

FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba

September 2003

Domestic Affairs

September 1: Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá could not attend a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the EU Parliament because Cuban authorities didn't grant him the exit permit to travel to Strasburg. (El Nuevo Herald, 2/9/03)

September 1: Prison guards transferred four political prisoners who were staging a hunger strike in Boniato prison, Santiago de Cuba, to a place or places unknown. The four, independent journalists Manuel Vázquez Portal and Normando Hernández, and government opponents Nelson Aguiar and Próspero Gainza, had started a hunger strike to protest prison conditions. Department of State Security officials in Havana told Vázquez Portal's sister, Xiomara, that they had been transferred to Aguadores prison, also in Santiago de Cuba. (Cubonet, 2/9/03)

September 1: Wives of 25 jailed dissidents protested that Fidel Castro's communist government was holding their husbands in "subhuman" prison conditions and feeding them rotten food. The wives handed in a letter at the Interior Ministry calling on the government to "change the inhuman conditions that our loved ones are subjected to." "They are undergoing very high temperatures, plagued by insects. They have no running water and the water they are given is not drinking water. The food is insufficient and many times rotten," they wrote to Interior Minister Abelardo Colomé. The husbands are among 75 dissidents arrested in March and sentenced to jail terms of up to 28 years. (Reuters, 3/9/03)

September 1: Thirteen Cuban dissidents who have been jailed since April for allegedly conspiring against state security launched a hunger strike to protest harsh prison conditions, relatives said in a statement. Seven opponents of the communist government have been jailed in Holguín in eastern Cuba and six in the Boniato prison in Santiago de Cuba, also in Cuba's east. They launched the demonstration against what they called inhumane treatment. (The Miami Herald, 3/9/03)

September 3: Cuban dissident Oswaldo Paya publicly denounced a "system of cruelty" against political prisoners on the island while family members announced that six detainees had begun a hunger strike. Guards are limiting medicines, withholding food brought by family members, and abusing both prisoners and visiting relatives at the "Kilo 8" prison in the central-eastern province of Camaguey, Paya said in a statement issued to the foreign news media. The abuse and deplorable living conditions - a combination of unbearable heat, plagues of mosquitoes, lack of ventilation and bad hygiene - are part of a "system of cruelty" against detainees, Paya said. The conditions "have no other objective but to provoke suffering among those who already have been unjustly convicted (...) and that of intimidating the Cuban community so that it doesn't demand the rights and changes that we will achieve anyway," he said. (AP, 3/9/03)

September 5: Spanish playwright Alfonso Sastre will be attending the 11th Havana International Theater Festival. "Intellectuals and Today's Theater" is the name of a lecture that Sastre will deliver at the Cuban Higher Institute of Arts. Sastre will also attend the presentation of the book - The Battle of Intellectuals-, a compilation of his essays to be published by Ciencias Sociales Publishing House, a reflection on artists and their political milieu. (Boletín Cubarte, 15/9/03)

September 6: Cuban projections on the development of special software and the use of minimum-access surgery techniques are being presented at the First International Symposium on Neurosurgery, currently underway in the Cuban capital. The event, presenting cases of more than

15,000 patients from Cuba and other countries treated at the International Center of Neurological Restoration (CIREN), should facilitate an exchange information on the use of new technologies in neuro-rehabilitation. (Radio Habana Cuba, 6/9/03)

September 6: An investment process underway in the Cuban capital to improve water supply systems has benefited several municipalities with long-term difficulties in their water infrastructure. Authorities say that several territories with deteriorated pipes and other structural problems have already benefited from the program, which aims to provide the local population with regular water supply service. (Radio Habana Cuba, 6/9/03)

September 7: A leading Cuban dissident has marked the 15th anniversary of the founding of his outlawed political organization by vowing to continue the fight for democracy and freedom. "We're convinced that in Cuba the changes that people want will only come about when the majority of Cubans free themselves from the culture of fear," Oswaldo Payá said in a statement marking the anniversary of his Christian Liberation Movement, or MCL. He also said the dissident group would "continue its fight until the Cuban people are free." Payá said in the statement. "If the changes come about through civic action, then the way forward will reflect the will of the people who must design their own program of transition and a new constitution." (EFE, 8/9/03)

September 7: After obtaining some improvements in his prison conditions, Manuel Vázquez Portal has ended a hunger strike started eight days ago. (Cubanet, 22/9/03)

September 8: The feast of Our Lady of Charity, the patroness of Cuba, is marked by the Roman Catholic faithful with 50 processions in various parts of the island. The Catholic Bishops Conference said the government had denied permission for 14 other processions to honor the patroness: three of them in the province of Camagüey, three in Ciego de Avila, six in Santa Clara and two in Cienfuegos. Public processions are scheduled at Our Lady of Charity Parish in Havana, where Cardinal Archbishop Jaime Ortega will say Mass, and in 8 city parishes. Processions will also be held in 9 dioceses. The government authorized the broadcast on local radio of sermons by two bishops. (EFE, 5/9/03)

September 8: Fidel Castro has received the 2003 Literacy Award from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The award was presented to the Cuban leader by the regional representative of UNESCO, Francisco José Lacayo, during the official inauguration of the new school year. (Radio Habana Cuba, 9/9/03)

September 8: Cuba will become known for its results in education, health and culture and contributions made to mankind, said Fidel Castro in the official act that inaugurated the 2003-2004 school year. "These contributions have taken place in the toughest of times for mankind, in moments when blockade and other acts against Cubans have worsened", he stated in the Revolution Square that included the presence of students from different levels, and 4 881 new integral High School professors. (AIN, 8/9/03)

September 9: Rafael Acosta, president of the Cuban National Visual Arts Council and head of the 8th Havana Biennial organizing committee, announced that 50 projects by artists from 47 countries will be on show from November to December. He explained that the Biennial, whose theme this year is Art and Life, is taking place "even though European foundations that have traditionally helped us have withdrawn, pressurized by anti-Cuban campaigns and measures generated by the European Union." (Granma International, 9/9/03)

September 9: The Cuban Roman Catholic Church called on Fidel Castro's government to allow more religious, political and economic freedom, and begin a dialogue toward national reconciliation. The Cuban Conference of Bishops expressed its concern over the government's "return to language and methods used during the first years of the revolution," asking it to release 75 dissidents sentenced to average 19-year prison terms earlier this year in the most severe repression in decades. "We once again ask the country's authorities for a gesture of clemency for

these people in prison, above all taking humanitarian considerations for their age, state of health, and gender," said the document by the Cuban Bishops Conference. "It is preoccupying that currently all thoughts and actions which do not coincide with official ideology are considered lacking in legality, disqualified and combated without taking into account the truth and goodness they might possess," said the Cuban Conference of Bishops in the statement, which marked the feast day of Cuba's patron saint, the Virgin of Charity. The bishops also criticized the summary firing-squad execution of three Cubans who hijacked a Havana Bay ferry in April to try to reach Florida. (Reuters, EFE, Sun Sentinel, 9/9/03)

September 11: Cuba presented a video of human rights activist Elizardo Sánchez receiving a medal from state security agents, in the latest government attempt to paint one of the island's best-known dissidents as a spy. Sánchez, who spent 8-1/2 years in prison in the 1980s, said in a telephone interview the video was part of the government's "dirty war" against dissent, and insisted he had no memory of the event, implying he may have been drugged. "There is one day when I lost my sense of reality and time. I have no idea what happened, only a very cloudy memory," he said, acknowledging that he had no proof of having been drugged. In the video presented to the press, Sánchez appears singing the national anthem with a group of state security agents, after which a statement is read congratulating him for "distinguished service." The video clearly shows the colonel pinning an Interior Ministry medal on Sánchez's chest. Then the two embrace and toast the award. "It is all part of the same gross manipulation. People can believe the government or believe me," Sánchez told the press. "They give medals to everybody (...) In my conversations with them I never harmed anyone." (Reuters, 11/9/03)

September 11: Although a video tape presented by Cuban authorities has raised doubt among some about Elizardo Sánchez's relationship with government agents, other opposition leaders in Cuba remain supportive and raise their own questions about the credibility of the tape. "In the worst of cases, Elizardo is a government agent; but in that case he obviously didn't do the work the government wanted him to," Vladimiro Roca, another prominent dissident, told the press in a telephone interview from Havana. "Otherwise, they wouldn't have done what they did." "Instead of paying attention to Elizardo, we should be paying more attention to the Government's policy towards oppositionists." (The Miami Herald, 12/9/03)

September 11: Ricardo Alarcón, President of the Cuban parliament, highlighted the importance of deepening socialist values in Cuban society. Alarcon, during a meeting in Cienfuegos province, outlined that it is the responsibility of the peoples' representatives to struggle for a fairer and more democratic society. (AIN, 11/9/03)

September 12: Although the ration book entitles everyone to buy five eggs a month, they've become scarce in some parts of Cuba. That's the case in the province of Ciego de Avila on the north coast of central Cuba. Even though there are two large agricultural units near the town of Moron, no eggs have been available at the state stores where the ration books are required. (Cubanet, 12/9/03)

September 13: The compromising footage of prominent dissident Elizardo Sánchez came as no surprise to those familiar with the inner workings of Fidel Castro's government. "The government records all the time," said Alcibíades Hidalgo, a former Cuban ambassador to the United Nations and personal secretary to Castro's brother, armed forces chief Raúl Castro. "Hidden cameras are used to film those whom they want to trap, discredit or embarrass," Hidalgo, who left Cuba last year, said in a telephone interview from Washington. "I lived under that same anguish, knowing that you are constantly being filmed and recorded, not being able to speak freely in your own home." (The Miami Herald, 13/9/03)

September 15: Cuban human rights activist Elizardo Sánchez admitted that he received a medal from the secret police but insisted that the ceremony caught on tape and made public was part of a government campaign to smear opposition leaders and silence reform-minded thinkers within its ranks. "I fell in a trap and for that I assume full responsibility," Sánchez told the press. (The

Miami Herald, 15/9/03)

September 15: Some 1055 new health specialists have joined the Cuban health services. In recent years, Cuban health-care services have seen a shortage of staff as well as of medical instruments. The new specialists are the first graduates from the Escuela Emergente de Técnicos de la Salud de La Habana, a project launched in 2002 at the request of Fidel Castro. (World Data Service, 15/9/03)

September 15: Havana's Archbishop, Jaime Ortega, said that the dialogue between Pope John Paul II and Fidel Castro continues. "Speaking in Havana John Paul II said that, even if difficult, it is through dialogue that differences can be overcome," said Ortega in an interview published by the Italian daily La Nazione. "This was recently reiterated by Cardinal (Angelo) Sodano (Secretary of State), in reply to a question from a journalist that the Pope does not regret carrying on the dialogue", he added. (Notimex, 15/9/03)

September 16: A Cuban dissident group that calls itself the "moderate opposition" urged the island's government to promote dialogue and reconciliation and presented for public consideration a Charter of Fundamental Rights and Duties of the Cuban People. The charter, proposed by the Reflection Committee of the Moderate Opposition and the Pro-Rights Dialogue Coalition, is a human-rights initiative that, according to organizers, was submitted to a representative group of Cubans for their review. Among the other rights spelled out in the letter are the rights to free expression, association and movement as well as the freedom to hold private property and work for whomever one chooses. According to Manuel Cuesta Morúa, the text of the charter was submitted to 35,209 citizens for their review, 87.27 percent of whom endorsed the charter without amendments, and only 5.23 rejected it. (EFE, AP, 16/9/03)

September 16: Manuel Cuesta Morúa, main promoter of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Duties of the Cuban People, denied that his coalition's proposal was an alternative to the Varela Project democracy effort, which Fidel Castro's government has rejected as unconstitutional. Like the document released, the Varela Project seeks wide human and economic rights, but it began as a signature gathering drive to seek a voters initiative on laws that would guarantee those liberties. While those signing the Varela Project were required to list their names, addresses and government identity numbers, participants in the newest survey were anonymous. The groups said respondents to the survey were from all of Cuba's 14 provinces and ranged politically from anti-government activists to Communist Party members. "This project is about human rights, not politics like Varela," Cuesta Morua said. He said project organizers received no reports of government repression against survey takers. (The Globe & Mail, 18/9/03)

September 17: One of the most controversial of the set of rules approved in 1997, in Cuba, states that accredited journalists must act with "objectivity, rigorously sticking to the facts, in line with the principles" governing the profession. If they fail to do so, "the CPI (International Press Center) could issue a warning or temporarily or permanently cancel their accreditation, depending on the circumstances and the consequences of the fault committed," it adds. A reporter who "steps out of line" might find, for example, that obtaining interviews has become more difficult or even impossible. "It is not easy to work thinking that every story you write is carefully evaluated by someone in the ideological apparatus. For that reason, some correspondents choose to avoid issues that could cause trouble, and even censor themselves," said a journalist. Around 10 accredited foreign reporters have been forced to leave Cuba in the past 20 years for a variety of reasons. (IPS, 17/9/03)

September 18: Real estate property registries will reopen in Cuba more than 30 years after they were eliminated by the communist regime, Cuban media said. "This measure will be one more step to organizing real estate property - private as well as government-owned - in the country," the official Granma newspaper said. Francisco Garcia, director of the Commercial and Patrimony Property Registry told reporters that the plan began in 2002 with the registration of state-owned property, and will now continue with privately-owned real estate. The process will be "gradual,"

beginning with the zones where land registry programs are in place. The measure will allow for the registration of private homes and lots that are swapped, donated or inherited. (EFE, 18/9/03)

September 18: After being confined for more than six months without trial, dissidents Migdalia Hernández Enamorado and Rafael Benítez Chui, were sentenced to two and four years in prison respectively for the alleged crime of contempt. According to the information, State Security troops arrested both activists when they protested the regime's crackdown against internal dissidents last March. (Puente Informativo, 21/9/03)

