-1984), is sponsored by the Cuban Book Institute, the Casa de las Americas cultural organization and the Fundacion ALIA (EFE, 28/8/08).

August 28: Cuban computer networks have been attacked in recent years by 2,966 "malignant programs," including viruses, "worms" and other malicious software, despite the island's restrictions on private access to the Internet, according to figures published by Cuban official media. A total of "413 viruses, 748 worms, 23 Jokes, 25 Exploits and no fewer than 1,757 Trojan Horses" have been detected, the Communist Party daily *Juventud Rebelde* reported, citing figures from state-run computer-security firm *Segurmatica*. These numbers show, according to the daily, that the island "is not immune to attacks by hackers or to infections with malignant programs." Neither national or user networks, it added, "are free from the threat posed by these intrusive files, which often get in because basic security measures have not been applied." *Juventud Rebelde* has published other articles in recent months to bring attention to the problems that affect the security of the country's computer networks, such as hacking and a lack of programs to combat it. Cuba officially connected to the Internet in 1996, but private access to the Web is restricted because - according to Havana - the United States' 46-year-old trade embargo on the island limits the range, quality and velocity of the connection (*EFE*, 28/8/08).

August 28: Band mates of Cuban punk rocker Gorqui Aguila were beaten and briefly detained during a concert in Havana featuring singer Pablo Milanés. Band Guitarist Ciro Diaz said he and a friend were roughed up and arrested by state agents after they held up a handwritten sign reading "Gorki" at Milanés' open-air concert. He said they were treated for minor injuries and then interrogated for hours before being released without charge. Milanés had been urged by hundreds of artists including Miguel Bosé and Alejandro Sanz to publicly call for Aguila's freedom. Aguila could have become the first artist to face criminal charges for his resistance music since Raúl Castro took over power from his brother Fidel two years ago. Aguila's direct attacks on the Castro brothers and his profanity-laced lyrics appear to have pushed the limits on what the Cuban government was prepared to accept. Cuba watchers say Aguila's arrest sends a clear signal that while Raúl Castro is open to public debate, he will set boundaries. 'It's one thing to say, 'the government makes mistakes' or 'this thing doesn't work,' said Uva de Aragón, of Florida International University's Cuban Research Institute. ``Going directly after Raúl and Fidel is something else." De Aragón said Aguila's work is reminiscent of past protest artists such as Carlos Varela and Pedro Luís Ferrer, who in the '80s and '90s fell from the government's graces for writing songs that criticized the establishment. But those singers were never as daring as Aguila, whose most famous tune "El Comandante" says -- over and over again -- that Fidel Castro should quit performing oral sex on men. The logo for his band is a Soviet hammer and sickle, but in the form of genitals (*AP, The Miami Herald*, 28/8/08).

August 29: In a case that has drawn attention around the world, Cuban punk rocker Gorki Aguila, 39, went on trial on charges of "pre-crime social dangerousness." He faced a sentence of up to four years in prison, but in the end the court fined him the equivalent of \$28US and promised to free him. Wire-service reports from Havana said the singer yelled "freedom!" as he was led into a courthouse. Gathered outside the courthouse before the trial were human rights observers from the Canadian and Dutch embassies, as well as an official from the US Interests Section. The trial began some eight hours late. The two-

hour trial was closed to the media and was ignored by the Cuban news media. Blogger Yoani Sanchez — who has won international acclaim for her criticism of the government — was granted access to the trial, which she called "an inquisition." "It's a message to all those who have not yet dared to criticize things but were thinking about it," she said. Elizardo Sánchez, head of the independent Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation attended the trial and talked to reporters later. "The prosecution asked for a fine," he said. "Fortunately, there will be no more time in prison." Gorki Aguila is irreverent, vulgar -- and bolder than any other performance artist in modern Cuban history. His lyrics blasting the Cuban dictatorship are so strong, a newspaper can't print many of them. The founder and lead singer of the 10-year-old group "Porn for Ricardo" walks around his western Havana neighborhood with T-shirts that say things like, "59: Year of the Mistake" (AP, *The Miami Herald*, 29/8/08).

August 30: Cuban First Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura toured different areas in Havana province, the territory that surrounds Havana City, to corroborate the preventive measures taken to protect the population and material resources before the imminent landfall of Hurricane Gustav. Machado Ventura, accompanied by Vice President Esteban Lazo and other members of the Secretariat of Cuba's Communist Party Central Committee visited the Havana territories that could be hard hit particularly by floods. Machado Ventura told local authorities that all agricultural products that may be saved should be collected once the recovery starts after the passage of the hurricane. More than 250,000 people were evacuated to safe places in the four western Cuban provinces and in the Isle of Youth in the face of Hurricane Gustav. The Operations Chief of the Civil Defence Staff, Colonel Miguel Angel Puig, said that to the figure of evacuees in western Cuba should be added a number of people who were evacuated in 20 municipalities in the eastern part of the country, when the natural phenomena hit that zone (ACN, 30/8/08).

August 30: Cuban President Raul Castro kept in phone contact with authorities in the Isle of Youth as Hurricane Gustav hit that Cuban territory. The president of the Municipal Defence Council in the Isle of Youth Ana Isa Delgado told the Cuban Television that the Cuban President called urging care in avoiding any imprudence that could lead to fatal accidents, and to adopt all measures to guarantee basic services for the population. The damage is extensive, said Delgado, who explained that facilities that seemed very strong sustained much damaged, and buses that were in parking lots were lifted by the winds, some of which were mangled. However, no deaths have been reported, though the situation was very complicated as not all areas had been reached through the communication lines (ACN, 31/8/08).

August 30: Gustav assaulted western Cuba as a powerful Category 4 hurricane as Cubans made anxious last-minute preparations to deal with the deadly storm. More than 240,000 people were evacuated from Pinar del Rio, Cuba's tobacco-growing region, before the storm arrived. State media reported major flooding and wind damage to businesses on the Isle of Youth, off Cuba's southwest coast, along with numerous injuries. There were no reports of deaths. The island was without electricity and phone service most of the day. In Cuba's capital, only a few souls could be seen braving the

howling winds. In Old Havana, massive planters overturned and scaffolding on aging buildings swung precariously in the wind. Huge trees were uprooted throughout the capital as workers hurriedly boarded up the windows of businesses and homes near the seaside Malecon, which was battered by huge waves throughout the afternoon. The state news media said more than 240,000 people had been evacuated from Pinar del Rio province. "Nobody is more expert in hurricanes than Pinarenos," Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage Davila told the newspaper *Guerrillero*, using the nickname for residents of the province. In Havana, hotels and shops were boarding up windows. Many tourist restaurants and bars closed early. Cuban officials said the hurricane devastated plantations, uprooted trees, destroyed buildings and washed boats ashore in Isle of Youth and Pinar del Rio province. However, Cuba's key cash crop - tobacco - had been moved into warehouses to protect it from damage (*Chicago Tribune, VOA, 31/8/08*).

Economy

August 1: Russia and Cuba are to make efforts to boost bilateral cooperation in all spheres, the Russian Security Council said. Council chief Nikolai Patrushev and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin visited Cuba, in a trip focusing on projects to revive economic ties between the former Cold War allies, including Russian companies' participation in developing oil fields in the Latin American state. "[Cuban President] Raul Castro, Patrushev and Sechin said at a meeting that their countries were set to make consistent efforts to restore longtime ties in all spheres of cooperation and to expand and strengthen them," the Security Council said in a statement. Sechin earlier cited oil production, tourism, healthcare, nickel production, telecommunications and nanotechnology as the most promising spheres for cooperation between the two countries (*Ria-Novosty, 2/8/08*).

August 1: Cuba is interested in using Russian space systems-based information technologies for civilian purposes, the head of the Russian Federal Space Service, or Roskosmos, Anatoliy Perminov, told ITAR-TASS, following his visit to Havana as a member of a Russian delegation led by Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin. "We've conducted intensive negotiations with the Cuban side and expressed an interest in cooperating with Cuba in the field of new information technologies based on space systems," he told the news agency. He added that Roskosmos is resuming its activity in Cuba after a very long break and that for the time being it will not go beyond "bringing space information to ordinary customers in order to make the life of ordinary Cubans better". The sides discussed the deployment of radio and television transmission networks and civilian applications of the GLONASS radio- based satellite navigation system, including prospects of using the Russian satellite constellation for remote probing of the Earth and setting up terrestrial stations for receiving such information. Perminov emphasized the civilian nature of potential cooperation adding that, "it does not raise anyone's concerns" (*Itar-Tass, 1/8/08*).

August 1: Russian oil companies have "sufficiently promising prospects" to develop cooperation with Cuban partners, Russian Energy Minister Sergey Shmatko said in an interview with the press, following his visit to Cuba to take part in a session of the

Intergovernmental Russo-Cuban Joint Commission for Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation co-chaired by Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin. "Cuba is actively implementing a policy" of engaging foreign partners in oil prospecting in the Gulf of Mexico off the north- western coast of the island, Interfax quoted Shmatko as saying. Russian oil companies, such as Gazpromneft, TNK-BP and Rosneft, are showing a strong interest in exploring offshore fields. "I think that working groups will soon be set up as part of an agreement signed by the Russian Energy Ministry and the Cuban Ministry of Basic Industry at the commission session to examine the issue," the report quoted him as saying. He added that the Russian company Zarubezhneft is prepared to offer Cuba its technologies for improving the oil recovery efficiency of onshore oil fields and that an agreement has been reached to arrange a long-term and short-term schedule to start the operations. Shmatko also said that Russia may provide assistance in overhauling Cuba's oil production infrastructure, adding that a group of Rosneft experts are coming to Cuba to look at possibilities for sharing oil transportation technologies and helping Cuba repair its crude oil storage facilities and inspect pipelines (*BBC, Itar-Tass, 2/8/08*).

August 4: Authorities have decided to place more than 600,000 cubic meters (21.1 million cubic feet) of sand on Varadero beach, the island's most famous, as part of a plan to combat coastal erosion. According to officials, the beaches of this popular tourist destination in western Cuba have been steadily deteriorating as a result of construction projects and the "indiscriminate" extraction of sand, mainly in the 1960s. Cuba's ministries of tourism and environment will jointly carry out the program under which 622,000 cubic meters of sand will be placed along 7 kilometers (4.3 miles) of beachfront in Varadero, some 140 kilometers (87 miles) east of Havana. Environmental official Angel Alberto Alfonso told the press that the project should begin in the second half of August and require about 70 days to complete. Alfonso said the plan is being carried out "now because the beach needs it" due to "signs of erosion" on some stretches of the coastline. Cuban environmental authorities began monitoring Varadero beach in 1975 and in the 1980s an action plan was implemented that led to the placement of a total of a million cubic meters of sand in 1998. In 2003, a second such placement of sand fill was carried out (*EFE, 4/8/08*).

August 6: Cuba is embarking on an ambitious project to tackle the food crisis. Cuba's Deputy Agriculture Minister Juan Pérez Lamas told journalists in early June that the country's rice imports could be halved within five years. In order to maintain current rice consumption levels, it will be necessary to double rice production. The Cuban government plans to double the country's rice production in the next five years. According to Lamas, the effort will involve state-owned enterprises, cooperatives and individual farmers, family plots and farms run by the Revolutionary Armed Forces and the Ministry of the Interior, Cuban News Agency reported. The announcement follows a fierce food security campaign undertaken by the Cuban government. Earlier this year, President Raúl Castro had announced new agrarian reforms aimed at stimulating food production in Cuba's rural and urban settings. The moves include the planting of idle lands around the cities, while also making arable land more available in the countryside. The state is providing farmers with seeds and fertilizer, as well as more farming

equipment and machinery. The measures are intended to assure Cuba's food sovereignty and long-term food security (*Tehran Times*, 6/8/08).

August 6: United Aircraft Corp., the Russian state aerospace group, and OAO Aviaexport agreed with Cuba's Civil Aviation Institute to sell the Caribbean nation airplanes and set up service centers for local clients. A memorandum of understanding was signed during Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin's visit to Cuba to deliver models including OAO Tupolev Co.'s Tu-204 mid-range planes and Antonov An- 148 regional jets, Russia's Industry and Trade Ministry said in a statement on its Web site. Russian drugmakers OAO Pharmstandard and OOO Pharmapark also agreed with Cuba's Center of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnologies to cooperate on producing vaccines in Russia, according to the statement (*Bloomberg*, 6/8/08).

