

## FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba November 2003

### Domestic Affairs

**November 1:** In spite of the financial cutbacks by European government entities, the opening ceremony of the Eighth Havana Biennial was held at the Plaza Vieja. The Centro Wifredo Lam, the event's principal organizer, opened with works by Panamanian artist Humberto Veléz, titled *Because Love Exists*, and in the tenement building La California -where famous Cuban musician Chano Pozo was born--, famous Cuban artists Manuel Mendive, Choco, and Roberto Diago exhibited their works. The Museum of Fine Arts, where several sidebar exhibits are hosted, will be the center of debates on subjects such as Art for Life -organized by Canada's "Le Lieu"--, in which well known curators will participate. Havana's San Carlos de la Cabaña Fortress has also become a huge exhibition area for 100 artists participating in the Biennial, as well as the Cuba Pavilion, where the works of 27 artists are on display. The Havana-based Casa de las Américas cultural institution opened a space in its Ernesto Guevara Hall as part of the Havana Biennial, which included the auction "Each Child Saved is a Work of Art" ("Cada niño salvado es una obra maestro"). Fifty Cuban artists joined the effort. The proceeds will be donated to the Pediatric Hospital's Oncology and Hematology Ward in the central Cuban province of Villa Clara. (CubaNow, 3/11/03)

**November 1:** Abel Escobar Ramírez, an independent journalist for Cuba Press, was released after having been detained for three days. Reporters Without Borders also reported that over 300 books and journals were confiscated by State Security agents from Jesús Álvarez Castillo, delegate of the independent Manuel Márquez Sterling Journalists Society in Ciego de Ávila province. The search in Álvarez Castillo's house lasted for more than three hours. (Encuentro en la Red, 4/11/03)

**November 3:** Seven dissidents imprisoned at the Holguín Provincial Penitentiary - in the eastern part of the island - finished a sixteen-day hunger strike in protest against the treatment received from prison authorities. (El Nuevo Herald, 4/11/03)

**November 3:** The pluralistic nature of the Havana Arts Biennial, which emerged in 1984, is being called into question in its eighth edition as a space for artists of the developing South. The withdrawal of two artists and the subsequent debate about artistic freedoms on the socialist-governed island have cast a shadow over this year's exhibition. A cloud hovers over the programme by the intense debate about artistic freedom in Cuba, triggered by the decision of artists Alexander Apóstol of Venezuela and Priscila Moge of Costa Rica to pull out of the biennial. The result of what Cuban cultural officials referred to as a "media campaign" against the island was the retraction of funds for the biennial pledged by institutions from the Netherlands and France. To confront the crisis, the organisers turned to the Cuban government, which at the last minute agreed to provide a low budget of 156,000 dollars, less than initially planned, but enough to go forward with the exhibition. (IPS, 3/11/03)

**November 4:** The Cuban Gazette, the official publication of the Ministry of Justice, published in its September 12 edition a note from the President of the Council of State, Fidel Castro, accepting Daniel Yail Pérez Legón's resignation as Attorney General. The note is followed by the appointment of Guillermo Hechavarría Trujillo to the position. Both Council of State agreements, dated August 5, were not published in the Cuban official press. (Cubanet, 4/11/03)

**November 4:** Alberto Martínez Fernández, a member of the dissident Christian Liberation Movement imprisoned at Combinado de Guantánamo, offered testimony of "all the atrocities that my family and I have to endure", since he began his peaceful opposition in 1990. Martínez Fernández denounced repression and physical abuse by members of the Cuban Department of

the State Security. (Puente Informativo, 5/11/03)

**November 5:** A museum to honor chocolate, from its historic cacao beginnings to its most tempting finished form, opened in the Cuban capital in recognition of the city's 484th anniversary. The recently inaugurated museum, located in the Cruz Verde House in Havana's historic district, will display a collection of porcelain "chocolateras" (pots for making hot chocolate) from different countries. The exhibit will feature other artifacts like copper containers and other pieces discovered in archeological excavations around the downtown area. The museum was sponsored by the Havana Historical Office in cooperation with a Belgian museum in an attempt to install a new cultural attraction in this part of the capital, which was declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1982. (EFE, 5/11/03)