September 19: Cuban singer-songwriter Pablo Milanés has captivated the Mexican audience once again with the exquisite sound of Mexico's National Symphony Orchestra and Cuban musicians. At the colossal Mexican National Auditorium, the icon of the Cuban Nueva Trova Movement delighted fans for almost two hours with songs composed during his 25-year artistic career. Milanés made special recognition of his exiled fellow countrymen and of homosexuals. During the presentation of his song titled "Éxodo" (Exodus), the singer-songwriter said it was dedicated "to Cubans living outside Cuba. It attempts to be a bridge between us", he said. At the presentation of "El pecado original" (Original Sin), Milanés said the song "is dedicated to the gay movement in the world", which sparked off the excitement of those present. (Prensa Latina, El Nuevo Herald, 19/9/03)

September 19: Scores of residents staged a rare protest in a Havana neighborhood when police arrived to evict a family that had built a home on a vacant lot without the government's permission. "Down with the eviction!" the neighbors shouted during the protest in western Havana. The eviction, coming amid a crackdown on illegally constructed or modified dwellings, was another reminder of the severe housing crisis in this capital of more than 2 million people. While much of Havana's older housing has grown dilapidated and uninhabitable, new-housing construction has slowed to a trickle. (The Seattle Times, 19/9/03)

September 20: The mental health of the 77-year-old Cuban dictator is the subject of serious discussion in Havana, as he lashes out not only at Washington, but at key allies in Europe and Latin America. "This place is in semi-paralysis," said one diplomat. "[Government] is his very personal vision now, and very few of his officials know where this is going". "Physically, there's lots of rumours about his health. If I were a Cuban, I would have more worries about his mental health." "The myth of a Cuban reform process is finished," said one diplomat. "Two planks of foreign policy were going well - EU links and moves in Congress to ease restrictions. "Now, those policies are out the window. They're talking about Cuba's future lying with the global South, Africa or Asia. You have to question whether Castro's government is rational." (The Daily Telegraph, 20/9/03)

September 21: Cuban dissident leader Oswaldo Payá asked Brazil's president, Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva, to not only meet with government representatives but also with members of the dissident movement. "Brazil should (...) demand the release of political prisoners in the country, who are kept in cages and who live in horrible environments", said Payá. (El Nuevo Herald, 22/9/03)

September 21: Mirta Plá, considered to be one of the four jewels of Cuban national ballet, by English critic Arnold Haskell, died at the age of 63 in Barcelona, a victim of cancer. The late ballerina was trained at the Alicia Alonso Ballet Academy, which she entered in 1950, after receiving a scholarship. In 1953, Mirta Plá started her professional life while still a student at the ballet academy. At that time, she made her debut in Nutcracker with the Alicia Alonso Ballet. Plá was part of the Cuban National Ballet from 1959 until the 90s. After leaving the stage, Plá passed on her professional and artistic experiences to new generations in Cuba and abroad. She taught at the San Carlos de Napoles Theater (Italy), Mexico's National Ballet Company, and Spain's National Ballet, among others. (Prensa Latina, 22/9/03)

September 22: The estimated 300 political prisoners in Cuba make up only a fraction of what

may be the world's most extensive per-capita prison gulag -- even larger than the US penitentiary system, which tops the list kept by the London-based International Centre for Prison Studies. Cuba today has an estimated 100,000 inmates in about 200 prisons and correctional labor camps, including 80 maximum and lesser security penitentiaries, according to the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation, an independent organization in Havana. Officials at Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International said they have no independent knowledge of the number of prisoners but do not dispute the 100,000 figure. A 1995 UN report on Cuba's human rights situation in Cuba estimated there were ``between 100,000 and 200,000 prisoners in all categories." (The Miami Herald, 22/9/03)

September 23: In the house where he was born, in Birán, in the eastern province of Holguín, Fidel Castro attended the launching of the book "Todo el tiempo de los cedros" (All the Time of the Cedars) based on his family life. Written by Cuban journalist Katiuska Blanco and published by Casa Abril, the book includes documents and pictures kept by the Historic Affairs Office of the Council of State. At the request of participating pioneer children, Castro shared his childhood memories in Birán and Santiago de Cuba and he recalled his mother, who always did everything possible, he said, to have her children study. "If there is something I regret is the fact of not having studied much more than I did during my life", he said. (AIN, Radio Rebelde, 23/9/03)

September 24: An insect-eating mammal, believed for years to have been extinct, has been found alive and well in Cuba. The male almiqui, which is native to Cuba, was found in the island's eastern mountains, according to Cuban news agency Prensa Latina. The discovery raises hopes "that it will not wind up in the catalogue of the irretrievable animals disappearing from the face of the Earth," said the agency. (AP, 24/9/03)

September 24: A new opportunity was opened for over 35,000 Cuban young people, previously unemployed or not involved in studies. The young Cubans have been incorporated in an integral education course that will prepare them to access to higher education. The three-year-old program, created at the initiative of Fidel Castro, seeks to reincorporate thousands of young people into the national social life, most of whom are too young to work and gave up studying for different reasons. (Prensa Latina, 24/9/03)

September 24: Multimedia is being used in Cuba to submit children to 15 psycho-pedagogical tests to establish a standard of behavior, logical and audiovisual memory, and levels of maturity and self-esteem. Edgar Cedeño, creator of the software, explained that the initiative allows to implement, from day one of this year's classes, the tests that help establish each child's educational needs and those of his family's. (Prensa Latina, 24/9/03)

September 24: A group of Cuban dissidents called for the release of imprisoned opposition activists on the day of the Virgin of Mercy, patron saint of prisoners. Close to a dozen members of the banned Pro-Human Rights Party, led by René Montes de Oca, attended a Mass in the patron saint's Havana church to demand the government release 75 dissidents who were arrested during the harshest opposition crackdown on the island in years. During the Mass, celebrated by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, vicar of the Havana Archdiocese, the dissidents raised their hands upwards - displaying the two-finger "V-for-Victory" sign - lit candles and sang religious hymns. At the end of the ceremony, the dissidents yelled "Freedom for Cuba's Prisoners," and "Long Live Human Rights!" (EFE, 24/9/03)

September 26: The sixth congress of Cuba's largest citizens' organization, the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), which boasts more than 8 million members, or 93 percent of the adult population, kicked off in Havana. Some 1,500 Cuban delegates and guests, along with representatives from 20 countries, are in attendance, according to the National Information Agency (AIN). Cuban citizens 14 and up register in the organization, which has an office on every street on the island, a total of 131,000 around the country. The CDRs have 8,114,200 members - 93.5 percent of all Cubans over 14 - according to the organization. During the debate, delegates presented information about the people's military preparation in order "to prevent an enemy (US)

attack". Raúl Castro, Minister of Armed Forces, concluded the debate saying that it was a priority to strengthen military training in the island, and to reinforce "internal unity" among the population. (EFE, Granma, 26/9/03)

September 27: Since the Cuban economic crisis became more intense and Spain's government restricted visas to immigrants, the number of marriages between foreigners and Cubans has skyrocketed. Only 15 Spaniards married Cubans in 1990, Spain's El País newspaper reported in 1997. That number shot to 670 by 1993 and to 1,190 by 1996, a year when 117,000 Spaniards of both sexes visited the island. Today, Spain and Italy each record between 1,000 and 2,500 such marriages per year, diplomats say. Mexico, Canada, Germany and Portugal also see a considerable number, they say. (The Dallas Morning News, El País, 28/9/03)

September 27: Canada's men's volleyball team pulled off the improbable upsetting Cuba in five sets at the NORCECA Zone Championships in Mexico. Before Saturday's win over Cuba, Canada hadn't beat the Caribbean colossus since January of 1998. (Winnipeg Sun, 28/9/03)

September 27: Cuban authorities denied a temporary exit visa to dissident Gisela Delgado. Delgado had been invited to travel to Sweden to give a conference on independent libraries in Cuba. (El Nuevo Herald, 29/9/03)

September 28: During the closure of the 6th Congress of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), Fidel Castro stated that there has never been a social process throughout history that has been supported by the masses as much as the Cuban revolution. "And the "mystery" of this Revolution is the fact that it has been supported by the masses. The achievements that have been made during these years is the work of all of you and all our mass organizations, including the Pioneros (schoolchildren)", Castro said at the Karl Marx theater. The event lasted three days and was attended by 1,500 delegates and guests. (Granma International, 29/9/03)

September 29: The Cuban independent journalist movement has published a new issue of its bimonthly magazine "De Cuba," despite the fact that many of its members are serving long prison sentences. The 62-page publication, published by the Manuel Márquez Sterling Journalists' Association, is dedicated to the dissidents sent to jail after the latest crackdown on the island. (La Vanguardia, 29/9/03)

September 29: The 11th Havana International Theater Festival was a great success with an avalanche of young people who defied the rain to crowd theaters, halls, museums, squares and parks. Avidly, 55,000 people attended the performances of 180 foreign artists from 15 countries and the best of Cuban theater, in a 10-day exchange. Two of the most applauded groups were Teatro Tierra (Earth Theatre) from Colombia, and Batida Teatro, from Denmark. (Prensa Latina, 29/9/03)

September 30: During an interview with the Spanish newspaper El Mundo, prominent dissident leader Osvaldo Payá said that last March-April government's crackdown on dissidents attempted to eliminate followers of the Varela Project, but it failed. "Security agents are threatening many of the 11,020 activists who signed the Project. They make the relatives of the oppositionists imprisoned believe they are part of the Project by visiting their houses. Once there, the agents portray a negative image trying to discredit the Project activists. (El Mundo, 30/9/03)

September 30: Spanish priest Pablo Fuentes, of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary, left for Argentina after the official from the Cuban Central Committee of the Communist party in charge of religious affairs informed him that his permit to stay on the island would not be extended. In May, authorities had banned a procession organized by Fuentes because according to them he was not trustworthy. (Cubanet, 30/9/03)

September 30: Nobel Prize nominee and last year's winner of the Sakharov prize, Osvaldo Payá

Sardiñas, explains in an interview why he is not able to travel to Europe to discuss the political situation in Cuba. "My government has its own mechanisms to stop me from going - even though I have a passport and a visa to get to the EU", he said. Payá Sardiñas was supposed to go to a session of the European Parliament at the beginning of September to present the situation of political prisoners arrested in Cuba about half a year ago, but was prevented from doing so. (EUObserver, 1/10/03)

Economy

September 1: Brazil's state oil giant Petrobras (PBR.N) (PETR4.SA) has signed a letter of intent with Cuba on technological exchange as part of a strategy aimed at returning to the island in search for crude. Petrobras President Jose Eduardo Dutra told reporters his company was studying at least one block that should be offered on a concession basis by the Cuban government. "We have already been there and drilled one well five years ago and now Cuba will be licensing other blocks. Petrobras, in the same way it acts in other Latin American countries, also has interest in working there," Dutra said. (Reuters, 1/9/03)

September 2: Matches have not been available in Havana quota stores for the last four months and the prices on the black market are going up. "There are no matches in the dollar markets, either," said an employee of a grocery store in the Havana municipality of 10 de Octubre. Prices on the black market have gone up from about one peso to 1.50 pesos in the last few days. (Cubamet, 2/9/03)

September 3: Air Canada is beefing up its service to Cuba as the island nation continues to attract Canadian tourists. Air Canada will introduce scheduled flights for the winter on most of the 15 routes the carrier operates to Cuba from seven Canadian cities. Canada will also begin year round, non-stop service between Toronto and Havana, three times weekly. For the new winter season, the carrier will also introduce non-stop flights between Montreal-Cayo Largo, Moncton-Holguin and Halifax-Varadero. (Canadian Press, 3/9/03)

September 4: Venezuelan energy experts are helping Cuba increase its oil output and carry out new exploration as part of growing bilateral cooperation, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez said. Perez, who held talks in Caracas with his Venezuelan counterpart Roy Chaderton, said "dozens" of oil technicians from the OPEC nation had traveled to Cuba to give on-the-spot advice and to train Cuban personnel. "Venezuelan technicians are teaching us; they are helping us improve our own production, and are also training our people," Perez told reporters. He added that this technical support also covered Cuba's oil exploration efforts but offered no details. (Reuters, 4/9/03)

September 5: Canada's Sherritt International Corp. sold its 40 percent indirect stake in a Cuban telephone operation for \$43 million to a Cuban government agency. A Sherritt representative said in a statement it had sold its stake in Teléfonos Celulares de Cuba, S.A. (Cubacel) to Telefónica Antillana S.A. and would receive 80 percent of the selling price. The remaining 20 percent would go to the private holder of the minority interest in Cubacel. A payment of \$10 million has already been made with the balance of the \$43 million to be paid quarterly until August 2007. Sherritt's sale proceeds are about equal to its \$45.1 million net book value of the Cubacel investment. (Reuters, 5/9/03)

September 6: Cuba's Arimao Citrus Fruit Enterprise has exported 500 tons of 100 percent natural orange juice to Europe. Omar González, the director of the enterprise located in Cienfuegos province, said that during the most recent harvest, his entity collected and processed 1000 tons of oranges. The Cuban executive said the export initiative followed the signing of a contract with Swiss Firm Coop, which manages 1000 supermarkets throughout Europe. (Radio Habana Cuba, 6/9/03)

September 8: A Chilean trade mission will visit Cuba at the end of September 2003 to discuss business opportunities and to boost trade relations, the head of the mission, Nelson Gutierrez, said. Over 60 city mayors, businessmen and representatives from public and private industry associations expressed interest in taking part in the trade mission. Trade relations between Chile and Cuba started with the export of frozen mackerel from Chile to the island. At present, primary Chilean exports to Cuba include meat, milk products, wine, textiles, cellulose, paper and timber. The value of Chilean exports to Cuba has increased 40 times since 1990. Trade between the two countries in 2002 totalled \$42.9 mln (38.69 mln euro), of which \$41.8 mln (37.7 mln euro) were of Chilean exports to Cuba. (Spanish News Digest, 9/9/03)