August 6: Cuba expects to meet domestic sugar demand in 2009 for the first time after a major restructuring six years ago of a once-critical industry, a senior ministry official said. Sugar Vice Minister Juan Godefoy said the sugar harvest that ended earlier this year yielded 28 percent more than the harvest in 2007, which government statistics reported as 1.2 million metric tons (1.32 million tons). That would put this year's harvest at around 1.5 million metric tons (1.65 million tons). Godefoy told a news conference that "we will satisfy national needs" for the crop, while continuing to develop existing and new sugar cane derivatives. Cuba produces about 80 derivatives from sugar cane, including building materials and alcohol for beverages and medicine. Faced with falling harvests and inefficient and aging sugar mills, Cuba began restructuring the industry in 2002 by shutting down more than half of its production centers. Sugar was once Cuba's key export crop, with yields of up to 8 million metric tons (9 million tons) during the 1980s (*AP*, 6/8/08).

August 6: Following denunciations of the use of food for fuel by former Cuban leader Fidel Castro, a Cuban official said the Caribbean island is modernizing its sugar industry but that plans to increase ethanol production have been scaled back. Luis Galvez, director of the sugar ministry's Sugar Cane Derivatives Research Institute, said as sugar output increases, so will derivatives, but in no case at the expense of food. "We are modernizing the sugar industry but in no moment are we going to compete with food," he said in a news conference. Galvez, who announced plans for a derivatives conference in October, refused even to use the word ethanol, stating plans for "alcohol" were reduced due to the market, land use and the country's strategy. "We are producing around 100 million liters and with modernization we are going to double production," he said of the derivative which is used in rum, medicines, cosmetics and as fuel additive. Two years ago, Galvez, opening a conference on ethanol in Havana, was more upbeat about Cuba's ethanol future. "Our country has begun an accelerated drive to increase alcohol production, modernizing existing distilleries and installing new ones to increase by five times installed capacity," Galvez said at the time (*Reuters*, 6/8/08).

August 6: The Information Technology and Communications Ministry issued a regulation that requires companies that produce or market software to register all programs and includes penalties for non-compliance, the Cuban Communist Party daily

Granma reported. The newspaper said software must be registered before the end of this month. Granma said the goal was to bring "order to the production and marketing processes in that industry, as well as prevent efforts and outlays of foreign currency due to lack of knowledge about existing products in the country." The regulation covers all Cuban and foreign software destined for "application in Cuba or export." Companies that fail to meet the deadline would be subject to penalties of "double or triple the fee" for registration, fines and the "suspension or cancellation" of their business license. The Cuban government, which has been led by General Raul Castro since February, approved the sale on April 1 of computers and computer accessories to citizens, but the issue of access to software is still being addressed. Among the problems in Cuba's computer market are software piracy, a shortage of legal programs, restrictions on access to the Internet from homes and legal issues related to the economic embargo that the United States has maintained against Cuba since 1962. In May, the Cuban Information Technology and Communications Ministry ruled out liberalizing access to the Internet in the short-term (*EFE*, 6/8/08).

August 6: At least 1,350 hectares of coastal waters in the Cuban municipality of Moa, in the eastern province of Holguín, show high levels of contamination due to the mining of nickel in the area and to the indiscriminate dumping of poisonous waste in the rivers, criticized an expert who takes part in the annual conference of the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE), based in Miami. The findings of an assessment on the environmental impact, conducted by geographer Eudel Cepero, also offer worrying indications of the destruction of the coral reefs in the Bay of Moa, as well as the disappearance of hundreds of hectares of rainforests and diverse vegetation in the areas of extraction of Moa Nickel S.A., a joint venture created in 1994 between the Cuban government and the Canadian company Sherritt International Inc. The group mines minerals over 4,964 hectares. It also runs the Commander Pedro Sotto Alba plant, specializing in the production of mixed sulphides of nickel and cobalt. "There is a dark side to Sherritt in Cuba," said Cepero. "The images that we have looked at show that, in addition to the continuous expansion of the mining zones, there has been no significant progress in the reforestation plans (*El Nuevo Herald*, 7/8/08).

August 7: Cuba will save three million dollars on imports with the production of seven million bags of saline solution by the Eastern Pharmaceutical Labs, in Santiago de Cuba. Following the assembling of a new production line, the enterprise reached the highest yield in a year with 3,600 saline solution units obtained in the period from January to July. The medicine is packed in plastic bags, which will soon be produced within the factory after the assembling of a unit for fabricating such items. This new capacity is the result of agreements between Cuba and Venezuela under the umbrella of the Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas (ALBA) (*ACN*, 7/8/08).

August 8: Researchers, technicians and entrepreneurs from at least 20 countries will attend the 10th International Congress on Sugar and Cane Derivates running from October 14 to 17 in Havana. Luis Galvez, president of the organizing committee said that the delegates are mainly from Latin America and the Caribbean. This event is held every two years and it is organized by national and international institutions interested in the

spreading of knowledge and the development of the potential of this plant. The main topics of debate are diversification in obtaining products and sub products, using chemical techniques and biotechnology to produce energy, alcohol and beverages, as well as animal fodder. Environmental protection will also be discussed, Galvez added. Due to the use of food to produce bio fuels, the Canadian State Fund for Modernization from the Canadian Agency for International Development is promoting a Workshop on Sustainable Production of Alcohol and Beverages, in which experts of several nations will take part (*ACN*, 7/8/08).

August 12: Venezuela sends oil to Cuba and now Cuba will ship zoo animals to Venezuela, giving a new dimension to ties between the socialist allies. Officials at the Havana National Zoological Park are preparing to transport animals to Venezuela next month to replenish the South American country's zoos, depleted by years of neglect. Just as Cuba sends doctors to Venezuela in a barter arrangement for 92,000 barrels a day of oil, Venezuela will give medical equipment to Cuba in exchange for the animals, Havana zoo director Tomas Escobar said in a recent interview. "We strengthen both: they complete their collection of animals and we get equipment," said Escobar. The list of animals is still being negotiated but among the 10 or so expected to go are a giraffe named "Evo" for Bolivia's leftist leader Evo Morales, a lion, a pygmy hippopotamus, two hyenas, an antelope and an ankoli African cow. A white rhinoceros may be sent later, Escobar said. The animals are being evaluated for their fitness for the trip, but Escobar said Cuba has a reputation for giving its animals good care, despite economic hardships on the island (*Reuters*, 12/8/08)

August 12: The first meeting of the Technical Executive Secretariat of the recently created Council of Agriculture Ministers of Petrocaribe is taking place in Havana where participants are analyzing the constituent documents of this body. According to Granma news daily, this body is made up of Nicaragua, Honduras, Suriname, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, Venezuela and Cuba, which represent the 18 member countries of Petrocaribe. Some of its duties include the design and recommendation of a Treaty of Food security and also the establishment of mechanisms to manage an Oil Fund created in the framework of the Petrocaribe initiative (*ACN*, 12/8/08).

August 12: Cuba created a commission to increase production at its outdated sugar mills, in light of the poor results of the recent harvest and in response to the increased output of sugar cane, said an official. The production of unrefined sugar increased 24 per cent this year, to 1.5 million tons, the first increase since the state industry was reduced by more than 50 per cent in 2003. "An industry group has been created to analyze the principal problems and situations that exist at every level and to take the measures that may be needed," said the president of the Cuban Association of Sugar Technicians, Tirso Sáenz, to a state radio station. However, the plan was to produce 1.6 million tons for May and the milling had to be extended until June due to late starts, the slow supply of parts and equipment and the recurrent breakdown of equipment. All that raised costs. Only eight of the remaining 65 sugar mills were built after the 1959 revolution and none has been built

since the beginning of the 1980s. “The industry is completely undercapitalized and it needs new sugar mills and private investment,” said a local expert (*Reuters*, 12/8/08).

August 12: Participants in the PetroCaribe meeting held in Havana adopted several agreements to face the international food crises, among them the creation of a regional foodstuffs enterprise named Alba Alimentos (ALBA Food) that will operate among the member nations. Venezuela also proposed contributing two million dollars for each of PetroCaribe’s 18 member nations to support urgent food projects. Speaking at the closing of the meeting of Petrocaribe agricultural council, Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage said the Venezuelan initiative to create a food security fund goes beyond technical and commercial mechanisms to extend to integration and solidarity. Lage highlighted Venezuela’s solidarity and noted that no other oil country in the world has suggested a similar initiative nor worked so hard for the creation of cooperation mechanisms in a gesture of solidarity like Petrocaribe. Lage also spoke about the factors leading to the current world food crises and mentioned population growth, protectionist policies in rich countries, climate change, the rise in the price of oil and the use of food crops for biofuels (*ACN*, 13/8/08).

August 14: Jamaica’s Minister for Energy, Clive Mullins, received a joint Cuba-Venezuela delegation with the aim of exchanging ideas on an underwater fiber-optic cable project, which promises to benefit the three nations. Seven specialists from Venezuela and Cuba, headed by Alberto Bravo, main advisor to the Cuban Minister of Computing and Telecommunications, Ramiro Valdes, met at the office of the Ministry of Energy in Kingston, Jamaica’s capital. The project’s objective is to connect Venezuela with the Cuban city of Santiago de Cuba, and later on with the locality of Ocho Ríos, on the north side of Jamaica (*ACN*, 14/8/08).

August 14: Cuba's broadest gauge of its foreign trade swung to a \$488 million surplus in 2007, helped by a surge in service exports which have traditionally included health care provided in Venezuela, official statistics showed. The current account balance of payments moved to a surplus in 2007 from a \$215 million deficit in 2006, as net service exports last year reached \$7.8 billion, helping offset a trade deficit of about \$6.2 billion, as gauged by current prices, according to data on the National Statistics Office's Web site. The current account, the broadest measure of any country's external transactions, can play a key role in augmenting or diminishing a country's foreign currency reserves. Cuba does not specify what it includes within the service export category, though on various occasions officials have said tourism and related revenues, the export of medical and other technical services and donations all fall within it. Besides trade in goods and services, like tourism, the current account also includes financial transfers like profit repatriation and interest payments. The statistical office's data only provided data on the current account's tally of trade in goods and services (*Reuters*, 14/8/08).

August 14: The construction of the National Highway, a large-scale project left unfinished after the end of Soviet assistance, will resume next year in a stretch that joins the central provinces of Villa Clara and Sancti Spíritus. According to official reports, in

2009 the Ministry of Construction will complete a 60 kilometre three-lane stretch between the two territories (*El Nuevo Herald*, 14/8/08)

August 14: Cuban nickel exports in 2007 reached \$2.1 billion, which consolidates it as the lead revenue generating commodity, with a growth of 35 per cent compared to \$1.4 billion in 2006. In its report, the National Statistics Office points out that the export of pharmaceutical products placed second with \$289 million (compared to \$306 million in 2006), followed by tobacco \$236.3 million (\$245.9 million in 2006) and sugar \$193.2 million (\$215.8 million in 2006) (*AFP*, 14/8/08).

August 16: A total of 121 plastic boats were built for Angola at the Shipyard Base (ASTISUR) of central Cienfuegos province as part of a contract with that African nation. In statements published by the website of the territory's 5 de Septiembre newspaper, Edgar Cárdenas, the Shipyard's business representative, said that this task is also carried out at a subsidiary of the Cienfuegos Shipyard by the shores of Lake Hanabanilla. He explained that the ships are top-quality products. They are four meters long, he added, and made of reinforced plastic, with the use of fiberglass. He also commented that other contracts are planned to be signed with Angola. Besides the boats, ASTISUR workers are also building three ships and repairing a lobster vessel (*ACN*, 16/8/08).

August 18: Nippon Export and Investment Insurance, the Japanese government-backed provider of trade insurance, has stopped accepting new applications for trade insurance on business with Cuba, the Nikkei business daily reported. The Central Bank of Cuba's failure to pay for Japanese imports by agreed dates is behind the decision, the Nikkei said in a report on its website. It means that almost all exports from Japan to Cuba will come to a halt for now, it added. The newspaper reported Japanese government officials as saying that Cuba was often short of foreign exchange reserves because of US economic sanctions, and that the high cost of crude oil and food appears to have made the situation worse. The report didn't identify specific sources for the information. Cuba's central bank couldn't immediately be reached for comment. But, another news report said that the Central Bank of Cuba informed Japan's Nippon Export and Investment Insurance that it couldn't pay for Japanese imports by the agreed upon dates. "This isn't a problem specific to this bank. Foreign exchange reserves for settling trade accounts are in short supply in Cuba," said an official at the Cuban central bank, according to Market Watch (*MarketWatch, Reuters*, 18/8/08).