**November 5:** A concert attended by Fidel Castro was offered at Lennon Park as the eighth Havana Arts Biennial continues in the Cuban capital. Castro watched artists cover a Sherman tank with white sheets to protest wars. The peace concert in Havana's Lennon Park drew at least 2,000 people. Yoko's sister Setsuko Ono, a sculptor and former World Bank loans official, took to the stage to praise communist-run Cuba for contributing to peace by building an egalitarian society with free access to education and health care for all. "The words peace, democracy and human rights are being manipulated by politicians around the world," Ono, 62, said. Castro, 77, looked tired as he listened to musicians play songs by the Beatles, whose music his government banned in the '60s and '70s. Cuba's National Choir closed singing Imagine in English. (Reuters, 6/11/03)

**November 5:** Cuba is to host an international forum on mathematics and informatics. The conference will be attended by experts from Mexico, Germany, Uruguay, Brazil and Honduras. Laudelino Solano, president of Sancti Spiritus Mathematics and Informatics Society, said the results of research on mathematics, informatics and teaching will be presented at the 8th International Congress (Compomat 2003) conference. (Caribbean Media Corporation, 5/11/03)

**November 5:** Aleida Guevara, daughter of Ernesto Ché Guevara, said in Moscow that the hunger strikes of Cuban political dissidents are not so because they do get liquids and proteins to prevent jeopardizing their lives. Guevara was replying to a question on the hunger strike of Cuban journalist and dissident Adolfo Fernández Sainz, correspondent in Cuba of the Russian news agency Prima. (EFE, 5/11/03)

**November 8:** Strains of conga music will be in the air along Havana's "Malecon" seaside drive as the Havana carnivals opened with a spirited children's parade. Some one hundred popular musical groups will play for street dances throughout the city. The parades will feature twelve ornate floats complete with musical groups and dancers aloft. There will be a special float carrying extravagantly costumed dancers from the famous Tropicana nightclub and there will be numerous groups of competing street dancing ensembles. The eight-day music and dance extravaganza is being held for the first time in November, coinciding with the 484th anniversary of the city of Havana. (Radio Habana Cuba, 8/11/03)

**November 11:** Cuba blanked Canada 5-0 to win the regional Olympic baseball qualifying tournament held in Panama City. Both teams qualified for the 2004 Olympics in Athens. (The Toronto Star, 9/11/03)

**November 11:** The experiences of Cuba in the application of homeopathy have been revealed in the 59th Pan American Medical Congress on Homeopathy, inaugurated in Havana. In the inauguration of the event, that gathers more than 250 delegates from 10 nations, including Cuba, was showed the efficiency of this therapeutic method in the control of bronchial asthma, diabetes mellitus, arterial hypertension, allergy, and other conditions. (AIN, 11/11/03)

**November 12:** Cuban farmers are working to make good years of deforestation and soil loss by planting trees on sensitive hillsides. The government pays land workers in the south-east of the

island to establish trees in designated areas - giving them a large bonus only if they survive. In many parts of Cuba, trees were cleared to grow tobacco and sugar cane. It resulted in unprotected soils - and even roads - being washed away by rain. (BBC, 12/11/03)

**November 13:** Cuban journalist Bernardo Arevalo Padron has been released from prison after serving a six-year sentence for anti-revolutionary activities, his friends say. He is the founder of the independent press agency Linea Sur Pres - which was banned by the Cuban authorities. In 1997 he was given a six-year prison sentence for "insulting" Fidel Castro. The Paris-based group Reporters Without Borders has said Padron was beaten during his detention and that he has deteriorated physically and psychologically. (BBC, 15/11/03)