September 8: An exhibition of Cuban products and services will be held in the Aztec territory of Merida, where 16 sectors of the island's economy will be represented. This initiative, in which 60 enterprises and 88 businessmen will take part, will be held in an effort to diversify Cuba's economic and trade relations with Mexico at the state level. (AIN, 9/9/03)

September 13: With a growing demand, the Cuban tobacco industry will significantly increase the amount of land dedicated to the crop this year. The initiative will particularly take place in central Sancti Spiritus and Villa Clara provinces, where some 1000 new tobacco-curing houses are being built to meet the expected production increase, said Eduardo Rodríguez, an executive with the Tabacuba Group. "Planting activities will soon get underway, since high-quality seeds and all other necessary resources are guaranteed for the season," said Rodríguez. (Radio Habana Cuba, 13/9/03)

September 13: Flights between South Africa and Cuba and the interest of important South African hotel chains to invest in Cuba were some of the subjects dealt with by South African Vice President Jacob Zuma during a recent visit to Cuba. During his tour of the Varadero Beach Resort, the high-ranking South-African government official said that bilateral cooperation between his country and Cuba in the field of tourism will increase. (Radio Habana Cuba, 13/9/03)

September 13: The Cuban tobacco industry will significantly increase the amount of land dedicated to the crop this year. The initiative will particularly take place in central Sancti Spiritus and Villa Clara provinces, where some 1000 new tobacco-curing houses are being built to meet the expected production increase, said Eduardo Rodríguez, an executive with the Tabacuba Group. (Radio Habana Cuba, 13/9/03)

September 14: Cuba should efficiently fulfill its sugar industry strategy, the Cuban Vice President, Carlos Lage, said at a meeting with sector representatives in Havana. The sugar cane harvesting and processing should be carried out at low costs as world market prices of sugar are currently low, Lage added. Cuba should ensure sufficient sugar cane harvest to cover the needs of the domestic and external markets, Lage said. (Encuentro en la Red, 15/9/03)

September 15: Brazil's state owned oil company Petr leo Brasileiro SA (Petrobras) plans to resume oil exploration activities in Cuba, said Jos  Eduardo Dutra, the company's president. Dutra announced that Petrobras and the Cuban state oil company Cubapetroleo SA had signed a letter of intent for the exchange of technological information. Analysts said that this is the first step towards Petrobras' accepting Cuba's invitation to explore for oil in deep water off Cuba in the Gulf of Mexico (Oil & Gas, 15/9/03).

September 15: Cuban exporters of fresh and processed foods and beverages, alcoholic beverages (rum), natural/herbal products and textiles will be visiting Canada at the end of October. Meetings will be held in Montreal and Toronto sponsored by Trade Facilitation Office Canada and The Center for Export Promotion of Cuba (CEPEC). (TFOC, 15/9/03)

September 15: Chilean Sky Airlines, owned by German businessman Jurgen Paulmann and Chilean businessman Fernando Uauy, plans to start flights between Chile and Cuba by the end of 2003, Paulmann said. The company has not decided yet whether the flights will be charter or

regular ones. (Spanish News Digest, 15/9/03)

September 15: The governments of Cuba and Croatia began talks on enhancing economic and trade cooperation. The sectors of information, communications, petroleum, education and transportation will be the focus of the first meeting of a mixed commission for economic and trade cooperation between the two sides. Vice Minister of Economy Olgica Spevec heads the Croatian delegation, and Vice Minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation Ricardo Guerrero leads the Cuban side during the three-day talk. (Xinhua, 15/9/03)

September 17: Ukraine and Cuba have signed a protocol on reciprocal access to their goods and services markets. The document was signed during the World Trade Organization's ministerial conference held in Cancun, Mexico, the press service of the Ukrainian Economy and European Integration Ministry said. (Interfax, 17/9/03)

September 18: Brazil plans to create a \$400 million credit line to finance exports to Cuba, a fund that will be announced by President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva when he visits the island, Valor Economico said. The loans will be provided by state-owned development bank Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Economico e Social, the newspaper reported. Brazilian exports to Cuba dropped to \$95 million last year, from a peak of \$120 million. The main export categories are chickens, footwear and agricultural machinery. Drugs and vaccines top the list of imports. (Bloomberg, 18/9/03)

September 19: Cuba pays more than one billion dollars a year for its Venezuelan oil based on an agreement signed in October 2000, said Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Perez Roque. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez does not give free oil to Cuba, we buy it from Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), the Cuban diplomat replied to a South American cybernaut on an Internet forum on the US blockade of Cuba. (Prensa Latina, 19/9/03)

September 19: Major automobile, maritime and railroad transportation companies from Europe and Asia are exhibiting their most recent creations in Cuba as part of the International Transportation Fair -- FIT 2003 -- which is underway in Havana. Speaking with reporters in the Cuban capital, Angel Garate -- Deputy Transportation Minister and organizer of the event -- said that Germany, Brazil, Spain, Russia, Canada, Mexico and Belgium stand out among the 16 countries participating in the event. (Radio Habana Cuba, 19/9/03)

September 20: A report by the TABACUBA group in charge of Cuba's tobacco production, notes that more tobacco has been planted this year than in recent years, particularly in the central provinces of Sancti Spiritus and Villa Clara. The report also notes that the central provinces are preparing one thousand new tobacco houses and other spaces for leaf storage. Cuban tobacco authorities hope to harvest 61,289 pounds of tobacco -- to break the record 55,997 pounds established in the 1970s. The main markets for Cuban tobacco are Spain, France, Germany, England, North Africa and Arab nations in the Middle East. (Radio Habana Cuba, 20/9/03)

September 20: Havana's Caribbean Dry Dock Company has finished a major construction project in Curacao. The Cuban entity built a complex dry dock gate, whose floating test has proven successful. (Radio Habana Cuba, 20/9/03)

September 20: Products in high demand, such as honey and marble, have joined the over 100-product export list of the Cuban industrial sector in eastern Granma province. Both local products are currently in high demand on the European and Canadian markets. Granma province is the country's largest producer of honey; it also possesses the island's largest marble reserves. Other export lines include sacks to transport coffee, which are usually exported to the Brazilian and Colombian markets. (Radio Habana Cuba, 20/9/03)

September 22: A contract signed between Volvo and Veracuba, the Cuban company to import buses to be used in tourism, has notably increased economic results at the International

Transport Fair, currently under way in Havana. Volvo will be among the group of business people accompanying Brazilian President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva on his next visit to Cuba. Luiz Carlos Caparelli, sales manager of Volvo do Brasil, regarding negotiating prospects, affirmed that many of these are based on finance from Brazil's National Economic and Social Development Bank. He also stressed how Lula's visit will speed up any future negotiations between Brazilian and Cuban companies. (Granma International, 22/9/03)

September 24: Nigeria and Cuba have agreed to enhance cooperation in the field of agriculture, said a communique released in Abuja. The communique said that the two sides also agreed to link prospective investors and entrepreneurs in Nigeria with Cuban technical experts in the sugar industry. "It has been agreed that a team of Cuban technical experts would arrive in Nigeria for further discussions in this area," said the document. During the third session of the Nigeria-Cuba Joint Commission, the Cuban delegation said the country had very special species of sugarcane with high yield as well as expertise in the sector which could be very beneficial to the country. (Xinhua, 25/9/03)

September 25: Cuban Deputy Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, Ricardo Guerrero Blanco, and Austrian Deputy Minister for Economic and Labor Affairs, Josef Mayer signed a bilateral agreement with the aim of expanding economic and commercial ties. The protocol calls for increasing commercial exchange, and promotes business in areas including tourism, biotechnology and multimedia, fields offering broad development potential for both countries. (Prensa Latina, 25/9/03)

September 25: A British delegation from the Great Britain-Cuba Initiative, headed by lawmaker Lord Colin Moynihan, is in Havana exploring new areas to establish business with Cuba. The group of British lawmakers is putting the accent on tourism, agriculture, biotechnology, energy, and computing, according to statements made by Lord Moynihan to the local TV. (Efecom, 25/9/03)

September 27: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Fidel Castro pledged to emphasize business over politics in their relations and urged executives in both nations to make trade and investment deals. Lula was accompanied by more than 60 Brazilian executives, on a two-day visit to Cuba to discuss doing business with the Communist-run nation. The two leaders presided over a signing ceremony for commercial agreements worth \$200 million, an "exceptional step for Cuba and Brazil," Lula said. Among the most significant was an accord between Cuba's state-run tourism firm, GranCaribe, and private Brazilian companies to build four beach resorts worth about \$114 million. Other projects include using Cuban biotechnology to develop generic drugs in northern Brazilian laboratories and a \$20 million deal to produce fuel grade alcohol in Cuba's outdated sugar mills, said Almir Lima Nascimento, adviser to the Brazilian foreign ministry's department of commercial promotion. Also signed was an agreement to renegotiate Havana's \$40 million debt with Brazil, to be paid back in part with revenue from the island's exports to the Latin American giant. Mario Vilalva, business development director at the Brazilian Foreign Ministry, said that some of the investment agreements are at an advanced phase, while others require further study. One of the works in progress is a \$114 million investment in the construction of four resort hotels with a combined total of 2,500 rooms. In regard to oil, Vilalva said the possibility of Brazil's oil giant Petrobras drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, where Canada's Sheritt and Spain's Repsol have been operating, was not addressed. (AP, Sun Sentinel, Reuters, EFE, 27/9/03)

September 28: Foreign tourist arrivals in Cuba rose 14.8 percent during the first eight months of 2003, compared to the same period last year, Deputy Tourism Minister Antonio Romillo said. Tourism revenues and hotel occupancy rates rose 19 percent and 4 percent, respectively, during the period. Some 1.68 million visitors, hailing mainly from Canada, Spain, Britain, France, Italy and Mexico, visited Cuba last year, generating revenues of some \$2 billion, according to official data. (EFE, 28/9/03)

Exile Community

September 4: The Cuban American National Foundation applauded President George W. Bush's veto threat to potential amendments to the Transportation/Treasury bill. "We are very pleased with the President's explicit veto threat on these amendments. It sends a very strong message to the Congress and even more importantly, to the people of Cuba, that the United States will not support the Castro regime by providing it with an unearned windfall of financial support," said Jorge Mas Santos, chairman of the Cuban American National Foundation. (US Newswire, 4/9/03)

September 5: Almost 50 people -- most of them immigrants from Cuba -- who live in a 30-unit apartment complex in Little Havana, Miami, lost their possessions in a stubborn blaze that took firefighters more than three hours to put out. No lives were lost, but some residents lost items, they said, that might as well certify their existence: Immigration papers. We've become nobody -- we don't have identification, especially with the laws of immigration," said Aura Picado, 36, one of 48 people who were displaced to a Coral Gables hotel. Some people, awakened from sleep by a fire, did not remember or did not have time to grab important papers. (The Miami Herald, 6/9/03)

September 7: Lorna Feijó and Nelson Madrigal, recent defections from Alicia Alonso's Ballet Nacional de Cuba, gave a breathtaking performance of the pas de deux from Don Quixote at the International Ballet Festival at the Jackie Gleason Theater. In an evening featuring many dancers from around the globe, these two Cuban exiles, who are now stars of the Boston Ballet, came last and stole the show. (The Miami Herald, 8/9/03)

September 11: A videotape about Cuban dissident leader Elizardo Sánchez's relationship with government agents, did little to deter support of Sánchez in Miami. "I cannot give any credibility to anything coming from the regime, period," said Sebastin Arcos Cazab, who served in a Cuban prison with Sánchez in the 1980s. "The government either exalts people or assassinates people," said Angel De Fana, a leader of the Miami group Plantados, which supports dissidents in Cuba. "I can't figure out why they'd release a little video or book to discredit him. It makes no sense." (The Miami Herald, 12/9/03)

September 11: An organization that favors relations between the US and Cuba said that 55 000 signatures were gathered in the US to obtain the release of five Cubans who are in several American jails. Alianza Martiana, a Miami group associated with Fidel Castro's government, says in a statement that the five Cubans were not spies, but were "gathering information on terrorist activities by Cuban American extreme rightist organizations". (AFP, 11/9/03)

September 12: Cuban Americans are calling for a boycott of the Tropicana Casino and Resort after the gaming hall erected two billboards with the likeness of Fidel Castro. The Tropicana is using Castro's image to tout The Quarter, the casino's \$245 million entertainment, dining, retail and spa development project. The ads, along two major highways leading into the city, show Castro with his trademark cigar and carry the slogan "The next revolution." (The Miami Herald, 12/9/03)

September 15: A group of Cuban exiles in Brazil and Brazilian citizens made public a letter addressed to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, asking him to meet with members of the internal dissident movement during his scheduled visit to Cuba. (Encuentro en la Red, 17/9/03)

September 18: The Cuban-American Bar Association has filed a petition with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on behalf of jailed Cuban dissidents and asked the international body to sanction Cuba for violating the human rights of those who oppose its government. The petition calls for dozens of dissidents who were jailed in March to be released and asks that Cuba treat them humanely. It also urges the commission to monitor Cuba to ensure it does not violate the dissidents' human rights, among other measures. (Sun Sentinel, 18/9/03)

September 19: Juan Pérez Franco, a Cuban exile leader and paratrooper during the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, died of cancer. He was 75. The longtime president of Brigade 2506, the Bay of Pigs Veterans Association, Pérez Franco played a key role in many South Florida demonstrations against Fidel Castro. Pérez Franco studied law in Cuba and came to the United States in 1959. He was captured during the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, but returned two years later when the United States exchanged \$53 million in food and medicine for the imprisoned exiles. He later served in the US Army. (AP, 23/9/03)