August 18: With the implementation of an investment program, Cuba expects to replace 29 percent of its rice imports in 2009 and take that figure up to 56 percent in 2013. In recent statements to Juventud Rebelde newspaper, the head of the Rice Production Program with the Agriculture Ministry, Nelson Gonzalez, said that after making an analysis of the limitations that faced rice production over the past few years, Cuba decided to implement an investment program aimed at progressively replacing rice imports with local production. The first stage of the investment program will conclude in 2013 with the replacement of 56 percent of rice imports by increasing the amount of lands planted with the cereal and by improving productivity. Cuba expects to produce

223, 000 tons of rice this year; however that figure does not yet meet half the demand of the Cuban population. Rice is a basic staple in the diet of Cubans (ACN, 18/8/08).

August 19: Russia's Zarubezhneft, which specializes in oil projects abroad, plans to take part in a project to raise yields from reservoirs at the Boca de Haruco field in Cuba, company head Nikolai Brunich told Interfax. The decision to go ahead with the project followed a visit to Cuba by a Russian delegation headed by the co-chair of the Russian-Cuban Intergovernmental Commission, Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin. Boca de Haruco is managed by Cuba's Cupet. The onshore field, which has been under development for over 40 years, contains highly viscous oil. Only about 4% of reserves have been recovered. Zarubezhneft will apply Russian technologies to raise output. The company is also considering a project to develop Cuba's shelf. "Petrovietnam, which already owns three offshore blocks, has invited us. The decision on whether to join the project will be made after we see how interesting it is, from the commercial point of view in particular," he said (*Interfax*, 19/8/08).

August 19: Cuba's trade ties with India received a boost with Havana Club rum, the tallest trademark of the communist nation, kicking off local bottling operations. Global drinks giant Pernod Ricard in joint venture with the Republic of Cuba has started rolling out the rum priced at approximately 10% premium over arch rival Bacardi in the domestic market. Pernod Ricard is bottling Havana Club's white rum variant at its plant in Punjab under the supervision of the Cuban experts. "The bulk rum is imported and bottled here without any local addition, not even water," Pernod Ricard India vice-president Bikram Basu told the press. The decks were finally cleared for the rum following a Cuban trade delegation's visit to India in May this year, when they pitched for rum and cigar imports (*The Economic Times*, 19/8/08).

August 20: The model adopted by Cuba "is not sustainable from a tourism perspective," said Águeda Esteban Talaya, a consultant with the World Tourism Organization and the United Nations Development Program, in statements published by the Mexican newspaper *El Universal*. As an example, Esteban Talaya mentioned the fact that the island imports 80% of the products it offers its visitors. The expert considered that while in the long run an opening to American tourism might be a threat to destinations like Cancun, it poses no risk in the medium-term. It is necessary, she added, that tourists return, that the flow of visitors increases, in addition to a number of services and infrastructure that take decades to develop (*Cubaencuentro*, 20/8/08).

August 20: The crew of a Canjet Airlines Boeing 737-800, performing flight C6-939 from Varadero (Cuba) to Montreal Trudeau (Canada), reported a flap problem while on approach to Montreal, however did not declare emergency. The crew performed a safe high-speed landing (*Aviation Herald*, 20/8/08).

August 22: Cuban pharmaceutical and biotechnological products were showcased at the Damascus International Fair, which began on August 15 in Syria. The Cuban stand received hundreds of visitors every day during the fair, including a visit by Syrian Economy and Commerce Minister Amer Husni Lufti, who was accompanied by the

General Director of the Public Fair and Exhibits Department, Mohammad Hammoud (ACN, 22/8/08).

August 25: Some 25 Cuban executives and officials will take part at the Izmir International Fair, which has facilitated the opening of the Turkish market to Cuban products such as cigars, rum, and roasted and ground coffee. The Cuban Foreign Ministry announced that this year the island will try to expand the array of exports to other products like tropical fruit juices, medicines, biotechnological vaccines, and bio-fertilizers. According to figures by the Turkish Statistics Institute, in 2007 the bilateral trade between Cuba and Turkey was valued at \$33.6 million, which tripled the sum reached in 2006. Cuba is the number one tourist destination in the Caribbean for the Turkish, with 6,000 visitors coming from that country to the island every year. Among the Cuban enterprises to be represented at the fair, which runs from August 22 thru 31, will be Habanos S.A. and Havana Club International – a Cuban rum-exporting company. The Izmir International Fair is the oldest tradeshow in Turkey, and is considered the cradle of Turkey's fairs and expositions industry; it also notable for hosting a series of simultaneous festival activities (IPR, 25/8/08).

August 25: The Cuban government authorized the opening of 15 shops to sell supplies to cattle-raisers and other farmers in convertible pesos, as part of a restructuring led by President Raúl Castro to improve the agricultural sector, considered a key sector for the country. “The goal is to take the supplies to the cattle-raisers and farmers, or as close as possible to the areas of production,” said the vice-minister of Agriculture Joaquín Lezcano López to the weekly paper *Trabajadores*. Previously, farmers had no way of purchasing supplies freely and the majority had to wait for the implements designated and distributed by the State (AP, 25/8/08).

August 26: Although foreign investment has been accepted in the production of alcohol and other derivatives from sugar cane, for the time being authorities seem to prefer not to mention the possibility of admitting it in the cultivation of sugar cane or the production of sugar. Currently, there are six joint ventures and one company of cooperated production, with capital from Spain, Italy, Canada, Venezuela and Mexico, but they are all limited to the diversification of the sugar industry, confirmed Liobel Pérez, head of the communication department of the Ministry of Sugar (IPS, 26/8/08).

August 26: In addition to a lack of resources in 2008, the public works investment program in Cuba is also affected by a workforce deficit, organization problems and low wages, according to official sources. “Despite being a priority area, not even the investment program of the “Battle of Ideas” could supply the workforce foreseen during the first half of the year,” said vice-president of the Council of Ministers, Otto Rivero, cited by the official newspaper *Granma*. On the construction sites of the “Battle of Ideas” program, which consists of refurbishing hospitals, clinics, schools and other public works, the monthly average shortfall of workers was 2,200, with peaks of up to 3,982 in June (*El Nuevo Herald*, 27/8/08).

August 27: Powered by a strong dollar, Canadians travelled outside the country more in the first quarter. Canadian residents made nearly 2.8 million overnight trips to overseas countries during the first three months of 2008, up 12 per cent from the same quarter last year. The three most-visited countries by Canadians outside of the United States were Mexico, Cuba and the Dominican Republic (*Canadian Press*, 27/8/08).

August 28: Cuban creditors and suppliers said they were worried the import-dependent nation faced a new cash crunch after it notified at least two foreign governments that it could not meet debt payments. Western diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity for themselves and the countries involved, said the governments were notified that official debts needed to be renegotiated and Cuba did not have the funds to fully meet August payments to them or their companies. "This is really bad news," said a western businessman with years of experience in Cuba. "Everyone is nervous," he added. "But obviously Cuba is in far better condition than the last payments crisis in 2002." Cuba's foreign exchange earnings have more than doubled to around \$10 billion since earlier in the decade, due mainly to the sale of medical and other services to oil-rich ally Venezuela, nickel prices and revenues from pharmaceutical projects abroad. Nippon Export and Investment Insurance (NEXI) stopped accepting new applications for trade insurance for business with Cuba as of August 5 after Cuba failed to pay exporters and notified Japan that high fuel and food prices meant Havana needed to restructure its official debt. Cuba last reported its foreign debt as just over \$15 billion in 2006, of which \$7.794 billion was active and being serviced and \$7.592 billion was debt it defaulted on before 1991. Cuba does not include debt to the former Soviet Union in its figures. Canadian oil firm Pebercan Inc., which produces oil in Cuba, said in late June it had not received debt payments totaling \$37 million in April and May from state-owned Cuba Petroleos due to "the difficult economic situation" and rising food and raw material costs. Cuban sources reported the government was ordering state companies and government offices to restrict fuel consumption and take other belt tightening measures. It was impossible to determine the extent of the financial problems as Cuba's reserves are a state secret and no debt figures were available for 2007 (*Reuters*, 28/8/08).

August 27: Vietnam and Cuba signed co-operation agreements in oil and gas, power, mining and metallurgy in Havana, during Minister of Industry and Trade Vu Huy Hoang's two-day visit to the country. During their talks, Minister Vu Huy Hoang and Cuba's Minister of Basic Industry Yadira Garcia said the co-operation between the two countries in oil and gas has yielded good results, especially after the Cuban minister's visit to Vietnam last September. Minister Garcia said Cuba wants to share experience with Vietnam in power saving, fertiliser and herbicide production, and mining technology. Minister Vu Huy Hoang highly valued the Cuban government's assistance in implementing a joint project between the Vietnam National Oil and Gas Group (PVN) and Cuba's National Petroleum Company (CUPET) to explore oil and gas in the Mexico gulf and on land. PVN and CUPET have completed geological study of a 4,000 square kilometre area in the Mexico gulf and 600 square kilometres on land. The two parties are conducting oil drilling under the project. Vietnam is willing to co-operate with Cuba in mining and the production of computer's equipment, Minister Hoang said and proposed

trilateral oil and gas co-operation among Vietnam, Cuba and Venezuela. (VNA, 29/8/08; ACN, 28/8/08).

August 28: Cuban First Vice-president José Ramón Machado Ventura visited the site of a second set of oil-burning generators that are now under construction and slated to be operational before 2009. During his visit in Guantanamo City, it was explained to Machado Ventura that once the plant is synchronized with the national electric grid, the province will increase its generating capacity to 104.2 megawatts during peak hours, which is 24.2 megawatts more than today. With the conclusion of this group of generators, the territory will complete its program of distributed generating established by the nation's Energy Revolution Project, since there will be two fuel-oil and five diesel generators in the municipalities of Guantánamo, Baracoa, Yateras, Niceto Pérez and Maisí (ACN, 28/8/08).

August 29: Prime Minister Bruce Golding said Cabinet has given its approval for a 25 per cent increase in the stipend payable to Jamaican students on scholarships in Cuba. This will move the allowance from US\$100 to US\$125 per month. Golding also said this monthly stipend would be paid to all Jamaican students awarded scholarships by the Cuban government. "This will include those students, who have benefited from special arrangements with the People's National Party and trade unions, as well as those undergoing the one-year preparatory course," Golding said while making a statement to the House of Representatives. For many years, the Cuban government has awarded tertiary level scholarships to Jamaican students, under bilateral technical assistance agreements between the two nations (*Jamaica Gleaner*, 29/8/08).

August 31: Some residents of picturesque Los Palacios (The Palaces), in the western province of Pinar del Río, have already re-baptized their town in the wake of Hurricane Gustav: They now call it The Ruins. In the storm Cuban authorities are saying was the worst here in more than 50 years -- one that registered unprecedented wind speeds -- Los Palacios has the dubious distinction of being the first that lay directly in Gustav's path. The pastel-colored houses in this town of 15,000 collapsed. Cars went flying. Power and phone lines throughout the city tumbled. At least 10 army trucks and several bulldozers charged into the community to begin cleanup, while the people in nearby Isle of Youth remained in complete darkness as every single TV, electric and mobile phone tower fell. "The devil came through here," said Juan Carlos Rodríguez, who works for the municipal school management office and spent the night guarding the building. "It swept it completely." The force of the wind decimated entire fields of banana trees. According to Olga Lidia Tapia, President of Pinar del Río civil defense committee, 86,000 homes were damaged, 80 electric towers and 600 electric posts fell. "Many people cannot go back to their homes because they lost them," she said on the nightly news program Mesa Redonda, adding that people are building makeshift shelters with whatever materials they could find. In the Isle of Youth, municipal defense committee president Ana Isa Delgado phoned in to the news show: "Regarding housing, everything has been affected. All towns." Vicente de la O, who heads Cuba's electric company, said that a total of 136 electric towers toppled over. In a previous hurricane, 30 towers were damaged and it took 15 days to restore service, but he said he hoped to have service restored in 10 to 12 days

in Pinar del Rio Province. The situation in the Isle of Youth was much worse. "100 percent of the electrical grid is damaged," de la O said. "Totally destroyed." In Los Palacios, Rodríguez estimated that 90 percent of the homes were affected, as well as about half of the electric infrastructure (*The Miami Herald*, 1/9/08).