**November 14:** The Independent Journalist María Josefa (Marilyn) Díaz Fernández and her husband Lázaro González Ávila, a member of the Christian Liberation Movement in Camagüey, were beaten and then arrested by State Security agents in Sancti Spiritus. María Josefa denounced to correspondents of independent Lux Info Press the arbitrary actions that the political police committed against her and her husband at the Bus Terminal in Sancti Spiritus. Their trip back home, where María Josefa planned to recuperate from a recent illness, was interrupted. Police checked their luggage where the couple had copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to distribute in her province. (Puente Informativo, 15/11/03)

**November 15:** A New Cuban vaccine has been released against "Hemophilia influenza type B", a bacteria that causes pneumonia and meningitis primarily in children up to five years of age. The technology to produce this vaccine, made from synthetic antigens, was jointly patented in 1999 by the University of Ottawa and the University of Havana. In statements to the press, Vicente Pérez, Head of the Chemistry Faculty's Synthetic Antigen Laboratory at the University of Havana, said that the vaccine is in the process of being patented in other nations and will begin to be used in Cuba in 2004. (Radio Habana Cuba, 15/11/03)

**November 15:** Relatives of inmates at the Aguadores prison, in Santiago de Cuba, informed that 21 political and common prisoners began a hunger strike, including poet and journalist Manuel Vázquez Portal. (Cubanet, 15/11/03)

**November 15:** Cuba is no longer one of the world's top destinations for sex tourism after five years of relentless police crackdowns, travel experts say. But another trend has emerged: More travelers are using the Internet to find prostitutes in Cuba. And rights advocates say that computer-assisted sex tourism is troubling because it makes it easier for men to sexually exploit Cuban women and teenagers. Police enforcement has driven many prostitutes off the streets, and in some towns, few can be found at all. Prostitutes, increasingly fearful of going to jail, spend more time dodging police than cavorting with customers. "It's terrible. The police are everywhere," said a 17-year-old who was looking for clients in Old Havana. "I don't think Cuba ranks any longer as a prime sex destination," said Christopher Baker, an award-winning writer and author of Moon's Cuba Handbook. "The Dominican Republic and Thailand continue to be the top destinations. Cuba is now in the second tier." Still, some sex tourists can't stay away from Cuba. And via the Internet, they share information on where to find women, how to approach them, what to say and what to pay. (The Dallas Morning News, 15/11/03)

**November 16:** The old clock that graces a tower located on Havana's Fifth Avenue, the only one of its kind in Cuba, is ticking and chiming again after not keeping time for several years. Declared a "symbol" of the Havana municipality of Playa in 1993, the clock is set in a 22-meter-(72-foot-) tall tower on one of Havana's busiest streets, at the entrance to the Miramar residential district. (EFE, 17/11/03)

**November 16:** Dance Cuba, a company of women, does more than blend the Cuban dance traditions. It turns aspects of folk dance, flamenco, ballet and Afro-Cuban dance into a theatrical kaleidoscope. Litz Alfonso, the troupe's director, has developed a style that emphasizes constantly shifting geometrical formations. As a performance at Broadway's New Victory Theater

revealed, her marvelously drilled dancers move with split-second precision and unflagging energy. There were moments when the pace and patterning became somewhat relentless, but monotony never became a problem because the program lasted only about 80 minutes. Instead, Dance Cuba's vigor set the audience cheering. Most of the choreography was by Ms. Alfonso, with additional contributions by Yanet Rodriguez and Liliet Rivera. (The New York Times, 21/11/03)

**November 17:** Cuban dissident groups joined forces on the island and boosted their ties with supporters abroad after Havana launched a massive crackdown on their activities in March, a veteran Cuban human rights activist said in an interview. "We have been working together for some time. Since March that cooperation was reinforced because it is a question of survival," Vladimiro Roca, a former political prisoner, told the press. "Relations with dissidents outside of Cuba have also been tightened, which shows the regime is in its final stage," he added. (AFP, 17/11/03)