September 24: Retired banker Luis J. Botifoll, hailed as the dean of the Cuban exile community for his decades of civic leadership and willingness to help thousands of Cuban refugees obtain loans to launch new businesses, died of heart failure at his home. He was 95 and still active in the Cuban American National Foundation, which he helped found in 1981. Botifoll, who turned Republic National Bank into the nation's largest Hispanic-owned bank while helping fellow Cubans start over in Miami, represented the foundation at a gathering with Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar, who was visiting Miami. (The Miami Herald, 25/9/03)

September 26: Organized by the Cuba Democracy "YA" Platform, Cuban exiles demonstrated in front of the Cuban embassy in Madrid against violations of human rights in the island. International coordinator of the Platform, Rigoberto Carceller, said that this first demonstration gathered over thirty persons. (AFP, 27/9/03)

September 26: A collaboration agreement between Cuba and Venezuela has made possible that 60 drug addicts from the South American country are under treatment on the island. The Villa Colibrí Therapeutic Community located in Baconao, southeast of the city of Santiago de Cuba, specializes in rehabilitation and has provided assistance to Venezuelans. (Prensa Latina, 26/6/03)

September 27: Beginning early next year, Cubans living abroad will no longer need permission from Havana officials to visit their homeland, Cuba's foreign minister reportedly said at a meeting in New York. Roque told the audience that a passport was all that would be required for Cubans to visit, several people at the meeting said. But it was unclear if that meant that Cubans with US citizenship would have to obtain a Cuban passport. (The Miami Herald, 30/9/03)

September 27: Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, who was in New York for the UN General Assembly, told a crowd of about 250 Cuban Americans that a conference between exiles and Cuban officials would take place in May, according to several people who attended the meeting. The Nation and Emigration conference was called off in April in the midst of an island-wide crackdown that landed 75 dissidents in jail. (The Miami Herald, 30/9/03)

September 28: With a solidarity message to all Cuban dissidents in jail, the Cuban Canadian Foundation celebrated its Fifth Anniversary in the Sandy Hill Community Center, in Ottawa. The Foundation's president, Ismael Sombra, said in his speech that "while speaking about the island, it is impossible to forget the large number of oppositionists, human rights activists and journalists suffering repression, for expressing their democratic ideas and for loving freedom". (Encuentro en la Red, 29/9/03)

September 29: Numerous representatives of the Cuban exile community in Paris expressed their disappointment with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva for not addressing human rights during his visit to the island. "I had hoped (Lula) would say something in favor of Cuban prisoners, but he didn't say anything. But I'm glad that the European Union has toughened its stance," Cristina Rivero, daughter of dissident poet and journalist Raul Rivero, told the press. (EFE, 29/9/03)

September 30: Many Cuban Americans viewed the relaxing of the travel regulations as a goodwill gesture from Cuba at a time when Washington and Havana have traded barbs, accusing each other's diplomats of everything from spying to destabilizing Castro's government. "It's a first

step to normalizing relations with the Cuban-American community," said Alfredo Duran, secretary of the Cuban Committee for Democracy and a member of the CIA-trained Bay of Pigs Brigade 2506. The Cuban government is trying "to show they are becoming more soft, and one of the ways they can show that not only to the international community but also the Cuban-American community is by dropping the visa requirement," Duran said. Opposition leader Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo said he hoped the next step will be allowing Cubans to leave the island freely without government permission. Cuba is one of the few countries requiring an exit permit for its citizens. (Sun Sentinel, 30/9/03)

September 30: Cubans who immigrated to the United States after 1970 will still need a Cuban passport to enter the island, Cuba's foreign ministry said. There is no change in regulations for non-Cubans traveling to Cuba. In addition to entry permits, which cost \$100, most Cuban-Americans must buy a passport from the Cuban Interests Section for \$230, pay travel agency fees ranging from \$15 to \$35, and buy a plane ticket, which costs \$299 to \$399, depending on the season, said Armando Garcia, owner of Marazul, one of the largest travel agencies booking trips to the island. (Sun Sentinel, 30/9/03)

Foreign Affairs

September 1: Fidel Castro opened in Havana a high-level segment of a UN conference on drought and desertification that was attended by around a dozen heads of state. Dressed in a dark business suit and accompanied by the convention's executive secretary, Hama Arba Diallo, Castro greeted the presidents and chiefs of the delegations present at the event. Alienated from European nations after a crackdown on the opposition and the execution of three ferry-boat hijackers, Fidel Castro closed ranks with friendly African, Caribbean and South American heads of state at the UN conference. Notably absent from the sixth UN Convention to Combat Desertification were high-ranking representatives of the European Union. The 13 heads of state and government from Africa and the Caribbean attending the UN conference included the presidents of Zimbabwe, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Mali and Namibia and the prime ministers of Lesotho, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Grenada, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez was the only Latin American head of state attending the conference. (EFE, AP, 1/9/023)

September 2: The Declaration of Havana against desertification and drought was approved by the presidents and heads of state that are taking part in the UN summit meeting in the Cuban capital. The Declaration, which was read by Hama Arba Diallo, Executive Secretary of the Convention, includes the commitment to work together to fulfill the agreements of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The Declaration of Havana also recognizes the urgent necessity of increasing international cooperation between the rich North and the poor South. The text of the Declaration refers to the lifestyles and consumption models of capitalism, pointing out that they cause serious problems in a world filled with increasing levels of poverty, illiteracy and disease. The Declaration of Havana calls for the improvement of conditions in regions affected by drought and poverty -- with a commitment to work for a better and more equitable world. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/9/03)

September 3: The Third Meeting of the Working Party for bilateral cooperation between Cuba and Brazil has concluded with agreements on tourism, production of sugarcane by-products and support of local economies. The bilateral cooperation accords signed by Havana and Brasilia include agricultural projects as well as the use of a Cuban vaccine against tick infestation in cattle. Mutual links will target literacy and post-literacy programs for Brazilians, as well as the decentralized collaboration among states and cities from both nations on the environment, health and finances. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/9/03)

September 3: The European Union said it had seen no movement by Cuba to meet EU worries over human rights violations. The EU, Cuba's main trade partner, source of tourists and foreign

investment, was angered by the island's execution of three men who hijacked a boat to try to make it to the United States and the jailing of 75 dissidents for up to 28 years. "We have to say that the Cuban government has not taken a single positive step to meet the goals that Europe has set and in fact the situation of human rights has worsened yet further," said Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini. Frattini, whose country holds the rotating EU presidency, complained to the European Parliament that Cuba had to reinstate a moratorium on the death penalty and called on the government of Fidel Castro to release political prisoners. (Reuters, 3/9/03)

September 3: Bethuel Pakalitha Mosilini, first minister of the Lesotho kingdom is on an official visit to Cuba, invited by Fidel Castro. Granma Daily News reports the distinguished visitor and the delegation he presides is to take ahead a wide agenda that foresees official talks with the highest Cuban authorities and visits to historical, economic and scientific places. (AIN, 3/9/03)

September 4: The European Parliament condemned the "persistent and flagrant" violation of human rights in Cuba and called for the release of jailed opposition activists. EU legislators approved a 14-point resolution after a debate on relations between the European Union and Cuba, which have been severely strained following the latest wave of repression and arrests by Fidel Castro's regime. The parliament expressed regret for "the lack of economic and social reforms in Cuba." The resolution also called for "the immediate release" of all jailed Cuban opponents and independent journalists, and reminded authorities in the island nation that "no law can restrict the right to freedom of expression." The document established that, since the EU last evaluated its position toward Cuba in 2002, "not only have no positive steps been taken by the Cuban government, but the human rights situation has drastically deteriorated." The European Parliament expressed regret at Cuba's decision to turn down the EU's offer for humanitarian aid, and reiterated that "the European Union's commitment and willingness to lend assistance to the Cuban people remain unchanged." Parliament asked for last year's Sakharov Prize winner Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas and Cuban opposition leader to be invited as soon as possible for an official visit to the EU. (AP, European Parliament, The Miami Herald, 4/9/03)

September 4: Fidel Castro held conversations with President from Mali Amadou Toumani Touré. Both leaders and their corresponding delegations met at the Revolution Palace. (Prensa Latina, 4/9/03)

September 4: The Frankfurt Book Fair will have to do without Cuba this October. The communist country cancelled its participation after Germany withdrew from the 2004 Book Fair in Havana. In a letter, the Cuban Book Institute told the Frankfurt Book Fair management that Cuba would not take part in the industry's biggest trade event, book fair spokesman Holger Ehling said. (Deutsche Welle Culture & Lifestyle, 4/9/03)

September 5: Reporters Without Borders (RSF) expressed great concern about a hunger strike begun by three independent Cuban journalists - Manuel Vázquez Portal, Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta and Normando Hernández González - in Boniatico prison, in the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba, to protest against their conditions of detention. Since they started the protest, they have been transferred to another prison in an unknown location. (BBC, 5/9/03)

September 5: A delegation of German lawmakers met in Havana with relatives of jailed Cuban dissidents and members of opposition groups, spokespersons for the internal opposition reported. A statement signed by the president of a leading dissident group, Rene Gomez Manzano, who attended the meeting, said that discussion "centered on the current political and economic situation in Cuba and bilateral relations with Germany." The communique also said that the talks "placed special emphasis on the very difficult situation faced by political prisoners in Cuban jails." The German delegation met with Miriam Leyva and Gisela Delgado, the wives of Oscar Espinosa and Héctor Palacios, respectively, two of the 75 dissidents sentenced in March and April to jail terms averaging 20 years. Also participating were the leader of the Christian Liberation Movement, Oswaldo Payá; a spokesman for Todos Unidos, Vladimiro Roca; Elizardo Sanchez, the president of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation; Felix

Bonne of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society and Roberto Larramendi and Jose Avalos of the College of Independent Scholars. (EFE, 5/9/03)

September 5: Philippe Richert, Senator from the South Rhine region in eastern France, asked the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Dominique de Villepin, "to do whatever is possible" to obtain from Cuban authorities the liberation of an independent journalist who is in jail on hunger strike. (AFP, 7/9/03)

September 5: Eight Cubans who landed illegally in Jamaica have been refused political asylum and are to be sent back to their country, the security ministry said. "(...) They do not meet the criteria of the (United Nations) refugee convention. They are economic migrants. They are not political refugees," said Donovan Nelson, a spokesman for the security ministry. The Cubans landed at Whitehouse in Montego Bay after being at sea for two days. They came with documents, including their passports, but were placed in police custody. (Observer Reporter, 6/9/03)

September 6: A group of 36 Cuban doctors and nurses have arrived in Trinidad and Tobago and will treat patients at hospitals across the twin islands. Upon their arrival in Port of Spain, the Cuban medical personnel were assigned to hospitals in Arima, Chagunas, Sangre Grande, Princes Town and Couva. According to Trinidad and Tobago's Health Ministry Human Resources Director, Ashford Sankar, all the Cuban doctors have been accredited in the country and are ready to go to work. With a population of 3.3 million inhabitants, Trinidad and Tobago will have a contingent of Cuban nurses working in a number of area hospitals, to help alleviate the serious shortage of medical personnel. (Radio Habana Cuba, 6/9/03)

September 6: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque says that Washington sees Havana and Caracas as "negative examples" for Latin America. During an interview with the state-owned Venezolana de Television, the Cuban official said that both countries have their own national policies, which apparently represent a threat for those seeking to impose the interests of multinationals in the area. Felipe Pérez Roque said that the Cuban Revolution is solidly and overwhelmingly supported by its people, "whose proven commitment have overcome four decades of aggression, invasions and sabotage." Cuba's foreign minister spoke with the television audience about the work of Cuban doctors and medical personnel in Venezuela, calling their efforts "very humane" and a living example of Che's "New Man" theories. Pérez Roque emphasized that medical care should not be a profit-making business and that good health cannot be bought or sold. (Radio Habana Cuba, 6/9/03)

September 8: Fidel Castro lumped Western Europe with his archenemy the United States vowing that "both of them together will not be able to defeat the Cuban revolution." In a speech launching the new school year, the aging autocrat declared: "The name of Cuba will go down in history because of what it has done and is doing for humanity in the fields of education, culture and health." He said these contributions continue even though the island is suffering from an embargo imposed "by the world's only superpower and is essentially being blockaded by Europe." "Both powers together can't defeat the Cuban revolution," Castro insisted. "Among other reasons, because together they don't have and never will have the human capital and moral values required to accomplish what socialist Cuba has," the world's longest-ruling leader insisted. (EFE, 8/9/03)

September 9: A Granma Daily report unveils Cuban singer, Silvio Rodríguez, asked Chilean support for the freedom of five Cuban prisoners confined in the United States, and promoted the gathering of signatures in that country. The Cuban artist attended a seminar at Santiago de Chile on Salvador Allende's thought and its presence within Chilean society, organized by the "Alejandro Lipschutz" Science Institute and the "America Libre" magazine of that South American country. (AIN, 9/9/03)

September 9: The weekly anti-Cuban demonstrations, which began last April outside the Cuban

Embassy in Paris, resumed with barely 20 people after having being suspended for summer vacation. (AFP, 9/9/03)

September 9: The South African Property Owners' Association (SAPOA) has added its voice to the growing discontent over the housing department decision to bring 38 Cuban architects and engineers to SA to train local people to build their own homes in townships and rural areas. Brian Kirchmann, CEO of Sapoa and manager at the Property Council of SA, has questioned why professionals were being brought to SA when the country already had enough professionals prepared to do the work. (Business Day, 9/9/03)

September 11: The Cuban government took another step in deepening the institutional crisis with Europe by closing the Spanish cultural center in Havana. Spain is the first European country to be sanctioned by Fidel Castro's regime, in what is thought to be a rebuke for criticism of the human rights situation on the island. (El País, 11/9/03)

September 11: At the 30th Anniversary of Augusto Pinochet's coup d'etat in Chile, flower wreaths from Fidel Castro were laid at a monument in Havana honoring former Chilean President Salvador Allende. (AIN, 11/9/03)