Exile Community

August 29: "Get my bones back to Cuba. "That's the last wish that Miami funeral director Rafaiy Alkhalifa says he has heard time and again from many of his "Cuba-bound" clients or their loved ones since 1994. That's the year Alkhalifa and his Auxiliadora Funeraria Nacional funeral home first began shipping recently deceased Cuban exiles back across the Florida Straits to their final resting place in Cuba. An exception to the otherwise tight US trade embargo imposed on Cuba in 1962, the airborne burial business has been moving ahead steadily ever since, according to Alkhalifa, a 64-year-old native of Guyana. "The gist of this whole thing is family first," Alkhalifa told the press. "It's not about money. It's not about money at all." Alkhalifa says he has been shipping between 12 and 20 late exiles by charter flight home to Cuba every month since US and Cuban authorities made it the first US-based funeral home with permission to transport cadavers between two countries long seen as implacable enemies. Many older exiles among the 650,000 Cubans in Miami have vowed they would never return to the island until Castro and his younger brother President Raul Castro are out of power. But Alkhalifa has seen how family and nationality or a sense of belonging can transcend politics when people face the ultimate decision about how best to deal with death. "They want to go home because it's the fatherland," he said, speaking of one motive driving those dying exiles who chose to return to Cuba. "Motherland, fatherland, whatever you want to call it. These are things that are very important to people" (*Reuters*, 29/8/08).

Foreign Affairs

August 1: For the fourth consecutive period, Cuba will have a representative on the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), comprised of 23 experts on women's rights. Magalys Arocha Dominguez, secretary of Foreign Relations of the Cuban Women's Federation (FMC) —an organization with special consultative status at the UN Economic and Social Council (ESOSOC)— was elected with 149 of 181 possible votes, for a four-year term starting December 31, 2008, reported Granma newspaper. Seventeen countries presented candidates to fill the eleven seats on the body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (*ACN*, 1/8/08).

August 1: The Medal of Friendship, awarded by the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba, was conferred on Reiko Korenaga of Japan, the owner of a travel agency that is part of the 100 For the Five, the committee in her country that supports the liberation of the five Cubans locked up in US prisons. During the event, Basilio Gutiérrez, vice president of the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), said that Korenaga merited the medal for her persistent interest in bringing the peoples of Cuba and Japan closer together and for promoting the travel of parliamentarians, journalists

and solidarity groups from her country. Gutiérrez said that Korenaga is also a member of the Cuba-Japan Solidarity Committee (Cubapon), a politically active group founded in 1993, which issues regular publications on Cuba's realities. For more than 15 years, Korenaga has worked in close coordination with the ICAP, the Amistur travel agency, the International Press Center and other Cuban institutions (*Granma International*, 1/8/08).

August 1: Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev sent a message to the President of Council of State and the Chairman of Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cuba Raul Castro Ruz, the Kremlin's press office reported. "Traditionally friendly, partnership relations connect Russia and Cuba, which have lately received a noticeable positive impulse. Bilateral political dialogue has become more trusting, trade and economic ties have gained a new dynamic," Medvedev's message said. In particular, the head of state notes that the use of credit schemes has already enabled the increase of the volume of Russian- Cuban trade. "We think it necessary and henceforth more proactive to advance cooperation in areas like the extraction and processing of hydrocarbon materials, energy, transport, information science, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals, where, as is well known, our countries have many leading results. By joint efforts we should take steps towards the implementation of bilateral investment projects and the creation of joint enterprises," the document emphasizes. The Intergovernmental Russian-Cuban Commission Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation plays a significant role in this process. Its regular meetings should above all be aimed at the search for and the realization of new areas of long-term cooperation, the president notes. "I am confident that our wide experience of constructive mutually- beneficial cooperation in various areas will henceforth serve the interests of our peoples and the building of a fair world order," Medvedev's message said (*Interfax*, 1/8/08).

August 1: After a fruitful visit to Cuba, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin returned to his country. On the final day of his stay in the island, the minister toured the energy installations on the north coast of the province of Havana, the port of Matanzas and the Varadero Beach resort. Cuban Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas accompanied Sechin and his delegation to Varadero's Juan Gualberto Gomez Airport in the afternoon (*ACN*, 2/8/08).

August 2: Surinam's Foreign Minister Lygia Kraag-Keteldijk arrived in Cuba for a four-day visit at the invitation of her Cuban counterpart Felipe Perez Roque, with whom she will hold talks. The visit of the foreign minister, which is the second one to Cuba, is expected to boost the existing ties of friendship and cooperation between the two nations, reported *Granma* newspaper. Cuba and Surinam re-established diplomatic relations based on mutual respect on May 12, 1995 (*ACN*, 2/8/08).

August 2: An official said a boat carrying at least 40 Cuban migrants caught fire off Cancun but all of the passengers reached shore safely. Police detained seven of the migrants, but the rest fled into the resort town. Regional Deputy Attorney General Luis Canche Aquino said investigators suspect the fire may have been set deliberately. He said the detained migrants told police they had left Havana in a makeshift boat, but were later picked up by a luxury vessel. Authorities suspect the migrants were picked up by

smugglers, who are increasingly involved in taking Cuban migrants to the United States through Mexico. The route is becoming popular among Cubans trying to avoid detection by the US Coast Guard (*AP*, 2/8/08).

August 2: Fidel Castro congratulated the Cuban team (AAA Class) taking part at the 23rd World Junior Baseball Championship, underway in Edmonton, Canada. Castro spoke with team manager Esteban Lombillo via telephone in the end of an exiting game between Cuba and Mexico, in which the island's team took the victory. The Cuban leader, who was informed in detail about the game by phone, sent warm congratulations to all members of the team. Fidel Castro also sent greetings to the Cuban consul in Toronto, who traveled to Edmonton for the game. In his message Castro said that the baseball team made a big feat, as did all Cubans who were there to offer their incalculable support. He called on them to "keep fighting" (*ACN*, 2/8/08).

August 2: Another Cuban baseball player has gone missing in Edmonton, Canada, tournament officials said. The Cuban coach and team confirmed through team liaison Phyllis Pannebaker that the total number of missing players is three. "The two (Noel Arguelles and Jose Iglesias) left, and the one left the next day," said Pannebaker. Rumours of the third defection have been swirling for days. Cuban team representatives at the 23rd World Junior Baseball Championship (AAA Class) told Pannebaker the team had been treated badly by the media, she said, and would not comment further, nor confirm the name of the third missing player. A man wearing a Team Cuba uniform said through a translator that pitcher Raydel Sanchez was missing, and a scout at the game between South Korea and Cuba said he didn't see Sanchez on the field. Whispers have been circulating at Telus Fiend that a total of five players are missing. The defections have angered former Cuban President Fidel Castro. In a recent online column, Castro labelled Edmonton a "dumping ground" or "trash bin," according to various English-language translations. According to Cuban baseball historian, Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria, baseball defectors are only doing what many ordinary Cubans would do if given the opportunity. "Cubans in general, not just ball players, want to leave," he said. "I don't think the Cubans are angry. Fidel Castro is angry" (*El equipo asediado; The Edmonton Journal*, 3/8/08).

August 3: The Cuban national baseball team walked away with the bronze medals of the 23rd World Junior Championship of the sport that concluded in Edmonton, Canada. After losing to defending champions South Korea 1-6 in semifinals, the Caribbean squad dispatched Australia 6-2 in the third-place game. Fidel Castro sent a congratulation message to the Cuban team and coaches (*ACN*, 4/8/08).

August 4: Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said it was time for Russia to rebuild links with former Cold War ally Cuba, news agencies reported. "We need to re-establish positions on Cuba and in other countries," news agency Interfax quoted Putin as saying at the weekly presidium meeting of key government ministers. Putin's remarks came after Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin reported on a recent three-day visit to Cuba, where he discussed a raft of trade and investment issues and met with Raul Castro, Fidel's brother and now the island's leader (*Reuters*, 4/8/08).

August 4: Cuban Ambassador to Honduras Juan Carlos Hernandez received the Keys to the City of Olanchito from Mayor Ramon Puerto Roca. The ceremony was attended by municipal authorities, members of the Honduras-Cuba Friendship Association, and Cuban doctors who work at the island's embassy, reads a report from the Cuban Foreign ministry. The mayor highlighted the historical ties of friendship between Cuba and his country and thanked the work of Cuban doctors in Honduras for more than ten years. He noted that this action of solidarity has highly contributed to the improvement of the nation's public health (ACN, 4/8/08).

August 4: Cuban Vice President Esteban Lazo met with visiting Surinamese Foreign Minister Lygia Louise Irene Kraag-Keteldijk and her accompanying delegation. During the meeting, both sides spoke of the situation in their respective countries and agreed to continue developing and strengthening bilateral relations, particularly in the areas of energy saving, education and public health. The Surinamese top diplomat advocated multilateralism and praised ongoing integration processes in our region and also condemned the almost 50-year-old US embargo against Cuba. Also present in the meeting were Fernando Ramirez de Estenoz, head of the Foreign Relations Department at the Central Committee of Cuba's Communist Party, and the Cuban ambassador to Suriname, Andres Gonzalez. The delegation from Suriname also includes Jane Aarland-Nanhu, Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Ministry; Robby Ramlakhan, chief of the Office of Integration; Manorma Soeknandan, Suriname's ambassador to Cuba, and Eurdice Hofwijks, director of America ai (ACN, 5/8/08).

August 4: Honduran president, Manuel Zelaya, invited his counterparts from Cuba, Raúl Castro; Venezuela, Hugo Chávez; Bolivia, Evo Morales; and Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, to visit Tegucigalpa for the official entry of Honduras into the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA). "The invitation is for August 13th to 16th, depending on the presidents' agendas," said the spokesman for the Presidential House, Guillermo Paz. The spokesman underlined that Honduras's membership "is a decision already made" and ratified by Zelaya and his Cabinet (AFP, 4/8/08).

August 4: Cuban jurist Miguel Alfonso Martinez, president of the Cuban Society of International Law, was appointed to head the Advisory Committee of the UN Human Rights Council. An experienced diplomat, Alfonso Martinez worked for several years as spokesperson for the Cuban Foreign Ministry. Russian jurist Vladimir Kartashkin and Egyptian lawyer and women's right defender Mona Zulfikar were appointed as vice presidents (ACN, 4/8/08).

August 5: The president of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcon, and his Panamanian counterpart, Pedro Miguel Gonzales, addressed ongoing preparations for a Continental Encounter in Solidarity with Cuba, to be held soon in Panama. "We expect the solidarity-with-Cuba forum, to be held in late September, to be as successful as the one that took place in July in Panama," said Gonzalez during a meeting held at the building hosting the presidency of the Cuban Parliament in Havana. "The event will boost the international campaign for the release of the five Cuban innocent prisoners held in US jails for fighting

terrorism,” he said. “The Continental Encounter in Solidarity with Cuba will also serve as an international tribune to demand the lifting of the over 45-year-old US economic, commercial and financial blockade of Cuba,” stressed the president of the Panamanian Parliament. Pedro Miguel Gonzalez said that the city of Santiago de Veraguas, hometown of former Panamanian President Omar Torrijos, will be the venue of the meeting, which will be attended by representatives of solidarity-with-Cuba movements (*ACN*, 5/8/08).

August 5: A group of 12 Cubans reached Honduras' Caribbean coast almost two weeks after having set sail from the communist island, the local press reported. The undocumented migrants arrived on August 3 in a fishing boat near the coastal town of Irióna, some 650 kilometers (403 miles) northeast of Tegucigalpa. The group comprised 10 men and two women, who were given food and shelter by local residents. Later, the Cubans were transported to the regional Immigration Office in Trujillo, capital of Colon province. Several of the migrants told reporters that they left the southern Cuban city of Manzanillo on July 22 and that their intention was to remain several days in Honduras before traveling on to the United States, where they have relatives (*AP*, 5/8/08).

August 5: The United States must return the Guantanamo naval base to Cuba in order to move forward in the normalization of relations with the island, said the president of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias. The Guantanamo naval base, which since January 2002 the United States has used as a detention camp in its “war against terrorism,” was leased to Washington at the beginning of the 20th century, a contract which the Cuban government has tried to terminate unsuccessfully since the triumph of the revolution in 1959. “I repeat again what I said to [former American president] Bill Clinton during the first term of his administration: you cannot ask anything from Cuba without offering something first,” said Arias to the newspaper *La Nación*. “I believe that after what’s happened in the prisons of Guantanamo and the negative image that the United States has earned violating basic human rights there, it is high time to consider that Guantanamo should be returned to Cuba,” he added (*AFP*, 6/8/08).

August 6: Ali Mohammed Shein, vice president of the United Republic of Tanzania, is to arrive in Cuba on an official visit, invited by Council of State vice president Esteban Lazo. The visit of the Tanzanian official will deepen the historic ties of friendship and cooperation existing between Cuba and the African nation, *Granma* newspaper reported. The visitor's agenda will include official talks with Lazo and other Cuban leaders, as well as visiting sites of economic, scientific and cultural interest (*ACN*, 6/8/08).

August 6: The Cuban flag was raised at the Central Plaza of the Olympic Villa, in Beijing, where the acting mayor of the Games, Cheng Jian, officially received the Cuban delegation. Jian gave a warm welcome to the Cuban athletes on behalf of the Chinese people and expressed his hope that the modern and environmentally friendly facilities felt like home to them. The delegation is headed by the Council of Ministers Vice President Jose Ramon Fernandez and the president of the National Institute of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation, Christian Jimenez (*ACN*, 6/8/08).

August 7: Angolan President Jose Eduardo dos Santos met in Luanda with Cuban Army Corps General Leopoldo Cintra Frias, member of the Politburo of the Cuban Communist Party. During the meeting, the two talked about issues related to the strengthening of bilateral relations, says a Granma report. According to Angolan media outlets, Cintra Frias told the press that among the topics dealt with at the encounter were the increase of cooperation in the fields of health, education and civil construction. The Cuban official expressed his hope that Angola's legislative elections, scheduled for September 5, are held in an environment of peace, harmony and confidence. Leopoldo Cintra Frias is heading a delegation that arrived in Luanda on August 4 with the objective of enhancing bilateral relations (*ACN*, 7/8/08).

August 7: A group of young Canadians, who lived in the eastern Cuban city of Bayamo for two and a half months, ended their stay charmed by the kindness of the people and the island's natural beauty and tranquility. Francois Fecteau, a sociology and communications student, told the local press that the visit, which began in May, allowed them to learn that Cuba is very different from the picture promoted by the press around the world. "It's best to talk with Cubans, appreciate their culture and see the differences between cities like Havana and Bayamo and the rural areas," the student noted. French literature and theater student Julien Bougie said the project was a source of inspiration for the young Canadians, who traveled to Cuba on a program organized by the Trois- Rivieres Solidarity Committee of Québec, Canada (*ACN*, 7/8/08).

August 7: Cuban Vice President Esteban Lazo met in Havana with his Tanzanian counterpart Ali Mohammed Sheik, who has been on an official visit to Cuba. Among the Tanzanians present at the meeting were Professors David Mwakusa and Jumane Magnembe, ministers of Health and Education, respectively, and other officials and parliament members. Attending for Cuba was Fernando Ramirez de Estenoz, member of the Secretariat of the Communist Party Central Committee; Marcos Rodriguez and Yilliam Jimenez, deputy Foreign ministers; Ramon Ripoll, vice minister of the Ministry of Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration (MINVEC); and other officials (*ACN*, 7/8/08).

August 7: A new committee to demand freedom for the five Cubans incarcerated in the United States since 1998 was created at UNESCO's Palace in Beirut, Lebanon. The creation of the committee is part of preparations for a worldwide solidarity campaign for the release of René González, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González and Gerardo Hernández, internationally known as the Cuban Five, scheduled for early September in different parts of the globe. The Cuban Foreign Ministry website reports that the executive council of the new committee was established in the presence of Samir El Kantar, a senior member of the organization of prisoners released from Israeli prisons, who was unanimously elected Honorary President (*ACN*, 7/8/08).

August 10: The Vice President of Tanzania, Dr. Ali Mohamed Sheik, concluded an official visit to Cuba. According to Granma news daily, prior to his departure, the visitor and his accompanying delegation met with his Cuban counterpart Esteban Lazo Hernandez. Mohamed Sheik thanked Lazo for the hospitality of the Cuban people and

government and, particularly, for his meeting with students and professors at the Havana-based Latin American School of Medicine. "This visit further strengthens the close and fraternal friendship ties between our two peoples," said the Tanzanian VP (ACN, 11/8/08).

August 10: Cuba sided with its old Cold War ally Russia when President Raul Castro issued an official statement supporting Russia's military actions in Georgia's breakaway enclave of South Ossetia. He backed a Russian demand that Georgia unconditionally withdraw its troops from the pro-Russian area that Georgia tried to reclaim militarily. "It's false that Georgia is defending its national sovereignty," Castro said in the statement that appeared to reflect recent steps toward renewing Cuba-Russia relations. "The request for a previous withdrawal of the invaders is just and our government supports it." Castro said South Ossetia shared neither nationality nor culture with Georgia and had maintained its status as "an autonomous republic." "The Autonomous Republic of South Ossetia historically formed part of the Russian Federation," he said. Castro charged that Georgia had launched its action on South Ossetia "in complicity with the United States," Cuba's long-time enemy ([Declaración Oficial del Gobierno de Cuba](#); *Reuters*, 11/8/08).

August 11: A series of initiatives to encourage bilateral cooperation between Cuba and Belarus were analyzed during a recent visit to the Caribbean nation of Victor Sheiman, special envoy from Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. According to Granma news daily, Sheiman and his accompanying delegation held meetings on August 8-10 with senior Cuban officials from different sectors. Recently, Cuba and Belarus ratified a governmental agreement through which the European nation will supply 100 buses for the Cuban public transportation sector (ACN, 11/8/08).

August 11: Canadian friends of Cuba are working "to spread the word" about the case of the five Cubans imprisoned in the US for nearly 10 years. Sylvain Pinet, with the Solidarity-with-Cuba Committee of Trois-Rivieres, in the province of Quebec, told the Cuban press during a visit to the island that the organization is actively involved in the international campaign in support of the release of the "Cuban Five." The young activist said that the committee has followed the case since 1998 – when Gerardo Hernandez, Rene Gonzalez, Antonio Guerrero, Ramon Labañino and Fernando Gonzalez were arrested. Pinet explained that the organization puts out a community newspaper of 75,000 copies in which information on the legal process of the Five is regularly published (ACN, 11/8/08).

August 11: A senior Cuban athletics coach denied that his team's best hope for a track gold at the Beijing Olympics had signed a controversial petition pressing China over Tibet and human rights. Rights groups published a petition they said was signed by 40 athletes, including Cuba's 110 meter world record holder Dayron Robles, urging Chinese President Hu Jintao to find peace in Tibet and protect freedom of religion and opinion. The appearance of Robles's name was a surprise given close ties between Cuba and China, which are both Communist-run. Cuban athletes generally avoid touchy politics, with the exception of defectors from the state-run sports system. "We saw this when we arrived, but at no time did anyone approach us, nor did we sign anything like this. We

don't even know who that group is," Robles's coach Santiago Antunez said of German-based Sports for Peace that put the petition online. "It's wrong. We're just here to compete," Antunez added as his 21-year-old protege limbered up behind him on a training track where he was not available for interviews (*Reuters*, 11/8/08).

August 11: Cuba is defending former Cold War ally Russia for using military force to halt Georgia's offensive to regain control of a breakaway province. Fidel Castro stated that the government of Georgia would never have launched its armed forces against the capital of the Autonomous Republic of South Ossetia in the dawn of August 8th, engaged in what it called the re-establishing of constitutional order, without previous coordination with US President George W. Bush. Fidel Castro stressed that Bush, last month in Bucharest, had committed to support President Saakashvili for Georgia's admission to NATO; that is like plunging a sharpened dagger deep into Russia's heart. In his article entitled "Cannon Fodder for The Market," the Cuban leader said that if Russia today is no longer a Communist threat and it no longer has more than 400 nuclear launching-pads directly aimed at Europe's military and strategic targets since they were dismantled after the demise of the USSR, why do they seem determined to surround it with a nuclear shield? The old continent also needs peace (*Carne de cañón para el mercado; The Miami Herald, Prensa Latina*, 12/8/08).

August 12: A multi-sectorial Cuban delegation headed by Army Corps General Leopoldo Cintra Frias ended a six-day visit to Angola, during which bilateral relations were examined. The Cuban military, who was received by Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos, met with various ministers with whom he analyzed existing cooperation agreements between the two countries in the fields of health, education, civil construction among other sectors, reported the Cuban Foreign Ministry's website. Cintra Frías also visited an eye clinic in Benguela, as well as other Angolan cities where Cubans and Angolans are carrying out the national reconstruction program (*ACN*, 12/8/08).

August 12: A human rights coordinator said a group opposed to President Evo Morales has attacked Cuban doctors and a teacher and forcibly removed them from their town in eastern Bolivia. Leonardo Tamborini said the attackers showed up at the Cubans' home in Santa Cruz state, a stronghold of Morales opposition. They insulted the Cubans, took their cell phones and forcibly drove them out of town. The doctors and teacher had yet to return. Tamborini called on for the prosecution of those responsible. The abduction occurred during the national recall vote on Morales and state governors. The opposition objects to Morales' alliances with leftist Venezuela and Cuba (*AP*, 12/8/08).

August 14: First Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura heads the Cuban official delegation that traveled to Paraguay to participate in the swearing-in ceremony of president-elect Fernando Lugo that takes place in Asuncion. According to Granma news daily, the delegation also includes the head of the Department of Foreign Relations at the Central Committee of Cuba's Communist Party, Fernando Ramirez de Estenoz; Deputy Foreign Minister Alejandro Gonzalez and Deputy Raul Suarez, president of the Cuba-Paraguay Parliamentary Friendship Group of the Cuban National Assembly. Currently, there are 20 Cuban health professionals making their contribution at the Maria

Auxiliadora Ophthalmological Center in Paraguay while 874 youths from the South American country are studying in Cuba (ACN, 14/8/08).

August 14: Cuban Health Minister Jose Ramon Balaguer arrived in Luanda, the capital of Angola, to participate in the opening of an eye clinic in the southern province of Benguela. Balaguer, who will remain in the African country four days, was met at the airport by Deputy Health Minister Jose Viera Dias Van Dunem, Foreign Ministry officials, and the Cuban ambassador to Luanda, Pedro Ross. Traveling with Balaguer is Council of State official Elia Rosa Lemus, who supervises the implementation of the Operation Miracle eye surgery program (ACN, 15/8/08).

August 14: Cuban Vice President Esteban Lazo is heading to Santo Domingo leading an official delegation to attend the inauguration ceremony of Leonel Fernandez, the reelected president of the Dominican Republic. Also part of the Cuban delegation is Juan Astiasaran Ceballo, the Cuban ambassador to the Dominican Republic, and officials from the International Relations Department of the Communist Party Central Committee and Foreign Ministry (ACN, 15/8/08).

August 14: Fidel Castro sent a congratulation message to the Paraguayan people in which he said he has pleasant memories of his visit to this South American country in 2003. The message was delivered by Cuban First Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, who arrived in Asuncion, the Paraguayan capital, to participate in the swearing-in ceremony of president-elect Fernando Lugo. According to Prensa Latina news agency, Machado Ventura also delivered warm greetings from the President of the Cuban councils of State and Ministers Raul Castro. The Cuban senior official was received at the Silvio Pettirossi International Airport by the outgoing Paraguayan Health Minister Oscar Martinez Doldan and by the Cuban ambassador in Asuncion, Adolfo Curbelo. "Solidarity between Cuba and Paraguay will increase," said Machado Ventura (ACN, 15/8/08).

August 16: First Vice President of the Councils of State and Ministers of Cuba Jose Ramon Machado Ventura met in Asuncion, capital of Paraguay, with important figures from that country. Among them were Vice President Federico Franco, Foreign Minister Alejandro Hamed Franco, Interior Minister Rafael Filizzola, National Defense Minister Luis Bareiro Spaini, Deputy Foreign Minister Jorge Lara Castro, and Cabinet Chief Miguel Angel Lopez Perito, Granma newspaper reported. A representation of the Cuban medical brigade, the Havana diplomatic staff accredited in that country, as well as academics, young Paraguayan physicians graduated in the island and solidarity friends also attended the meeting. Franco told the daily he feels "a great affection and respect for the Cuban people." "Cuba's struggle of all Latin America, we can have some differences, but Cuba is a flagship of health, education, sports and social commitment," he said. Machado Ventura led the Cuban delegation attending the inauguration of Fernando Lugo as president of Paraguay, and received the Illustrious Visitor distinction bestowed by the Philosophy Faculty at the Asuncion National University (ACN, 16/8/08).