September 12: Cuba voiced its opposition to the liberalization of world trade at the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Cancun, accusing it of thwarting poor countries' development. During the WTO plenary session, Cuban Interior Minister Ricardo Cabrisas said that only when unfair exchange disappeared and the poor countries obtained fair prices for their products would international trade serve to speed up development. In his opinion, the results of trade liberalization have turned out to be far from what has expected. The commercial exchange was growing more and more unfair. (The People's Daily, 13/9/03)

September 13: The 18th Pan American Congress on Naval Engineering will take place at Havana's International Convention Center. Some 300 experts from 15 countries will meet in the Cuban capital to exchange experiences on the development and competitiveness of the naval sector in the Western Hemisphere. The event will run parallel to the International Transportation Fair. (Radio Habana Cuba, 13/9/03)

September 15: As part of a program funded by the Canadian International Development Agency, in partnership with Victoria-based Lifecycles and the Cuban Association of Agriculture and Forestry Technicians, David Goodman and Linden Huizinga will be heading to Cuba to help promote and teach urban agriculture in Havana. In Cuba, Goodman will focus on nutrition and educating children, while Huizinga will show Cubans how to develop international partnerships with individuals and ecotourism groups. "It's just an amazing opportunity to be able to learn from them and how they look at food security and how they look at urban farming and how it fits into their culture and then bring that back here," Huizinga said. (The Ottawa Citizen, 15/9/03)

September 16: Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque said that Cuba considers "there should be a rectification" of Mexico's position on the human rights situation on the island before returning to the "high level that always characterized" bilateral relations. (AP, 17/9/03)

September 16: Argentina's new ambassador to Cuba, Raúl Taleb, affirmed before his country's Senate Agreements Committee that he believes in "democracy as a life style", and with that in mind he'll conduct his mission in Havana. The diplomat stated he would recommend a vote against Cuba at the UN Human Rights Commission if he observed extreme and undue violations on the island. (ECO, 16/9/03)

September 16: Mariano Rajoy, the Secretary General of the ruling Partido Popular (PP, right) and the candidate to succeed José María Aznar as Spain's president, said that Cuba is governed by "something as bizarre and ridiculous as a communist regime". (AFP, 17/9/03)

September 16: A handful of German publishers plan to ignore a foreign ministry decision to boycott an international book fair in Cuba over human rights abuses, Berlin daily Junge Welt reported. A spokesman for the Berlin-based "Havana Book Fair 2004 Office," Reinhard Thiele, told the newspaper that the group was acting to "motivate publishers, authors and artists to participate" and that at least five publishing houses had already signed on. Thiele sharply criticized Germany's boycott. (AFP, 16/9/03)

September 17: Ecuador is looking to strengthen its sports program with the help of Cuba, the South American country's physical education and sports secretary said. The Ecuadorian secretary, Col. Luis Tapia, and Cuban Sports Minister Humberto Rodriguez signed a broad, four-year cooperation agreement in the Cuban capital. (EFE, 17/9/03)

September 17: Argentine folksinger Mercedes Sosa, an icon of Latin American music and longtime leftist, has broken with Fidel Castro over the firing-squad executions of three youths who tried to hijack a boat to Florida this spring. "My love stops here," said Sosa. "I believe one must assume noble positions in the face of things that are not right." (El Nuevo Herald, 18/9/03)

September 17: Aichatou Mindaoudou, Niger Foreign Affairs Minister, met with his Cuban counterpart during a visit to the island. Mindaoudou will also meet with officials from the Cuban ministries of Public Health and Foreign Trade. (Prensa Latina, 17/9/03)

September 17: Brazil will ask for "prudence" in the speech that Fidel Castro will give during his Brazilian counterpart Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's visit to Cuba, revealed the newspaper Folha de Sao Paulo. The article indicated that the Brazilian embassy in Havana is handling a request so that Castro avoids giving a long "anti-US" speech during his meeting with Lula. Castro summoned a million people to welcome Lula, prompting a certain concern within the Brazilian diplomatic ranks. (Notimex, 17/9/03)

September 17: Three former political prisoners who became presidents are demanding a unified Western approach to Cuba. The heroes of Eastern Europe's anti-communist movement denounced Fidel Castro's "Stalinist" regime in Cuba and demanded action from the West to encourage its peaceful overthrow. Lech Walesa, the former Polish president, Vaclav Havel, the former Czechoslovak president, and Arpad Goncz, the former Hungarian president, made their call in a letter to The Daily Telegraph and other leading newspapers abroad. (The Daily Telegraph, 18/9/03)

September 18: The wife of Cuban writer and poet Raúl Rivero, sentenced to 20 years in prison called on Brazilian President, Luis Ignacio 'Lula' da Silva, to intercede with Castro on behalf of her husband and other political prisoners. Blanca Reyes made the appeal in an interview published by Brazil's daily 'O Globo de Rio de Janeiro'. (Europa Press, 18/9/03)

September 18: Brazil's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Celso Amorim, said that the upcoming trip of President Luis Ignacio 'Lula' da Silva to Cuba is motivated by a policy of "engagement", which is the best way to work with the island, "including on human rights issues". (Europa Press, 19/9/03)

September 18: Every two years a theater festival takes place in Havana featuring many of the nation's best groups, plus some from abroad. Julián González, president of the National Theater Council and the International Theater Festival organizing committee, said that performers from Argentina, Austria, Benin, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Ecuador, Guadeloupe, Italy, Korea, Mexico, Panama, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and the United States are expected to attend. (Granma International, 19/9/03)

September 18: A regional Spanish political party has awarded a medal to leading Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá for his fight for freedom and democracy in his communist-ruled homeland, the party announced. According to the Democratic Union of Catalonia, Payá is being honored for his "struggle for individual and collective liberty, his respect for human rights and his

independent political project for Cuba based on national reconciliation." The dissident is banned from leaving Cuba by Cuban authorities. (The Miami Herald, 19/9/03)

September 18: Fernando Perez's film, Suite Habana, opened the 51st San Sebastian Film Festival. "That's how they are. They live like that," said the director, talking about the 10 Cubans featured in the documentary-style film about a day in the life of the island's capital. All were strangers to him, apart from the rail way worker who plays the saxophone at night and is a neighbor of Perez. Two of the main characters are a 10-year-old boy with Down's Syndrome and his father. Another is a disillusioned and solitary old lady, who sells peanuts for a living. Suite Habana shows all their stories, without dialogue or narration, with the action unfolding through the images, streets sounds and music of the city. (El País, 19/9/03)

September 18: In Luanda, Angola and Cuba signed cooperation agreements on agriculture, trade, science and technology, Cuban Minister of High Education told the press. (AFP, 18/9/03)

September 18: Spanish president, José María Aznar, highlighted steps made by Lybia to normalize its presence in the international community. Contrasting Gadafi's attitude with that of Fidel Castro, Aznar criticized Castro's resistance to change. (ABC, 19/9/03)

September 18: A group calling itself the Dominican Patriotic Youth staged a march in Santo Domingo to condemn "the atrocious repression unleashed by Fidel Castro in Cuba against opponents of the communist regime." According to a press release by the group, the demonstration was organized to show solidarity with Castro's adversaries six months after Havana "resumed its persecution of those who reject the communist ideology." (EFE, 18/9/03)

September 18: The First Lady of the Ukraine, Liudmila Mikolaivna Kuchma, arrived in Havana. She will complete a full program, including meetings with Government officials and different social sectors, as well as a tour around Pinar del Río and Matanzas provinces. The Ukrainian leader will hold meetings with Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Pérez Roque. She will tour facilities at Tará, a sanatorium that has assisted 19,000 people since 1990, 16,697 of which were children from the European nation affected by the Chernobyl nuclear accident. (Prensa Latina, 19/9/03)

September 18: The UK Government's response to human rights challenges around the world over the last year is set out in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Annual Report on Human Rights, launched by the Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. In the last year the UK Government has taken up human rights concerns, of Cuba, Belarus, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, North Korea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran and Saudi Arabia, amongst many others. (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 18/9/03)

September 19: Former Czech President Vaclav Havel is leading an international campaign to press for democracy in Cuba and mobilize opposition to Fidel Castro's regime. The International Committee for Democracy in Cuba, based in the Czech capital, Prague, will lend support to political prisoners in Cuba and to the opposition movement, Tomas Pojar, the president of the committee, told the press yesterday. Its members include former US secretary of state Madeleine Albright, former Polish dissident Adam Michnik, former Bulgarian Prime Minister Filip Dimitrov and Elena Bonner, the widow of Russian dissident Andrei Sakharov, Pojar said. (Bloomberg, 19/9/03)

September 19: Built in 1912 and located across the street from the art deco mansion that belonged to former prime minister Pierre Trudeau, the former Cuban consulate is now a bustling renovation site. The Cubans sold the building in June to a Montreal developer who is converting it into upscale condos and townhouses. Over the years, observers viewed the consulate in Montreal as an important base for Cuban spying operations against the United States because of Cuba's limited diplomatic presence south of the border. "It's fair to say the Cuban mission in Montreal was a jumping-off point for aggressive intelligence operations into the United States," said Dave Harris, former chief of strategic planning at the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

(Montreal Gazette, 18/9/03)

September 19: France is exploring new "ways" to channel aid to the Cuban population after Fidel Castro cancelled cooperation programs between the two countries. The Cuban decision has "undoubtedly had an adverse effect" on the population and "we are going to search for other means so that the population can benefit" from our aid, said the spokesman of the French Foreign Ministry, Hervé Ladsous. (EFE, 19/9/03)

September 19: During an emergency session debate at the United Nations General Assembly, Cuba's UN Ambassador Bruno Rodríguez stressed that Israeli threats against the president of the Palestine National Authority constitute "an act of war". The life of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is in danger -Rodríguez said-- and his 'deportation' or arrest would not only be a mistake, but a crime. (Radio Habana Cuba, 20/9/03)

September 19: Chinese Party Leader Hu Jintao praised the friendship and cooperation between the two Communist parties and countries of China and Cuba. General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party Hu Jintao, who is also Chinese president, was speaking during a meeting with José Ramón Balaguer, member of the Political Bureau and head of the international Department of the Cuban Communist Party Central Committee. (The People's Daily, 19/9/03)

September 20: The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has acknowledged Cuba's achievements in the area of child and adolescent care. According to Prensa Latina News Agency, reporting from the Bolivian city of Santa Cruz, Cuba has been recognized for fulfilling the goals of Ibero-American countries in child care. (Radio Habana Cuba, 20/9/03)

September 22: The dispute between Cuba and the European Union (EU), which brought about the cancellation of cooperation programs and the disengagement of the EU, has given way to a silent diplomatic "war". "Neither a visa request nor discussions on a development project can be conducted without a direct bilateral contact", regretted Sven Kühn von Burgsdorff, representative of the European Commission in Cuba. (AFP, 22/9/03)

September 23: In an open letter, Reporters Without Borders calls on president "Lula" to meet with the families of imprisoned journalists. "Your long friendship with President Castro and your ideological affinities with the Cuban regime are well known. However, no democrat of the left or right would understand if these affinities were to take precedence over respect for human rights," the letter says. (Reporters Without Borders, 23/9/03)

September 23: Argentine foreign minister, Rafael Bielsa, will arrive in Cuba in October accompanied by appointed ambassador Raúl Taleb. The Argentine Chargé d'affaires in Havana, José María Aller, did not rule out a visit by Kirchner. (ANSA, 23/9/03)

September 23: Aleida Guevara March and Irma González are on a two-week tour of Canada aimed at providing information about the international campaign for the release of the Cuban Five. Aleida is the daughter of Cuban-Argentinean revolutionary Che Guevara, and Irma is the daughter of one of the five Cuban prisoners being held in the United States (Radio Habana Cuba, 23/9/03)

September 23: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva does not plan to meet with Cuban dissidents when he visits the island, though Brazil's Foreign Ministry is studying their requests. "The Brazilian Foreign Ministry is studying" the Cuban dissidents' requests, Ambassador Tilder Santiago said, ruling out a possible meeting of Lula with the opposition during his visit. "We are aware that a meeting was requested. We are waiting to decide how to respond, but Lula has said that he, as president, does not favor such a course," the ambassador told the press. (EFE, 23/9/03)

September 23: Wives of 30 imprisoned Cuban dissidents have called on Brazil's president to

raise their husbands' cases with Fidel Castro during a visit to the communist-run island this week, some of the women said. "I appeal to his (Lula's) prestige, his humble background and position as a friend of Fidel Castro to intercede with the president and gain the release of my husband and the other 74," Blanca Reyes, wife of jailed independent journalist Raúl Rivero, told the press. (Reuters, 23/9/03)

September 24: A delegation from the Vietnam Motherland Front arrived in Havana, headed by its general secretary, Huynh Dam, to participate in the 6th Congress of Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR). Huynh Dam, also member of the Vietnamese Communist Party, pointed out that the Cuban CDRs have been significant in maintaining the achievements of the revolution and this must always be a main objective. (Prensa Latina, 24/9/03)

September 24: Prime Minister Perry Christie urged United States President George Bush to "appreciate" the Bahamas' relationship with Cuba. Mr. Christie's call came during a breakfast meeting of Caribbean leaders at New York's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel hosted by Mr. Bush. (The Nassau Guardian, 26/9/03)

September 24: Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, speaking in Miami, called for a democratic transition in Cuba that was "led from within" and included Cubans living on the island and in exile. Aznar spoke to representatives of about a dozen Cuban exile groups in Miami as part of his official visit to the United States, during which he visited several Florida cities. Aznar also condemned the death penalty under any circumstance - alluding to the summary executions by Cuban authorities of three ferry hijackers - and gave his support to the dissident Varela Project movement for its efforts to bring about a peaceful transition of government on the communist island. The Spanish leader added that it was important not to fall prey to the provocations of the Castro government, which has stepped up its criticism of Spain and the European Union in recent months. (EFE, 24/9/03)

September 24: Four journalists from Afghanistan, Russia, Morocco and Cuba will be honored for "daring to report with independence and authority in countries where dissent is not easily tolerated," the Committee to Protect Journalists announced. Abdul Samay Hamed, of Afghanistan; Aboubakr Jamai, of Morocco; Musa Muradoz, of Russia; and Manuel Vázquez Portal, of Cuba, will be given the 2003 International Press Freedom Awards in November, CPJ said in a statement. (AP, 26/9/03)

September 25: Havana's anti-doping lab received the backing of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) at an organization's executive committee meeting. The Cuban institution has now become the fifth one on the American continent to receive IOC approval, following Los Angeles, Montreal, Bogotá and Rio de Janeiro. It is also the world's 31st lab with full capacity to analyze all kinds of tests in any sports event. (Granma International, 26/9/03)

September 25: Cuban advisors from the Ministry of Education are collaborating in New Zealand to develop a literacy program for radio and TV. The cooperative project, named Greenlight, works directly in the Maori university, the community that the project is aimed at. (Prensa Latina, 25/9/03)

September 25: Brazil's leftist president said he will refrain from public comments about Cuban politics during a visit to Havana. President Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva said he was going to Havana strictly as a head of state, not as "Lula, amigo of Fidel." "I don't give opinions about the internal political conditions of other countries," Silva said at a news conference after talks with Mexican President Vicente Fox. (AP, 26/9/03)

September 25: Cuba denied the Germany's commissioner for Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, Claudia Roth, permission to enter the island telling her she would not be welcome. Roth, a member of the Schroeder's coalition partner Green Party, had planned on travelling to Havana to check up on the 75 dissidents and independent journalists who were sentenced to up to 28 years

in jail in summary trials earlier this year. (EFE, 25/9/03)

September 25: The German government protested against Cuba's refusal to allow Germany's adviser on human rights, Claudia Roth, to visit the island. "The current self-isolation of Cuba is hurting the Cuban population," the foreign ministry said in a statement. It said Cuba's decision not to issue Roth an entry visa "is not in line with international practice. Neither is it the positive signal hoped for from the Cuban government." (Reuters, 25/9/03)

September 25: Some 200 people staged a demonstration outside the Cuban embassy in Prague to protest against human rights violations and to remember the fate of 300 Cuban political prisoners. The demonstration was staged while the Cuban charge d'affaires David Paulovich was hosting a reception at the embassy on the occasion of the end of his mission. Reception guests had to pass by the demonstrators, who were chanting various slogans such as "Shame", "We wish you to enjoy yourselves and good appetite for the political prisoners" and others. (CTK, 25/9/03)

September 26: President of the Caracas Medical College, Fernando Bianco, has come out in favour of the hundreds of Cuban doctors working poor neighbourhoods in and around Caracas, under a programme set up by President Hugo Chávez. Bianco said that the programme had provided for 350,164 patients from low-income neighbourhoods in just three months. 653 fully-qualified Cuban doctors are currently working in the metropolitan area of Venezuela's capital. Many of the Cuban doctors have been trained in a variety of medical specialist areas. (WRMC Daily Analysis, 26/9/03)

September 26: Viet Nam and Cuba will draw up a cooperation programme on state budget auditing and public assets management following a memorandum of understanding signed in Havana by Cuba's Minister of Auditing and Control, Lina Pedraza Rodriguez and visiting Vietnamese Auditor General, Do Binh Duong. Under the programme, the two auditing sectors will exchange high-level visits, technical assistance, publications and documents. (VNA, 26/9/03)

September 26: Linked for decades as fellow icons of Latin America's left, Brazil's and Cuba's presidents cemented their relationship as they talked business and ignored Cuba's human-rights record. Dressed in his traditional olive fatigues, Fidel Castro greeted Luis Inacio Lula Da Silva with a hug at Havana's airport. The pair sat down for talks after a formal military ceremony welcoming the Brazilian president. A second round of discussions is scheduled before Silva departs for home. Silva arrived in Havana after attending the United Nations General Assembly in New York, followed by a stop in Mexico for talks with President Vicente Fox. He was accompanied by a delegation of at least 100 people, including about 20 Cabinet members, about 30 lower-ranking functionaries and some 50 Brazilian business people. Despite prodding from Washington and Cuban opposition leaders, Lula did not meet with dissidents during his trip. "I do not give opinions about the internal political conditions of other countries," he told reporters in Mexico before arriving in Havana. (The Globe & Mail, AP, Sun Sentinel, 28/9/03)

September 26: Mexico is trying to restore its friendship with Cuba after several years of bad blood, a Mexican foreign ministry official said. The two countries' foreign ministers, Mexico's Luis Ernesto Derbez and Felipe Perez Roque from Cuba, met in New York, the highest level official contact since April 2002. (Reuters, 29/9/03)

September 27: While on official visit in the island, Brazilian president Luis Inacio "Lula" Da Silva met with Cardinal Jaime Ortega, leader of Cuba's Roman Catholic Church, according to sources in the Brazilian delegation. (Reuters, 27/9/03)

September 28: The Cuban Embassy in Prague has lodged a complaint with the Czech Foreign Ministry in which it sharply protests against the course of a demonstration outside the embassy building, it informed CTK today. In its statement to the press, the embassy blames Czech authorities of not having ensured the peace and for not preventing the gross behaviour of the

demonstrators. Foreign Ministry press department director Karel Boruvka told CTK today that the meeting was duly announced and that the police ensured the calm course. (CTK, 28/9/03)

September 29: Fidel Castro has lashed out against American and European Union policies toward his island state. "Only a country such as this can sing the truths of the United States and Europe, and tell them they are getting a bad humanitarian image," Castro said. The Cuban leader spoke during a closing address Sunday to a Congress of The Committees for the Defence of the Revolution in Havana. "We don't need you in order to live, creators of poverty, of exploitation and misery," Castro added in remarks reported by the state press agency. The foreign press were not invited to hear Castro's reported three-hour speech at Havana's Karl Marx theatre, which was attended by some 1,500 delegates from across Cuba. (AFP, 29/9/03)

September 29: The British Unions Congress (TUC), unanimously approved a resolution in support of Cuba and against the blockade and aggression maintained by the US. A communiqué signed by the TUC reads that the Congress condemns the intensified and hostile attempts of the US Government to undermine the economy and the right to self-determination of Cuban people. (AIN, 29/9/03)

September 29: Film stars and intellectuals including Catherine Deneuve, Sophie Marceau, Pedro Almodóvar and Jorge Semprún attended a soiree in Paris supporting the Cuban people and striking out against repression by leader Fidel Castro. Actress Deneuve opened the event, organized by the association Reporters sans Frontières (Reporters Without Borders), at a theatre on the Champs-Élysées. Special homage was paid to poet and journalist Raúl Rivero, sentenced recently to 20 years in prison at a closed-doors trial for "attacking the sovereignty of the (Cuban) state." Actress Sophie Marceau read a poem by Raul Rivero and Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar, brandishing a fan bearing the words "Cuba sí, Castro no" expressed the hope that Castro would restore Cuba's freedom and get rid of dictatorship. (AFP, 30/9/03)

September 30: In statements made by a representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Cuba has been acknowledged as one of the countries in the world that is very serious about fighting poverty and hunger as an active partner of the FAO's Food Security Program. FAO Representative Roberto Arias Milla made the comments about Cuba's commitment to the struggle against both urban and rural poverty in preparation for World Food Day, which will be celebrated in Cuba in October. (Radio Habana Cuba, 30/9/03)

September 30: Cuba has been "totally exonerated" of any responsibility for the war of words and snubs that led to a breakdown in its formerly cozy relations with the European Union, a senior Cuban official has said. Deputy Foreign Minister Angel Dalmau accused the Europeans of using a "double standard" when it criticized the Cuban regime for imprisoning 75 peaceful dissidents and independent journalists and executing three young men who staged a failed hijacking. Speaking at the opening of a seminar on European studies, Dalmau said "the European attitude cannot be justified" by unsupported claims that its own ideas of what constitutes human rights and democracy are universally valid for all. The thrust of his arguments was based on a kind of political relativism: that under the guise of "human rights" Europe was seeking to "impose its own notions and standards on all other human beings, without regard for their differences". He argued that Brussels has neither the right nor the authority to subject the rest of the world to its opinions nor to use them as a stick to beat "the political system that the vast majority of Cubans have decided we want for ourselves". (EFE, 1/10/03)

September 30: The Spanish Congress approved a bill deploring the closure of the Spanish Cultural Centre in Havana. Four parties, including the Socialist Party and the Popular Party, are asking Cuba "to respect human rights and to install democracy" in the island. (El País, 1/10/03)

Security

September 12: Army General Raúl Castro, Minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), presided over a military council of the Central Region Army which dealt with important aspects of the defense preparedness of a territory that stretches from Matanzas province to Ciego de Ávila. (Radio Rebelde, 13/9/03)

September 15: According to a report in the Cuban Communist Party newspaper, Granma, a high-ranking military delegation from China began a series of meetings with Cuban army officers and other officials in Havana, as the two countries seek to deepen their military links. Lieutenant General Tan Yuexin, director general of the Administration Office of China's Central Military Commission, is heading the visiting delegation. (AFP, 15/9/03)

September 21: Thousands of Cubans participated in defense exercises held all across the island in conjunction with National Defense Day. The mobilization included units of the reserve, the militia, special forces and the so-called Production and Defense Brigades of companies, learning institutions and communities, the local press reported. The exercises had among their objectives to test and improve the combat readiness of the public and the military command. The activities also included testing evacuation and relocation plans for the population, as well as procedures to outfit the populace to defend the island against foreign invasion. (EFE, 22/9/03)

September 22: Minister Delegate to Congo's Presidency, Division General Jacques Yvon Ndolou, has begun an official visit to Cuba. Defense Minister of the African Nation, Ndolou, and his delegation also visited a Tanks Unit where were welcomed by its Chief Brigadier General, Onelio Aguilera Bermúdez. Accompanied by Armed Forces Deputy Minister, the delegation toured several facilities belonging to that army unit. (Radio Rebelde, 22/9/03)

September 25: General Raúl Castro, Cuban Minister of Armed Forces (FAR), received Major General Jacques Yvon Ndolou, Minister of Defense of the Republic of Congo. (AIN, 25/9/03)

Terrorism

September 2: With the participation of journalists, agents of the Security of the State and investigators, the on-line forum "The terrorists that I met" ratified Luis Posada Carriles' wide criminal record. Sponsored by the circle of Cuban journalists against terrorism, the debate was carried out prior to the preliminary hearing taking place in Panama for a possible trial to the four terrorists detained in that Central American nation. (AIN, 2/9/03)

September 3: A Miami developer says Cuba has asked Panama for his extradition in order to keep him from testifying on behalf of Luis Posada Carriles, an exile arrested there amid allegations that he planned to kill Fidel Castro. Santiago Alvarez, 62, said he learned of the extradition request from a Panamanian government official who urged him to stay away from the three-day court hearing that began for Posada and three other exiles jailed in Panama. Alvarez said he was set to testify for the defense, but declined to comment on what he knew about the Posada case or the case behind Cuba's extradition request, a 2001 attempt by three Miami-Dade Cubans to infiltrate the island. The three were captured, along with several weapons. (The Miami Herald, 4/9/03)

September 3: Four Cuban exiles accused of trying to assassinate Fidel Castro appeared in a Panamanian court for the first day of a three-day preliminary hearing. Luis Posada Carriles, Gaspar Jiménez, Guillermo Novo and Pedro Remón were arrested after Castro denounced a plot to kill him during an Ibero-American summit that was held in Panama's capital in November 2000. Local courts ruled there wasn't enough evidence to try the four Cuban exiles for attempted murder, but Panamanian authorities said the men had gathered explosives in the country. The proceedings began amid a small but spirited protest that saw students, workers and Indian leaders march around the courthouse carrying pro-Castro signs and shouting slogans condemning the defendants. Later, a group of the Cuban exiles' friends and family members

arrived, forcing police to separate the two groups of demonstrators. (AP, 4/9/03)

September 5: Four Cuban exiles accused of trying to blow up Fidel Castro will stand trial on charges of conspiracy, possessing explosives and endangering the public's safety, a Panamanian judge ruled. Luis Posada Carriles, Gaspar Jiménez, Guillermo Novo and Pedro Remón were arrested after Castro denounced a plot to kill him during an Ibero-American summit held in Panama's capital in November 2000. Local courts had ruled there wasn't enough evidence to arrest the Cubans for attempted murder, but Panamanian authorities said the men had gathered explosives in the country. "There is sufficient merit and evidence" to go to trial, Judge Enrique Paniza said, setting a trial date for November. (AP, 7/9/03)

September 11: Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld says most suspected terrorists at a US prison camp in Cuba will probably be detained for the course of the global war on terrorism rather than face trial. Rumsfeld said Wednesday he expects some trials but prefers that most continue to be held at the Guantanamo Bay facility. "Our interest is in not trying them and letting them out," he said. "Our interest is in - during this global war on terror - keeping them off the streets, and so that's what's taking place." (AP, 11/9/03)

US-Cuba Relations

September 2: After almost four months behind bars in Cuba, a Miami-Dade couple accused of espionage returned home. María and Arcel Cardoso were on their way back from a family vacation to Camagüey, Cuba, in April when they were detained at the Camagüey airport. The spying charges stemmed from a letter Maria Cardoso's brother gave her to take to the United States. The Cardosos went free after Cuban officials told them they had determined that the couple was not responsible for what the letter said, but the brother, Omelio Angulo Borrero, 41, still awaits trial in Cuba. The contents of the letter have not been publicly disclosed. There was no trial. (The Miami Herald, Sun Sentinel, 3/9/03)