August 16: Cuban PhD Thalia Fung has been re-elected member of the Board of Directors of the International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP). This 22nd FISP Congress in Seoul, South Korea, unfolds under the theme "Rethinking Philosophy Today". Fung, that led a session and attended a panel on political philosophy, sparked heated debate with her theory on bioethics and meta-bioethics which she called a huge challenge of relations among human beings and their interaction with nature. The scientist said inter-cultural exchange and philosophies in Africa and other regions won space at the 22nd Congress although European trends still prevail (*ACN*, 16/8/08).

August 16: Cuban Vice-president, Carlos Lage, received Alí Kortei, minister of state of foreign affairs of Sudan, who is on a brief visit to the island. Kortei thanked the Cuban government for agreeing to his visit, which is part of a tour throughout the region which will include Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina. According to the Sudanese leader, Cuba is an example of the liberation of the people and it praised the good relations of friendship and the support that the island has always given to Sudan, which is the reason why his government decided to begin his trip with Cuba (*Juventud Rebelde*, 17/8/08).

August 17: Cuba's Vice President Esteban Lazo had a busy agenda in the Dominican Republic, where he attended President Leonel Fernandez' inauguration. After the swearing-in ceremony, Lazo met with Guatemalan Vice President Rafael Espada to discuss regional situation and bilateral cooperation. The meeting was also attended by Cuban diplomats Humberto Rivero and Juan Astiasaran, according to sources from the Cuban delegation. Despite heavy rains associated to tropical storm Fay, the Cuban Vice President also travelled to Bani, west of Santo Domingo, to pay tribute to Major General Maximo Gomez Baez (1836-1905), hero of Cuba's independence. Back in Santo Domingo, he attended a rally of activists from the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, which focuses on denouncing the US blockade and demanding the release of the five Cubans held in US prison since 1998 (*Prensa Latina*, 17/8/08).

August 17: The leftist front-runner in the race to be El Salvador's next president said he would reestablish diplomatic relations with Cuba if elected. Mauricio Funes, a former correspondent for international news channel CNN, is currently leading polls ahead of the March 2009 election. Speaking at a convention of his Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, or FMLN party, Funes said, "We are going to open diplomatic relations with our Cuban brothers and their government." El Salvador has never had a leftist president, and the country severed ties with Cuba after the communist island's 1959 revolution. The FMLN has shaken off some of its Marxist roots from its days as a rebel group that battled a series of US backed governments in the country's 1980-1992 civil war (*Reuters*, 17/8/08).

August 18: Paraguayan Youth Vice-minister Karina Rodríguez praised the examples of Cuba and Venezuela in the eradication of illiteracy, and announced a campaign to eliminate that social scourge in her country. In statements published by the local press, Rodríguez said that Cuba and Venezuela were the first two countries in Latin America to banish illiteracy, *Granma* newspaper highlighted. Rodríguez assured that the implementation of Mission Robinson –a Venezuelan community initiative– and “Yes I

Can” –a teaching method developed by Cuban specialists and successfully used in several nations– are the best examples (*ACN*, 20/8/08).

August 21: The International Boxing Association (AIBA) unveiled plans to launch a professional league, which the ruling body hopes the dominant Cuban boxers would join. AIBA, whose traditional ground is amateur boxing and whose showcase event is the Olympics, is hoping the World League of Boxing (WLB) will start in 2010. The WLB will be an annual, franchised-based professional league with cities, venues or companies applying to "own" a franchise and enter their team of boxers, AIBA said in a statement. "AIBA is not just about amateur boxing, it's about boxing as a whole," AIBA president Wu Ching-Kuo told reporters to explain the WLB project, which will feature both team and individual competitions (*Reuters*, 21/8/08).

August 21: Cuban Deputy Health Minister Roberto Gonzalez is in Managua to participate in the graduation ceremony of Nicaraguan youths who completed their studies at Havana's Latin American Medical School (ELAM). The group of 56 students concluded their internships in their home communities along the Caribbean coast under the supervision of Cuban doctors. Nineteen of the graduates majored in health and nursing technology (*Prensa Latina*, 21/8/08).

August 21: Vice-president of Cuba's Council of Ministers, Jose Ramon Fernandez met in Beijing with China's Deputy Prime Minister Li Kegiang to whom he gave greetings for President Hu Jintao on behalf of Fidel Castro and President Raul Castro. During the talks, Jose Ramon Fernandez, who is heading his country's delegation to the 29th Olympic Games, said he was carrier of fraternal greetings from Fidel Castro and from Cuban President Raul Castro to China's head of state Hu Jintao, PM Wen Jiabao and the political leadership of the Asian nation. The Cuban VP recalled that since last March the Cuban government expressed its support of the hosting by China of the Olympic Games, and its rejection of any foreign interference with the Chinese initiative. He said that he had attended five Olympics, so he could bear witness to the excellent organization of the games by China, the high quality services and the good attention given to all delegations and participating athletes by the volunteers and the Chinese people. Li Kegiang welcomed the Cuban VP whom he described as an important personality in the field of sports that had offered his full support to the Beijing Olympic Games since very early moments (*ACN*, 21/8/08).

August 22: Not long ago, Cuban surfers made surfboards by molding insulation foam from refrigerators with a cheese grater. Now they ride the waves on second-hand surfboards donated by surfers in other countries, whose solidarity is keeping afloat one of the least known tribes in the surfing universe. "Cuba is one of the last places not surfed in the world. It's probably like Bali was in the late 1960s," said Bob Samin, a 49-year-old Australian engineer who promotes surfing on the island. Surfing, which does not have the official support other sports receive in Cuba, survives thanks to the tenacity of a handful of fanatics who learned the sport by imitating what they saw in foreign magazines. Without money and with little contact with the outside world, the 100 or so surfers in Cuba shared the few boards they had, developing the cooperative ethos that once reigned

among surfers elsewhere but now has been replaced by competition, said Samin. "In the rest of the world, surfing has lost its soul, it has become very competitive. Everybody is so hyper, here is different," said Samin, who works on an oil platform in the Indian Ocean and travels every five weeks to Cuba. He has been the driving force behind the international effort to get boards for Cubans. So far this year, Cubans have received 20 boards and another 40 are expected in coming months (*Reuters*, 22/8/08).

August 22: Cuban doctors and Surinamese medical staff involved in the "Operation Miracle" eye-surgery program in Suriname received diplomas signed by Fidel Castro in recognition of their work. The diplomas were handed out by the Cuban ambassador to Suriname, Andres Gonzalez Garrido, to all of the health experts working in the program, which began in October 2005. Present at the ceremony, held at the Slands Hospital in Paramaribo, was Suriname's Public Health Minister Dr. Celsius Waterberg (*ACN*, 22/8/08).

August 22: Cuba's cooperation with Suriname in the field of sports began with the signing of a contract for the services in that country of a Cuban athletics trainer. The contract between Suriname's Ministry for Education and Community Development and its Sports Department with CUBADEPORTES foresees the island's cooperation in this field, points out the Cuban Foreign Ministry. The permanent secretary of that ministry, John Sadriman, signed the contract at the Cuban embassy in Paramaribo, the Surinamese capital, with the presence of Andres Gonzalez, the Cuban ambassador to that nation. Cooperation in the field of sports is part of the accords of the third Suriname-Cuba Joint Commission, which met in Paramaribo on February 28-29, this year (*ACN*, 22/8/08).

August 25: Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage Davila is heading his country's delegation to the signing ceremony that will make Honduras a member of the Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas (ALBA). The ceremony is scheduled to take place in Tegucigalpa, Granma daily reported. The Cuban delegation also includes deputy foreign minister Yilian Jimenez, Cuban ambassador to Honduras Juan Carlos Hernandez and other government officials (*ACN*, 25/8/08).

August 25: South Africa's Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma began an official visit to Cuba, at the invitation of her Cuban counterpart Felipe Perez Roque. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma arrived in on August 20, to preside over the Meeting of South African Ambassadors to the Americas. Zuma will hold official talks with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and will also meet with other Cuban government officials (*ACN*, 25/8/08).

August 25: The Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) is a genuine Latin American integration project, said Cuban Vice-president Carlos Lage in his speech at a Ceremony held in Tegucigalpa, in which Honduras officially joined the integration initiative. "ALBA was the inspiration of Hugo Chavez, the project boosted by both Chavez and Fidel Castro and the hope of all of us," said Lage, who noted that the initiative is aimed at the integration of nations and not of the markets, while it promotes solidarity and rejects individual selfish interests; it means understanding of differences

and preferential attention to the most vulnerable ones. Lage said that ALBA (Spanish acronym that stands for DAWN) places man at the center of its goals and makes it the target of all efforts and not as a victim of the market, of greed and ambition; ALBA does not need any military treaties, because it is a brotherhood oath ([Discurso de Carlos Lage](#); *ACN*, 26/8/08).

August 25: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque called relations between his country and South Africa exemplary. Perez Roque's comments came during the holding of official talks with visiting South African Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma. The Cuban foreign minister thanked South Africa for its firm expressions of support for Cuba and acknowledged the positive role of that African nation in international affairs, especially its performance as a member of the United Nations Security Council. Perez Roque hailed South Africa's stance in defense of international law and the charter of the United Nations and its active work within the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM). The South African Foreign Minister conveyed greetings from President Thabo Mbeki to Cuban leader Fidel Castro and to President Raul Castro (*ACN*, 26/8/08).

August 26: Barbados' Prime Minister David John Howard Thompson arrived in Cuba to inaugurate the 39th General Assembly of the Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU), in Havana. The CBU is a non-governmental organization based in Barbados which supports and promotes high quality work of radio and TV, private or public entities in the Caribbean. It has 57 members in 23 countries; of those, 18 belong to CARICOM. Cuba is the only Spanish speaking country that belongs to the CBU. This is the second time that the CBU meets in Cuba. The first meeting was in 2001 (*ACN*, 26/8/08).

August 26: Solidarity organizations in Canada will stage demonstrations next September 12 to demand the release of the five Cubans held in US jails. September 12 will mark the 10 years of imprisonment in US high security prisons of Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labañino, Fernando Gonzalez, Rene Gonzalez and Antonio Guerrero, known as the Cuban Five. During the Alternative Days meeting, organized by the Alternatives NGO, and attended by 380 activists in Quebec, members of the Fabio DiCelmo Committee for the Five handed out leaflets inviting activists to participate in the September 12 demonstration in front of the American Consulate in Montreal (*ACN*, 26/8/08).

August 26: Honduran President Jose Manuel Zelaya Rosales sent a message of greetings to Cuba in appreciation of the island's support for his country. After signing the admission documents that made Honduras a member of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), President Zelaya spoke to thousands of people who gathered in front of the Government Building in Tegucigalpa in support of their government's decision, reported *Granma* newspaper. Zelaya Rosales noted that Honduras is an independent and sovereign nation that doesn't have to ask for permission from any country to join ALBA. He sent warm greetings to the leader of the Cuban revolution, Fidel Castro, to President Raul Castro and to the Cuban people for their constant support (*ACN*, 26/8/08).

August 26: Representatives of Cuba and South Africa began a meeting to discuss new cooperation in the fields of energy, mining and social work. Cuban Foreign Investment

and Economic Cooperation Minister Marta Lomas and South Africa's Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma attended the meeting. Lomas and Zuma said it is necessary to boost bilateral cooperation and they hailed the advances in ties following the last session of the Cuba-South Africa Inter-governmental Mixed Commission in November 2007. Lomas said Cuba is willing to promote economic ties with South Africa to match their political and diplomatic ties (*Xinhua*, 26/8/08).

August 26: The Prime Minister of Barbados, David Thompson, urged Caribbean radio and television media outlets to support regional integration and to defend cultural diversity. Thompson, who arrived in Havana the day before, spoke during the inauguration of the 39th General Assembly of the Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU). The CBU is a non-governmental organization based in Barbados which supports and promotes high quality work of radio and TV private or public entities in the Caribbean. It has 57 members in 23 countries; 18 of them belong to CARICOM. Cuba is the only Spanish speaking country that belongs to the CBU. "The success of our integration depends, to a large extent, on an active communication," said Thompson. Also during the inaugural session, the president of the Cuban Radio and Television Institute (ICRT), Ernesto Lopez, thanked the CBU for its solidarity with Cuba and for granting the Caribbean nation the venue of this meeting for the second occasion (*ACN*, 27/8/08).