September 2: The sentencing documents of the 75 Cuban dissidents convicted in the Castro government's crackdown on opposition earlier this year show the lack of basic freedoms, human rights and impartial justice on the communist island, supporters of a university project said. The documents were obtained by Florida State University, which launched a Web site containing the hundreds of pages of court records. The university's Center for the Advancement of Human Rights worked with the US Interests Section in Havana to get the documents but the center funded the Web site independently, university officials said. (AP, 2/9/03)

September 3: The United States said it might not be able to give visas to Cuban musicians in time for them to attend today's Latin Grammy Awards in Miami because they sent in their applications too late. Among musicians believed unlikely to make the event in Miami, the heartland of the anti-Castro US Cuban exile community, are Latin jazz king Chucho Valdés and Los Van Van, a group considered the Rolling Stones of salsa. Fidel Castro's government has said US authorities deliberately held up visas but the State Department said the applications came in late and took time to process because Cuba is on its list of state sponsors of terrorism. (The Globe and Mail, 3/9/03)

September 3: Cuban musicians, nominated for the Latin Grammy Awards, held a news conference in Havana to denounce the refusal of entry visas to attend the awards ceremony in Miami. Musician Zenaida Romeu said that the absence of Cuban nominees at the Latin Grammy ceremony, besides a deliberate mistake, will be an enormous deficiency. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/9/03)

September 3: The World Trade Center Association Los Angeles-Long Beach along with a partner, Global Strategies Trading LLC, has concluded a week-long business trade mission to Havana. The mission resulted in an agreement with Alimport, the Cuban import company, to

secure \$10 million in business over the coming year. The trade mission was comprised of California-based companies involved in food, medical, and health care. (Long Beach Press Telegram, 3/9/03)

September 3: Prosecutors have expanded charges in a politically sensitive case against six admitted Cuban hijackers by adding two counts carrying a possible life prison sentence. The six Cuban men already had been facing possible life sentences on air piracy and conspiracy charges. They now also are charged with interfering with a flight crew and a related conspiracy count. (Sun Sentinel, 3/9/03)

September 4: East Valley Congressman Jeff Flake is renewing his efforts to get Cuban trade and travel bans lifted. The Republican is offering an amendment to a federal spending bill that would lift the ban on Americans traveling to Cuba. Flake argues the best way to bring democracy and market economics to Cuba and lift the authoritarian rule of Fidel Castro is to open the island up to US tourism and trade. (The Business Journal of Phoenix, 4/9/03)

September 4: Senators were divided along partisan lines over the issue of trade with Cuba. Democrats argued for easing the US trade and travel embargos against communist dictator Fidel Castro's Cuba while Republicans, backed up by Bush administration officials, remained committed to the restrictions. In his opening statement at the hearing, Finance Committee Chairman Charles Grassley (Republican-Iowa) acknowledged the pressure from some of his colleagues to change current policy. "They point out that, despite four decades of sanctions against his government, Castro remains in power," Grassley said. "They also contend that US farmers and businesses are losing trade opportunities in Cuba to their counterparts in other countries." But Grassley also explained that other lawmakers "believe that now is not the proper time to change US trade policies," given that Castro's record on human rights has "become even more egregious during the past year" and that "lifting trade restrictions will in effect reward Castro for his actions." (CNSNews.com, 4/9/03)

September 4: President Bush renewed a warning to Congress that he will veto any legislation that weakens economic sanctions against Cuba. The House is preparing to vote on an amendment to a spending bill for the Treasury and Transportation departments that would lift the ban on travel to Cuba. Another amendment would ease restrictions on remittances sent to Cubans. "It is essential to maintain sanctions and travel restrictions to deny economic resources to the brutal Castro regime," the White House budget office said in its written statement. "Lifting the sanctions now, or limiting our ability to enforce them, would provide a helping hand to a desperate and repressive regime at the expense of the Cuban people." The House has voted to lift the travel ban twice, and in recent years momentum has built in Congress to ease the embargo. But Republican leaders, especially in the House, have been able to remove most anti-embargo provisions from the final version of bills. (The Miami Herald, 4/9/03)

September 4: Several Cuban musicians who had been nominated for the Grammy awards held their own gala concert in Havana, broadcast to the rest of the world via satellite. Fidel Castro attended the concert at the Karl Marx Theater. Cuban officials have blasted the Latin Recording Academy with accusations that the organization caved into pressure from Miami exiles by failing to send its artists the letters of invitations required to apply for US visas. "They've fixed everything to make money and to not have problems with the Miami mafia," Deputy Culture Minister Abel Acosta Acosta told reporters in Havana. (The Miami Herald, Prensa Latina, 5/9/03)

September 4: Cuban officials analyzed "The Shameful History of the Latin Grammys in Miami" during a nightly televised broadcast called Mesa Redonda, the Communist Party newspaper Granma announced. Granma said none of the 103 Cuban musicians and producers linked with recordings nominated for Latin Grammys received letters of invitations from the organizers. Latin Recording Academy President Gabriel Abaroa denied the accusations to the Associated Press and said that invitations were sent out for all the nominated artists, including the Cuban acts. "The Latin Academy did its homework and sent the invitations. If any country is saying that, it is for

political purposes only," Abaroa told the press. (The Miami Herald, 5/9/03)

September 4: Members of Montana's congressional delegation are leading a small group of agricultural leaders to Cuba for meetings to learn about the potential for future trade and business dealings in that country, officials said. Democratic Senator Max Baucus and Republican Representative Denny Rehberg will be with seven Montanans with agricultural ties on the "fact-finding mission," which includes a scheduled meeting with Fidel Castro, said Barrett Kaiser, a Baucus spokesman. (Billings Gazette, 4/9/03)

September 5: Cuba's foreign minister said he thinks a majority of US citizens want better relations with his island, including free travel and commerce, but that the Bush administration is manipulated by hardline anti-Castro exiles. Many sectors of US public opinion "are in favor of easing restrictions, and many US senators and representatives "favor changes in the current policy toward Cuba," Felipe Perez Roque said on Venezuelan state television in the course of a working visit. Despite that sentiment, Washington "recently announced a revision of its Cuba policy that bows to pressure from extremist, hardline anti-Castro exiles in the Miami community and from far-right groups," the minister added. "Cuban hardliners do not represent the opinion of the majority of Cubans living in the United States, who do favor change and a normalization of US-Cuban relations," Perez Roque said. (EFE, 5/9/03)

September 8: The State Department's top Latin America policy official said that President Bush will veto any bill allowing US tourists to visit Cuba because "beachgoers are not going to liberate" the communist-ruled island. Roger Noriega, the new assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere Affairs, spoke to a gathering at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. Noriega, in his speech, insisted that the United States "has not turned its back" on the challenges posed by widespread poverty, corruption and crime in many countries of Latin America. Prior to his confirmation as assistant secretary, Noriega was US ambassador to the Organization of American States. (EFE, 8/9/03)

September 8: Twenty-four Cubans, including an athlete who defected during the Pan American Games in the Dominican Republic, were taken into custody after their boat landed on an uninhabited island off the west coast of Puerto Rico. The largest group of Cubans intercepted in the island in years, their arrival reflects the growing use of this US commonwealth as a back door into the United States for refugees from Cuba. By reaching desolate Mona Island, a speck of American territory jutting out of the shark-infested channel that separates the main island of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, the Cubans apparently qualify as "dry-foot" arrivals, eligible to stay in America. (KRT Wires Service, 9/9/03)

September 9: Ambassador Roger F. Noriega formally assumes his new duties as Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs after being sworn in by Secretary Colin Powell. During the ceremony, Powell said that "Roger and his team are working to carry out President Bush's commitment to the Cuban people -- that they will flourish under a new system that guarantees their freedom, respects their rights, and encourages their prosperity". (US Department of State, 9/9/03)

September 9: A self-described liberal idealist who says his three visits to Cuba in violation of federal law were acts of civil disobedience has been denied admission to the New Jersey Bar by the state Supreme Court. Zachary Sanders, who passed the New Jersey bar exam, was given a thumbs down by the Committee on Character, which rejected his argument that he had a right to disobey what he called the "immoral and unjust" embargo on trade and travel to Cuba. (New Jersey Law Journal, 9/9/03)

September 9: More than a dozen of short films on Cuban music will be on a premiere at the Lincoln Center, New York. The sample includes the already classic piece by Cuban filmmaker Rogelio París, "We, the Music", as well as films by Juan Carlos Tabío, Fernando Pérez, Mayra Vilasís, Octavio Cortazar and Miguel Torres. (AIN, 9/9/03)

September 9: House lawmakers voted to ease restrictions on traveling to the island and sending money to Cuban households. Representative Jeff Flake (Republican-Arizona) introduced an amendment to the Treasury Appropriations Bill for Year 2004 that would end funding for enforcing the travel ban to Cuba. The House also voted 222-196, for an amendment by Representative Bill Delahunt (Democrat-Massachusetts) to lift the cap on money remittances that may be sent by Americans with family members in Cuba. Also, Jim Davis (Democrat-Florida), a representative from Tampa, a city with deep historical ties with Cuba, added an amendment to roll back regulations imposed by the Administration preventing Americans from engaging in educational and cultural trips to Cuba - the amendment passed 246-173. (AP, Cuban American Alliance Education Fund, 10/9/03)

September 10: The United States will impose economic sanctions on Burma, Cuba and North Korea for failing to take steps to stop "human trafficking," such as forcing people to work or engage in sexual acts against their will, the White House said. Ten other nations, however, have made enough progress in ending "this heinous crime" to avoid losing US assistance, White House press secretary Scott McClellan said in a statement. "The steps taken by these countries stand in contrast to the continuing failure of Burma, Cuba, and North Korea to make significant efforts to comply with the act's minimum standards," he said. "As a result, the president decided to impose sanctions on these countries in accordance with the act." (White House Press Office, 10/9/03)

September 10: Cuba-watchers do not see a breaching anytime soon of the 43-year-old US trade embargo against the Castro regime despite the House of Representatives' passage of a bill that would allow US tourists to visit the communist-ruled island. However, Philip Brenner, professor of International Relations at Washington's American University, maintain that the vote shows that Bush has lost steam with Congress. "This will be one more sign that President Bush has lost his ability to mobilize Congress," Brenner told the press. "With these votes, the House is taking for granted that the current US policy toward Cuba has failed and hurts US citizens more than Cubans, because it affects their basic rights, such as the right to travel," he said. Brenner said he is convinced Bush will not have to veto the measure, which must first be debated and voted upon by the Senate, which thwarted similar measures in years past. (EFE, 10/9/03)

September 10: US Border Patrol took more than two dozens Cuban migrants into custody after they came ashore on Coco Plum Beach in Coral Gables. (The Miami Herald, 10/9/03)

September 11: For the first time in more than 40 years, representatives from the United States travel sector will meet in a public forum to discuss the potential for travel between the US and Cuba. The meeting - the US-Cuba Travel Conference - will be held in Cancún, Mexico, in October 2003 and is sponsored by the newly formed Association of Travel-Related Industry Officials (ATRIP). Along with ATRIP, a Cuban delegation of more than 20 officials and travel specialists from Havana will be at the conference led by Cuban Minister of Tourism, Ibrahim Ferradaz García. Support for this event is also being provided by Congressional leaders in both the Senate and House, Cuba Working Group. (Business Wire, 11/9/03)

September 12: A Bush administration announcement that Cuba will face economic sanctions for failing to curtail the sexual exploitation and forced labor of Cuban minors will have little impact beyond public humiliation, several experts say. "Leverage is minimal," said Damián Fernández, director of the Cuban Research Institute at Florida International University. "This really is more symbolic than anything else." Jaime Suchlicki, director of the Institute for Cuba and Cuban American Studies at the University of Miami, said the United States is limited in what it can do, particularly since Cuba does not turn to the IMF or World Bank for loans. "This is more about highlighting the abuses in Cuba," he said. (The Knight Ridder, 12/9/03)

September 12: An online forum was held at www.antiterroristas.cu , in recognition of the fifth anniversary of the arrest and imprisonment of five Cubans in the United States. Family members

and attorneys for "the Five" participated in the forum and more than 100 questions and comments were exchanged during the two hour encounter. (Radio Habana Cuba, 13/9/03)

September 12: University Deans from Cuba and the United States have signed a cooperation agreement, which includes research development projects and exchanges of professors and students. The delegation from the US Association of Colleges and State Universities, which gathers 397 US institutions wound up a four-day visit to the island. (Radio Habana Cuba, 13/9/03)

September 14: US Senator Max Baucus of Montana wraps up a four-day visit to Havana. Baucus, a democrat, is heading a delegation of agriculture and tourism executives from his home state and sealed a \$10 million agreement to sell food products to the island. The trade deal was signed with Pedro Alvarez, president of the state-run food importer, Alimport. Alvarez said that since the US Congress eased the trade embargo in December 2001 to allow Havana to buy food products for cash, "we have reached more than \$500 million in purchases." (EFE, 14/9/03)

September 14: Senator Max Baucus and Republican Representative Dennis Rehberg, of Montana, met for an hour with Oswaldo Payá, Cuba's best-known democracy activist. "They were very interested about the situation of the political prisoners, and about the Varela Project," Payá told reporters about the lawmakers. Paya said the meeting covered the political and economic situation in Cuba and the fate of 75 dissidents imprisoned in April after being charged with working to topple the government in collaboration with the United States. "It was very valuable for us because they came to Cuba and met with not only the government but other sectors of society," Paya said. "They expressed a lot of moral support and understanding." The wives of several imprisoned dissidents also met with the congressmen at Payá's home. "It was a significant meeting and I applauded his efforts to give voice to his people," Baucus said of Payá. (The Miami Herald, Reuters, 15/9/03)