August 27: Paraguayan Foreign Minister Hamed Franco and Cuban ambassador Adolfo Curbelo Castellanos met in Asuncion, the capital of the South American nation. During the meeting, Franco and Curbelo advocated for the strengthening of bilateral cooperation. The Caribbean ambassador in Asuncion also expressed the willingness of the Cuban government to continue developing bilateral programs implemented in recent years that include granting scholarships to Uruguayan youths and assistance in the health sector. Both officials paid particular attention to the relationship between the two foreign ministries (*ACN*, 27/8/08).

August 27: Cuban President Raul Castro met with South African Foreign Minister Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, who is on an official visit to the Caribbean nation. During the meeting they exchanged ideas about the fraternal ties between Cuba and South Africa and they also reiterated their respective countries' willingness to continue strengthening political and cooperation ties. Raul announced the decision of the Cuban government to send VP Esteban Lazo ahead of the Cuban delegation that will participate in the upcoming Summit of the African Diaspora that will take place in South Africa (*ACN*, 28/8/08).

August 27: Cuban President Raul Castro met with the Prime Minister of Barbados, David Howard Thompson, who attended the inauguration in Havana of the 39th General Assembly of the Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU), which takes place in the Cuban capital. Both leaders spoke about the development of ties between the two nations, their relationship with countries of the region and also about other topics of international interest. Raul reiterated his invitation to the distinguished visitor to participate in the 3rd Cuba-CARICOM Summit scheduled for next December in Santiago de Cuba. Also

present in the meeting were the Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Perez Roque, and Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas (*ACN*, 28/8/08).

August 29: Raúl Castro will visit Brazil this year, probably in December, according to Brazilian diplomatic sources cited by the newspaper *Folha de Sao Paulo*. According to the daily, sources from the Brazilian embassy in Havana said that Raúl Castro will travel in December, although the exact date of the trip is yet to be confirmed due to the “very tight” Cuban security measures. During a meeting held in Havana in January, the Brazilian president, Luiz Lula da Silva, invited Raúl Castro to visit Brazil. The invitation was repeated months later by the Brazilian foreign affairs minister, Celso Amorim, during another visit to Cuba. On that occasion, the foreign minister said that Brazil aspires to become Cuba’s “main partner” in Latin America (*ANSA*, 29/8/08).

August 31: The Spanish government has offered Cuba assistance to relieve the effects of hurricane Gustav, announced the Department of Foreign Affairs. “Spain, through the Spanish International Cooperation Agency for Development (AECID), offers humanitarian aid to the authorities of the countries affected in the wake of hurricane Gustav -- Jamaica and Cuba,” announced the Department. The AECID “has been monitoring the situation” and is “ready to respond promptly to the needs of the affected populations,” it added (*AFP*, 31/8/08).

Security

August 2: A week after Russia's defence ministry denied it planned to send nuclear-armed bombers to Cuba, a high-ranking Russian elected official renewed the idea of military cooperation. Andrei Klimov, the deputy head of Russia's International Affairs Committee in the Duma, said Russia intended to become more involved in Cuba. He did not rule out the possibility of a military presence on the Caribbean island just off the US coast, according to the state news agency RIA Novosti. “It's possible Russia could use this to react to US plans for a missile defence system in Central Europe,” the member of the United Russia Party said. But Klimov, who was speaking at the end of a Russian delegation's visit to Cuba, said that such plans would not involve pointing Russian rockets at the US. He emphasized that Russia must build a presence in as many regions as possible, in both economic as well as military affairs. 'We must defend our national interests - also in the area of security,' he said. Cuba's location has geopolitical importance, he noted. Nikolai Patrushev, secretary of Russia's Security Council and former head of domestic security, met over the past week with Cuban leaders. According to Klimov, Cuban President Raul Castro and Patrushev agreed that Russia and Cuba should “expand their traditional relationship” (*DPA*, 2/8/08).

August 2: The Cuban leadership has no intentions to resume military cooperation with Russia after a surprise closure of a Russian electronic listening post in Lourdes in 2001, a high-ranking Cuban diplomat said. After Russian Security Council chief Nikolai Patrushev and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin visited Cuba on July 30-31, the council issued a statement saying: "Russia and Cuba are set to make consistent efforts to restore longtime ties in all spheres of cooperation and to expand and strengthen them."

"The Cuban leadership is ready to cooperate with Russia in civilian sectors but it is unlikely to revive bilateral military cooperation, especially after what happened with Lourdes," the anonymous diplomatic source said. The electronic monitoring and surveillance facility near Havana at Torrens, also known as the Lourdes facility, the largest Russian SIGINT site abroad, was shut down in October 2001 by then-president Vladimir Putin. "We were not even notified about the decision [by the Russian leadership]," the diplomat said. The Lourdes facility reportedly covered a 28 square-mile area, with 1,000-1,500 Russian engineers, technicians, and military personnel working at the base (*Ria-Novosti*, 2/8/08).

August 4: Russia may resume a military presence in Cuba in response to growing military-political pressure from the West, a Russian political analyst said. Moscow has strongly opposed the possible deployment by the US of 10 interceptor missiles in Poland and an accompanying tracking radar in the Czech Republic as a threat to its national security. Washington says the defenses are needed to deter a possible strike from Iran, or other "rogue" states. Moscow has also expressed concern over NATO's expansion to Russia's borders and pledged to take "appropriate measures." "It is not a secret that the West is creating a 'buffer zone' around Russia, involving in the process countries in central Europe, the Caucasus, the Baltic states and Ukraine," said Leonid Ivashov, the former head of the Russian Defense Ministry's department for international cooperation, and currently president of the Academy of Geopolitical Problems. "In response, we may expand our military presence abroad, including in Cuba," Ivashov said, commenting on the recent visit of Russian Security Council chief Nikolai Patrushev and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin to Cuba on July 30-31. He said during the visit Patrushev had most likely discussed the possibility of a renewed Russian military presence in Cuba with the Cuban defense and interior ministers. "Cuba has convenient harbors which may host Russian reconnaissance and combat ships, and a network of forward landing airfields. With the Cuban leadership's consent and our own political will we may also consider resuming the work of an electronic listening post in Lourdes," the general said (*Ria-Novosti*, 4/8/08).

US-Cuba Relations

August 4: Washington didn't show any concern about the renewal of bilateral relations between Russia and Cuba. The State Department spokesman, Gonzalo Gallegos, said that is a matter of concern for those two countries. "We don't see dealing with the Cuban government as particularly productive. However, we understand that other countries will have bilateral relations as they seem fit", Gallegos said. He reminded the press that the US doesn't have relations with Havana because "that is a country that continues to oppress its citizens, that continues to squeeze them for all the resources that it can to maintain the regime there". "Our relations with Cuba are not – the relations that we don't have for Cuba are well known", he said (*EFE*, 4/8/08).

August 4: The Florida House of Representatives is defending a law it passed earlier this year requiring new restrictions on travel agencies and charter companies booking trips to Cuba. In July, a federal judge temporarily blocked the law until a September hearing.

House Speaker Marco Rubio planned to announce in Miami that the House of Representatives will join the lawsuit in support of the state. State Representative David Rivera sponsored the measure. He opposes travel to Cuba and says the law is not about his personal views but about protecting customers. The companies say the measure would pre-empt federal law and could put the agencies out of business. It would force them to put up a \$250,000 state bond. Other travel agencies pay \$25,000 (*AP*, 4/8/08).

August 5: A concert featuring world-renowned Latin performers in support of the five Cubans who remain imprisoned in the United States, will take place on September 13th at the Hostos Community College Auditorium, in New York City. The concert, entitled "Five Stars and a Song" and organized by the International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban Five in an attempt to reach a broader audience inside the United States, will take place as part of a series of activities to mark the tenth anniversary of the arrest and imprisonment of Gerardo Hernandez, Rene Gonzalez, Antonio Guerrero, Ramon Labañino and Fernando Gonzalez, on September 12th, 1998 (*ACN*, 5/8/08).

August 5: The United States government seized more than \$16,000 from a passenger who planned to fly to Cuba from Miami without authorization to take that amount, according to a federal court document. The seizure order was issued against Leonel González, who, when asked about the origin of the money, said that he received it from Magaly García, identified by the federal district attorney's office as a travel agent. According to the registry of corporations in Florida, García is linked to the Havanatur and Travel Service agency, with head office in Miramar, Havana. The federal records show no indication of González or García appealing to recover the money (*El Nuevo Herald*, 5/8/08).

August 5: The University of Alabama baseball team will be taking the road less traveled later this year. After years of negotiations, the Crimson Tide will travel and play in Cuba in mid-December, having received approval from both governments. A formal announcement of the mid-December trip is expected from UA officials. The trip was arranged through the auspices of the University's Alabama-Cuba Initiative. Over the past several years, the initiative has been responsible for a number of cross-cultural contacts. University faculty and students have visited Cuba for cultural exchanges and joint academic endeavours ranging from comparative studies in book arts to an anthropological dig in search of pre-Columbian artifacts on the island (*USA Today*, 5/8/08).

August 7: A veteran spy catcher's appearance on Spanish-language TV in Miami has added fuel to the decades-long debate about the Castro government's interest in spying in South Florida. Lt. Col. Chris Simmons, an Army Reserve counterintelligence officer and former Defense Intelligence Agency counterintelligence analyst, named Marifeli Pérez-Stable, Gilberto Abascal, Alberto R. Coll and Gillian Gunn Clissold as agents for the Cuban government. But Simmons offered no conclusive evidence that any of the four -- who have denied the accusation -- gave classified information to Cuba, received intelligence training or undertook missions for Cuban intelligence. Simmons said his years of training enable him to make educated determinations on whether someone is an

intelligence agent. "Why deny what we know to be true?" Simmons told the press. Of the four, Gunn, a former Georgetown University professor, is little known in the local exile community. The other three -- including Pérez-Stable -- have been accused in the past of collaborating with Cuban intelligence. Judy Orihuela, spokeswoman for the Miami office of the FBI, declined to comment. One of the agency's jobs is to catch spies working in the United States (*The Miami Herald*, 8/8/08).

August 8: If the American people knew the real mission of the Cuban Five, they would immediately demand their freedom, said Gloria la Riva, coordinator of the US National Committee for the release of the five Cubans held in US jails for nearly 10 years now. During an encounter in San Francisco California, the activist with the National Committee unveiled a huge billboard, which demands the release of Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, Rene Gonzalez and Fernando Gonzalez, internationally known as the Cuban Five. La Riva said the Five "are not criminals, they are heroes; they are very courageous and they have never regretted the decision they took over 10 years ago, when they infiltrated terrorist groups based in Miami in an effort to prevent them from carrying out terrorist actions and with it avoid a confrontation between the United States and Cuba" (*ACN*, 8/8/08).

August 8: Three Cuban dry-dock workers who sued a Curacao shipyard business for conspiring with the Cuban government and forcing them into virtual slave labor won their federal lawsuit, after their former employers failed to show up in court. In a joint venture with the Cuban state shipyard, Curacao Drydock Company hired at least 100 Cuban workers to repair cruise ships and tankers at its dock in Willemstad, Curacao. Court records showed that instead of paying the men, the Curacao company applied their \$6.90 hourly value to the Cuban government's debt with the company. Alberto Justo Rodríguez, Fernando Alonso Hernández and Luis Alberto Casanova Toledo escaped and in 2006 sued the company in US District Court in Miami under the Alien Tort Act, which allows foreigners to file civil suits in US federal courts when a serious international law has been violated. The men -- who now live in the Tampa area -- said the company made them work double shifts against their will in substandard conditions and kept their passports to prevent them from fleeing. On off hours, they were forced to watch hours-long videotaped speeches of then-President Fidel Castro. "It really is a historic ruling," said Tomás Bilbao, executive director of the Cuba Study Group, an organization of Cuban-American business leaders who followed the suit. "It sends a message to any company that would conspire with the Cuban government to violate the human rights of Cuban workers and basically says, 'Look, you are on notice: there is now a legal precedent. If you conspire to do this, there will be severe consequences'" (*The Miami Herald*, 9/8/08).

August 8: Cuban exile and journalism watchdog groups are seeking the release of 22 Cuban political prisoners, including one who recently sewed his lips shut to protest his treatment. The wife of a fellow prisoner told other dissidents and the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists that independent journalist Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta sewed his own lips together in mid-July. The CPJ said that the Cuban government considers the 42-year-old a counterrevolutionary in the services of the United States.