September 14: Democratic Senator Max Baucus told Fidel Castro he was concerned about the human rights situation in Cuba during a four-hour meeting, members of the American delegation said. Baucus, the highest ranking American official to visit Cuba since a March crackdown that put 75 dissidents behind bars, traveled to the island over the weekend with Republican Representative Dennis Rehberg and a group of Montana farm leaders and foreign policy specialists. Baucus and Rehberg, both from Montana, have been leaders of congressional efforts to eliminate restrictions on travel to and trade with the communist-run island. He said a vote this month in the US House of Representatives that scrapped funding needed to enforce the travel restrictions showed that most lawmakers "are in agreement that this (ban) measure is illogical and ineffective." (AP, EFE, 15/9/03)

September 16: Miami-based artists Roberto Behar and Rosario Marquardt, whose work was shown this summer at the Miami Art Museum, said in a phone interview that they were sending a letter to Havana Biennial organizers explaining their decision not to attend. "Everyone punished by the government in Cuba lately has been fighting peacefully for basic cultural freedoms," Behar said in a phone conversation. "It's very difficult to participate in anything the government sponsored." (The Miami Herald, 16/9/03)

September 16: Cuba charged that the Bush administration was tightening a US embargo on the island despite growing domestic and international opposition, as it launched an annual drive to have the United Nations condemn the policy. "The economic, financial and commercial blockade the United States has maintained against Cuba for more than four decades has not only been scrupulously applied, but strengthened over the last two years," Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said at a Havana news conference. For the last 11 years the UN General Assembly has overwhelmingly called for the United States to lift the embargo, last year by a vote of 173-3 with four abstentions. Pérez said he expected similar results this year when the UN debates and votes on the embargo in November. (Reuters, 16/9/03)

September 16: The US Interest Section in Havana delivered a note reporting that it has issued

travel documents to 20,000 Cuban citizens, "as required by the 1994 US-Cuba Migration Accord". The note said that "under the Accord the United States agreed to document for migration 20,000 Cubans per year in order to ensure the safe, legal and orderly migration from Cuba to the US". "We urge the Cuban government to grant exit permits to all those Cubans who have received the US travel documents", it added. (USIS, 16/9/03)

September 17: Acclaimed Cuban documentary filmmaker Jose Padrón says he has requested political asylum in the United States to escape official censorship and harassment in Cuba. Some of his films were shown for only a few days because they presented a critical view of the regime, Padrón told the press. "They were constantly taking them off," sometimes on direct orders from Fidel Castro, the filmmaker said. (The Miami Herald, 19/9/03)

September 17: National security advisor Condoleezza Rice has written South Florida Republican legislators to stress that President Bush is committed to the economic embargo against Cuba and bringing democracy to the island. Her letter underscores the importance in the next presidential election of the Cuban-American electorate, a voting block considered necessary by the GOP to win in Florida, which is expected to be a key state. Rice, writing to State Representative David Rivera, Republican-Miami, was responding to a letter that GOP state legislators had sent Bush in August asking him to get tougher on Cuba or risk losing the political support of Cuban Americans. (The Miami Herald, 17/9/03)

September 17: Six months after the Cuban government seized and imprisoned dozens of political dissidents, the International Republican Institute (IRI) unveiled new online and print resources on the progress and predicament of the pro-democracy movement in Cuba. The Institute now hosts a Web site that displays the backgrounds and condition of the 78 dissidents arrested by Cuban security services in March 2003. Most of those were sentenced to long prison terms in subsequent trials conducted by the Castro regime, and many are denied access to proper medical care. The database is available at <http://www.iri.org/cubanprisone> (PRNewswire, 17/9/03)

September 18: Canada should use its contacts with the Cuban government to press harder for protection of human rights, a senior US State Department official said. "We're hopeful that Canada could maybe use its ties, its remaining ties with Cubans to at least make appeals along the order of the United Nations Human Rights Commission's request that human rights be respected," Roger Noriega, assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, told reporters in Ottawa. Noriega was on a two-day visit to Ottawa where he met with Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham and Deputy Prime Minister John Manley and discussed the desire of both the US and Canada to see human rights respected in Cuba, where nearly all avenues of political dissent are restricted. (The Star, 19/9/03)

September 18: On his first full day as a candidate for president, retired General Wesley K. Clark explained that he just wants to "listen to people" before saying where he stands on topics such as the trade embargo with Cuba, the economy and immigration policies. On the trade embargo with Cuba, Clark said he understood both positions and said "there are a lot of complexities there." But the former chief of the US Southern Command, who oversaw military operations in Latin America and the Caribbean, said he is inclined to favor engagement as a means to democratization. "If you look at the way we operated in Eastern Europe, we were effective in taking down communism because there was no embargo," he said. "The Iron Curtain was something they built, not something we imposed". (The Miami Herald, 19/9/03)

September 18: A US judge rejected a plea bargain offer from two Cubans who swam to the Florida coast after attacking Coast Guardsmen who tried to intercept them at sea, setting the date of their trial for next year. Judge Michael Moore considered that the sanctions contained in the plea bargain offer did not send a "sufficiently strong message" to immigrants who try to enter the United States by attacking federal officials. Javier Morales Molina, 27, and Reinaldo Molina Morales, 29, are charged with attacking US Coast Guard personnel who tried to intercept them

just off the Florida coast in May. (EFE, 18/9/03)

September 19: Three Cuban-American members of Congress are urging the US government to amend the regulations that call for undocumented immigrants from Cuba who are intercepted at sea to be repatriated to the communist-ruled island. Representatives Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Mario Diaz-Balart, all Republicans from South Florida, made the request in a letter to the top officials for Latin American issues at the State Department and White House, Roger Noriega and Otto Reich, respectively. In a press release, the brothers Diaz-Balart and Ros-Lehtinen rejected the 1994 bilateral immigration agreement, noting that because of it, refugees intercepted at sea are sent back to the island "without even being heard to determine their eligibility for refugee status." (EFE, 18/9/03)

September 19: Miami Cuban exile activist Ramón Saúl Sánchez said that he will not resist efforts by immigration officials to deport him to his native Cuba but will challenge any attempt to imprison him indefinitely in the United States should Cuba not accept him. Sánchez will appear before an immigration judge, the first step in determining whether he has a right to stay in the United States. Although Sánchez arrived as a refugee in 1967, he never became a permanent resident. (Sun Sentinel, 19/9/03)

September 19: Cuba said that while Washington's granting of visas to 20,000 island residents represents a "positive element," the United States continues to violate provisions of the 1994 bilateral migration accords. The comments came in a statement from the Cuban Foreign Ministry, which noted an announcement by the US Interests Section in Havana that it had granted immigration visas to 20,000 Cuban citizens during the fiscal year 2002-2003, fulfilling one of the goals of the 1994 agreements. "Unfortunately," the communique continued, "other elements that violate the accords persist," a reference to the Cuban Adjustment Act and Washington's so-called "wet foot-dry foot" policy. Those elements "not only violate the commitments made in 1994 and 1995, but also constitute a great stimulus to illegal emigration and the associated phenomena, such as people trafficking and violence on the part of those trying to emigrate," the ministry said. (EFE, 19/9/03)

September 19: A Cuban architect was sentenced to 20 years in prison for using two fake grenades to hijack a passenger plane from the communist island to Florida in April. Adermis Wilson Gonzalez, 34, was found guilty of air piracy in July. The case became politically sensitive after three Cubans were executed there for hijacking a Cuban ferry a day after Mr. Wilson commandeered the Cuban Airlines plane with 31 people aboard. Ten of the Cubans aboard - including Mr. Wilson's wife and son - chose to remain in the United States. His lawyer plans an appeal. (The Globe & Mail, 19/9/03)

September 20: Senator Norm Coleman met with leading Cuban dissidents, the second day of a visit to learn more about human rights and possibilities for more American trade with the communist-run island. The Minnesota Republican met in the morning with democracy activist Oswaldo Payá, lead organizer of the Varela Project. Coleman later had lunch at a private family restaurant called El Gringo Viejo, or Old Gringo, with leading dissidents Vladimiro Roca and Elizardo Sánchez. (AP, 20/9/03)

September 21: Senator Norm Coleman, visiting Cuba, backed away from earlier calls to end sanctions on the communist country, saying that lifting the restrictions now would send the wrong message. Coleman cited the Cuban government's crackdown on the opposition in March, when 75 dissidents were rounded up and sentenced to prison terms of between six and 28 years. "I think about the folks in prison and what message that gives them," the Minnesota Republican said. American moves to eliminate the 40-year-old trade and travel sanctions have "been building for some time, but it's not there yet," Coleman told a small group of American reporters in Havana. "And the March actions create a problem." Coleman, however, said releasing some or all of the 75 dissidents "would be a good gesture," and would "increase the prospects" for American support to end the trade embargo and travel restrictions. (ABCNews, 21/9/03)

September 22: The United States accused Cuba of violating migration accords. Adam Ereli, State Department Deputy Spokesman, issued a press statement saying that at the last round of migration talks in June, the US delegation identified "over 600 individual cases of Cubans unfairly denied exit permits". (US State Department, 22/9/03)

September 24: Havanatur's services to US visitors to the island grew 61% a year on average in the last five years. The Director General of the company, Berto Pérez, said there has been a steady increase of flights from the US with a 38% yearly average since 1999. (Prensa Latina, 24/9/03)

September 25: A group of 27 Cuban migrants arrived on the Florida coast and US authorities are investigating whether they were transported by alien smugglers, local news media reported. The migrants were discovered by authorities on Boca Chica Key in Biscayne Bay near Miami, but no boat was found nearby, leading officials to believe that they had been deposited on the key by smugglers. The group was composed of men, women and children. (EFE, 25/9/03)

September 25: Internationally acclaimed Grammy Award-winning pianist, composer, and bandleader Chucho Valdés made a performance at Washington Prep High School. Valdés did his own compositions, and also performed with students from the nationally-acclaimed Washington Prep High School jazz band. (PRNewswire, 25/9/03)

September 25: US Senator Norm Coleman, Republican-Minnesota, has reversed his earlier position that the United States should reopen trade and travel with communist Cuba. Instead, Coleman said he will oppose Congressional efforts to lift the trade embargo against Cuba and the tourism ban to Cuba -- at least as long as dictator Fidel Castro continues to imprison 75 writers and dissidents jailed since this spring. Coleman visited Cuba last weekend where he met with families of those imprisoned by the Cuban government, and he said he "cannot put their faces out of my mind." (Saint Paul Pioneer Press, 26/9/03)

September 26: Ramón Saúl Sánchez, the Cuban exile leader put in deportation proceedings for allegedly being in the United States illegally, is even more likely to stay in the country now that authorities have withdrawn charges against him in immigration court and are again considering his green card application. (The Miami Herald, 26/9/03)

September 26: Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, delivered a speech against the US embargo on Cuba at the United Nations. The embargo has cost Cuba \$72 billion setting back its development, affecting education, trade, industry, business transactions and its ability to receive international assistance, the minister said. Pérez Roque is in New York for the annual ministerial session of the UN General Assembly. (AP, 28/9/03)

September 26: Cuba's foreign minister criticized the US-led war in Iraq and said the daily attacks on American forces there are carried out by an occupied people fighting for their "right to self-determination." (AP, 26/9/03)

September 28: Fidel Castro denied that his government makes it difficult for professionals with visas to emigrate to the United States. In remarks closing a conference of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, Castro denied US allegations that Cuba is failing to comply with migration agreements. "They say that Cuba is making it hard for doctors, computer specialists and other professionals to emigrate, but as far as I know, we have never signed an agreement to protect brain-drain," Castro said, the official Prensa Latina news agency reported. (EFE, 29/9/03)

September 28: Cuba's foreign minister made an impassioned appeal for the lifting of the trade embargo against his country, saying the blockade has cost the Caribbean nation \$72 billion in the last 42 years. In a 75-minute speech at a Harlem church, Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said the Cuban people do not hold any hatred against the American people. He stressed that

Cuba was against terrorism and has been combating drug trafficking, but despite overtures the Americans have refused to lift the embargo. "The blockade is a major obstacle to our development. (It) prevents and curtails our development," Perez Roque told a sympathetic audience of more than 800 people, many of whom repeatedly interrupted with chants of "Viva Cuba." (AP, 28/9/03)

September 28: Port Manatee officials learned at a trade show in New Orleans that a second shipment of animal feed will be headed to Cuba from the port. The first shipment was made in January, marking the first time Port Manatee had done shipping business of a non-humanitarian nature with Cuba since the trade embargo imposed in the 1960s. The embargo actually predates the port, which opened in 1970. Arthur Savage, president of A.R. Savage & Son, the shipping agent representing the Cuban buyer Alimport, said the trade represents the fourth to Cuba for his company from Tampa Bay this year. Two were sent from Port Manatee and two from Tampa Bay. (The Bradenton Herald, 28/9/03)

September 29: The Cubans who converted a pickup truck into a boat in an illegal attempt to reach Florida said their attempts to emigrate legally had failed as well. So far, 10 of the 12 people in the group that made the unusual and well-publicized attempt to reach American soil have been turned down for US immigration visas, the passengers on the floating boat said, showing copies of their rejection letters. (Sun Sentinel, 29/9/03)

September 29: Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright called for an international embrace of Cuban dissidents and said world leaders should give Varela Project leader Oswaldo Payá whatever he wants. Albright recently joined a group of European leaders, including former Czech President Vaclav Havel and Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar, formed to build international support for dissidents on the island seeking legitimacy and resources to fight the Castro government. (The Miami Herald, 30/9/03)

September 30: Members of a Texas trade mission to Cuba again pressed their case to sell rice from Texas producers. Ernest Bezdek, manager of trade development for the Port of Beaumont, said the chances are "very good" that Texas rice farmers could once again establish trade links to Cuba that were cut by embargo in the early 1960s. (The Beaumont Enterprise, 30/9/03)