Herrera is serving a 20-year sentence and is among 22 independent journalists held since 2003. His hunger strike started July 12 and ended around July 30 when he was taken to a prison hospital (*Sun Sentinel*, 9/8/08).

August 10: Young baseball players from the United States and Cuba squared off in a game that was the first of its kind in eight years and far friendlier than relations between their two countries. On a rustic, palm-fringed baseball diamond at a convent east of communist Cuba's capital, Havana, the Santos of Cuba clubbed three home runs in the first two innings and went on to defeat the Twin State Peregrines, 16-5. But both sides said it did not matter who won, only that boys from different worlds shared a few hours playing a game they loved, and maybe in the process made things a little better. The Peregrines, who come from Vermont and New Hampshire, were the first US Little Leaguers known to visit Cuba since the Lost Coast Pirates from northern California in 2000. The Peregrines won a second game against a different team, the Mangos, 19-8. Peregrines' coach Ted Levin said getting permission from the United States for the nine-day trip was not easy. "It was two years in the making, four tries with the US government and it was a moving target with the Cuban government," he said. It was finally arranged after intervention from members of the US Congress, he said. The Peregrines' Joe Crevara, 13, said the team came to Cuba, "just to have fun. We're not here to win." Florida rancher John Parke Wright, long active in trying to improve US-Cuba relations and who helped organize the trip, said the baseball game put on vivid display the strong ties between Americans and Cubans. "This is about kids and baseball and lovely friends," he said. "Both governments should be ashamed" (*Reuters*, 10/8/08).

August 11: The US women's volleyball team lost to Cuba in three sets in the Beijing Olympics. Cuba, ranked third in the world, overpowered the US women 25-15, 26-24, 25-17 and are up 2-0 in preliminary round play (*AP*, 11/8/08).

August 12: A key advisor to John McCain lobbied on behalf of a French liquor giant that partners with the Cuban government to sell rum -- and which has been embroiled in a costly and controversial trademark dispute with Miami-based Bacardi. Lobbyist disclosure forms suggest John Green since 2001 also lobbied on behalf of several bills that seek to relax the economic embargo against Cuba -- a stance contrary to McCain's support of the embargo. Campaigning in Miami in May, the Republican presidential contender told a crowd that before he'd entertain lifting the embargo he would press the Cuban government to release political prisoners, legalize political parties and schedule elections. The embargo, McCain said, "must stay in place until these basic elements of democratic society are met." The managing director of the lobbying firm that Green co-founded, however, said in an interview that the firm did not lobby for lifting the embargo. Stewart Hall said Ogilvy Government Relations' sole interest was protecting French liquor manufacturer Pernod Ricard's right to the trademark, Havana Club. The French company, partnering with Cubaexport, a Cuban government company, sells rum under the Havana Club name in Cuba and around the world -- but not in the United States, because of the trade embargo (*The Miami Herald*, 12/8/08).

August 13: Gilberto Abascal, an FBI informant and alleged Cuban government agent, told The Miami Herald that he is not working for Cuban intelligence and that he is loyal to the United States. "That's all a lie," Abascal said about the accusation in a telephone interview. Abascal's statements were his first since Lt. Col. Chris Simmons named him and three others as Cuban agents during a TV appearance July 31 and in an interview with The Herald. Of the four, only Abascal had not responded to Herald calls for comment before the story was published. Abascal, however, has denied similar allegations by others in the past. The other three named by Simmons also denied the allegations (*The Miami Herald*, 14/8/08).

August 14: The United States ranked among Cuba's top five trading partners in 2007 for the first time since imposing a trade embargo in 1962. Data for 2007 on the Web site of Cuba's National Statistics Office placed the United States fifth at \$582 million, up from \$484 million in 2006. The United States began selling food to Cuba in 2002 under an amendment to the embargo (*Reuters*, 15/8/08).

August 14: A federal appeals court has ordered Cuban militant Luis Posada Carriles to stand trial in El Paso on immigration fraud charges. A three-judge panel of the 5th US Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans ruled that Posada, an anti-Castro militant, should stand trial on charges that he lied to federal authorities in his bid to become a US citizen. The criminal case against Posada was dismissed last year when US District Judge Kathleen Cardone ruled that the government engaged in trickery and deceit by using a naturalization interview to build a case against Posada (*Sun Sentinel*, 15/8/08).

August 15: The Cuban government called the reinstatement of a criminal indictment against Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles a "maneuver" to delay and prevent his extradition. In the first official Havana reaction to the ruling by a New Orleans federal appeals court, the Cuban foreign ministry issued a statement saying the opinion could shield Posada from trial abroad as a terrorist. Posada, 80, sneaked into the United States in March 2005 and told authorities he crossed at Brownsville, Texas, with a migrant smuggler. A federal grand jury, however, indicted Posada on January 11, 2007, on charges that he lied in his naturalization proceedings about how he entered the country. Federal officials said they had a witness who saw Posada transported from Mexico to Miami on a shrimping vessel. A federal judge in El Paso in May 2007 threw out the indictment on the grounds federal authorities committed "fraud, deceit and trickery" to implicate Posada in a lie. The appeals court said US District Judge Kathleen Cardone erred in her analysis (*The Miami Herald*, 16/8/08).

August 18: Congressional candidate Mike Erickson is calling a six-day visit to Cuba in 2004 a "humanitarian trip" to deliver medical supplies for the disabled to a Cuban charity. But those familiar with the trip said it was basically a vacation, which likely would have been illegal without the supplies. He said he visited a medical center and met with doctors. The Oregonian, of Portland, said it had determined the medical center does not exist. Erickson, a Lake Oswego businessman and Republican candidate for Oregon's 5th Congressional District, said he donated 20 boxes of medical supplies worth \$9,000 that he bought in the United States. But two others on the trip said Erickson exaggerated

his donation and that the group bought the supplies at a discount store in Cancun, Mexico, to make their trip a legal humanitarian mission. American access to Cuba has been sharply cut by the Bush administration, although Cuba has helped Americans enter via third countries such as Mexico (*AP*, 18/8/08).

August 19: With commodity prices on the rise and the global economy softening, a goal to open more markets for agricultural products is essential for the future of the Lone Star State's farmers and ranchers, said Todd Staples, Texas' agriculture commissioner. In a keynote speech before approximately 200 farmers and ranchers attending this year's Big Country Wheat Conference at the Taylor County Expo Center in Abilene, Staples said he became personally aware of the potential for new export markets following a trade mission trip to Cuba in May. It exceeded all expectations and was a major success, he said. "There is a huge potential for exporting Texas products to Cuba, and the mission has set the table for a long-term business relationship with our neighbors in the Caribbean," he said. "The Cuban buyers were very accommodating and made it clear they are ready to do business with Texans." Staples became the first statewide elected official from Texas to visit Cuba on state business in more than 45 years. The delegation included 24 Texas farmers, ranchers, commodity suppliers and port representatives. The group met with Cuban government officials who procure agricultural products, and visited three Cuban farms and food markets to identify food needs not met by domestic production (*San Angelo Standard Times*, 20/8/08).

August 21: Political rivals Cuba and the United States meet on August 22 in the Olympic baseball semi-finals with US second baseman Jayson Nix possibly returning after a severe eye injury in their volatile round-robin meeting. Controversy erupted after Cuba's 5-4 victory over the Americans when US manager Davey Johnson accused Cuban pitcher Pedro Luis Lazo of deliberately throwing at Nix with the intent to injure. Lazo denied throwing at Nix and Cuban manager Antonio Pacheco said the claim by Johnson showed a lack of respect for his team. Nix, likely to join Major League Baseball's Colorado Rockies next month if he is able, has made progress since the injury and was listed as probable for what promises to be an emotional rematch. "There is some past there, definitely bad blood with players and coaches," US infielder Brian Barden said. "It was a tough game last time and we're hoping for a really good game this time. "You can't really get into bad blood. You just have to play your game." The US-Cuba winner will face the winner of the Japan-South Korea semi-final in the gold medal game while the losers meet for bronze (*AFP*, 21/8/08).

August 21: The US women's volleyball team has advanced to the gold medal game, defeating Cuba in three sets to guarantee the Americans their best Olympic finish since 1984. The United States will play the winner of the Brazil-China semifinal for the Olympic title on August 23. Cuba, three-time Olympic gold medal winners, will play the loser of that semifinal for the bronze (*AP*, 21/8/08).

August 25: Protesters wearing jail-style orange jumpsuits and black hoods over their heads marched down a pedestrian mall in downtown Denver, chanting "Stop the torture, stop the war." The protesters, estimated at several hundred, were at a rally at Civic Center

Park near the state Capitol when they began pouring down the mall at midday, hours before the Democratic National Convention was to start. The march from Civic Center to the old federal court house, organized by Recreate 68, was against the US detention of people protesters called political prisoners, including American Indian activist Leonard Peltier and five Cuban men who are behind bars in the United States for espionage. Peltier is serving a life sentence for killing two FBI agents during a 1975 standoff on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. The Cubans say they were monitoring terrorist groups in Miami they feared could attack Cuba (*AP*, 26/8/08).

August 26: A Manhattan public high-school teacher who twice took students on embargo-busting field trips to Cuba has resigned. Nathan Turner, a popular history instructor at the top-tier Beacon School, allegedly led dozens of students and teachers on at least two such spring-break excursions. Department of Education officials confirmed the resignation, along with that of fellow Beacon teacher Geoffrey Hunt, who also made jaunts to Castro country, according to sources. Officials declined to discuss whether Turner's departure was related to two ongoing investigations sparked by the April 2007 post exposé of the outings. The Treasury Department is exploring the trips' legality. Educational travel to Cuba is limited to college students, sources said. Each traveler could be fined up to \$65,000 (*The New York Post*, 26/8/08).

August 28: The US National Soccer Team is traveling to Havana for a World Cup qualifier against Cuba -- the team's first trip to the island since 1947. US coach Bob Bradley announced his roster for the match, and a second game against Trinidad & Tobago four days later in Chicago. The team is due to get together in Miami on August 31, and then travel to Havana on September 4. The game, scheduled for the Estadio Pedro Marrero in Havana, will take place on September 6. The US has twice met Cuba in World Cup qualifying, but that was back in 1949, before the rise of Fidel Castro and the end of diplomatic relations between the two countries. (*Goal.Com*, 28/8/08).

August 29: A federal judge has struck down a controversial state law that essentially banned professors at state universities in Florida from traveling to Cuba for research purposes, declaring it unconstitutional. US District Judge Patricia Seitz ruled that the 2006 law, pushed aggressively by State Representative David Rivera, "is an impermissible sanction and serves as an obstacle to the objectives of the federal government." The law prohibited the use of state and non-state funds for travel to Cuba and other countries labeled by the US government as state sponsors of terrorism. The judge struck down one provision of the law -- the one banning non-state or private funds from being used for such travel. That means most academics at state universities would be allowed to resume travel to Cuba because most of those trips are covered by private funds, said Florida International University Professor Lisandro Perez, who founded the university's Cuba Research Institute. The American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit challenging the law in 2006 on behalf of FIU's faculty senate. "It was a mean-spirited bill," said FIU Faculty Senate Chairman Tom Breslin. "It was made to turn back the clock. I'm glad it's gone for the sake of academic freedom" (*The Miami Herald*, 30/8/08).

August 29: Two Colorado companies have been caught recently in a tightening US government net around communist Cuba — a reminder of a nearly 50-year-old economic embargo that’s often easy to overlook. Platte River Associates of Boulder, which makes geologic modeling software used by oil and gas companies, and Denver-based RMO Inc., which makes orthodontic equipment, have been accused of violating the embargo on the Caribbean island nation. Platte River is facing federal criminal charges. RMO, also known as Rocky Mountain Orthodontics, paid a \$941 penalty earlier this year. But despite the government’s tough stance on Cuba, some Colorado business leaders are hoping to strengthen trade ties there. Jim Reis, president of World Trade Center Denver, has been trying to organize a trade mission to Cuba for Colorado politicians and business people in the agricultural and medical industries — the two areas that are exempt from the embargo — for roughly the last three years. He still hopes to organize a trip by spring 2009. “I’m still hoping to get it together, although obviously not until after the election,” Reis said. “It’s not fair to ask a politician who’s running for office to join a trade mission to Cuba. Some people have strong feelings about that.” Although he hasn’t spoken to Gov. Bill Ritter yet, Reis hopes Ritter would join a delegation (*Denver Business Journal*, 29/9/08).