**November 18:** Oppositionist Oscar Elías Biscet has been transferred to a punishment cell in Kilo 8 Prison, Pinar del Río, after refusing to share a cell with a prisoner sanctioned for killing an old man. In a note sent to his wife, Elsa Morejón, Biscet says that he is well, "even though I don't see the sky, always in the dark with a murderous companion that has caused twelve lesions." (Puente Informativo, 18/11/03)

**November 18:** The Fifth International Workshop of Women in the 21st Century got underway in the Cuban capital. Some 400 delegates from 21 countries are taking part in the event, which is being held at the University of Havana. The Workshop has been sponsored by the Federation of Cuban Women. (Radio Habana Cuba, 18/11/03)

**November 18:** In a phone interview with the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Cuban journalist Bernardo Rogelio Arévalo Padrón described physical and psychological torture at the hands of prison authorities. Arévalo Padrón was released after serving his six-year sentence on "disrespect" charges. "The allegations of torture are extremely troubling and warrant an immediate investigation," said CPJ Executive Director Ann Cooper, "and increases our concern for the other 28 journalists in jail in Cuba who have alleged mistreatment." (EFE, CPJ, 18/11/03)

**November 18:** The sons of the late Cuban singer Compay Segundo, who would have turned 96, said they would continue to play their father's music and announced events scheduled in his honor. The musical group "Compay Segundo and His Boys" - now led by Compay's son Salvador, with his other son Basilio singing backup like his father used to do - is recording an album on the Warner label and is planning to do another featuring previously unrecorded songs by the artist. (EFE, 18/11/03)

**November 19:** The director of Cuba's National Ballet, former prima ballerina Alicia Alonso, said that the defection of five young Cuban dancers on a recent tour of the United States was "painful." She said the dancers had recently graduated from dance school after seven years of training that was fully paid for by the Cuban state. "They are like kites that one builds carefully with rods, and string and paper. Then you launch them into flight and suddenly they break loose from the cord. It is sad how they fool themselves," Alonso said. (Reuters, 20/11/03)

**November 20:** There is a boom in the Cuban art market, which took off a decade ago and has collectors flocking to Havana from the United States, Europe and Latin America. Collectors purchase pieces that regularly fetch tens of thousands of dollars. Experts say collectors are enthralled by the excellence and sophistication of the island's artwork. Geoffrey Beaumont, a collector from San Francisco who was in Havana for the Biennial, said he purchased works from several top artists, including Sandra Ramos and Carlos Garaicoa. Beaumont said the quality of Cuban art "exceeded my expectations." "Somehow in the repressive environment, art is allowed to flourish and life is described by metaphor in the art," he said. "They are short on materials but they are extremely inventive." Cuba has long been a center for literature and culture in Latin

America, but the island's contemporary visual artists burst on the international scene in large numbers in the 1980s. (Chicago Tribune, 20/11/03)

**November 20:** More than 46,000 computers have been installed in Cuban schools. Currently, there are over 2,243,140 students of all levels taking computer courses given by over 218,560 teachers. (ANSA, 20/11/03)

**November 21:** Cuban education gives top priority to the teaching of mathematics and information technology, assured a director of the sector during the 8th COMPUMAT 2003 International Congress taking place at Camagüey's Higher Pedagogical Institute. Leonardo Forneiro, vice minister of education, told the press that over 10,000 information technology teachers have been trained in Cuba, aimed to teach this subject in all schools. (Prensa Latina, 21/11/03)

**November 21:** Oppositionist and prisoner of conscience Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello remains in the inmates' ward at the military hospital Carlos J. Finlay, in Havana, due to her frail health. (Cubanet, 21/11/03)

**November 23:** Fidel Castro's scientists have been churning out an impressive line of genetically engineered products, from fast-growing fish to recombinant vaccines and cancer therapeutics. Biotechnology Havana, a big conference held in the Cuban capital, aimed to bring together scientists and businessmen as part of the country's renewed search for risk capital from abroad. One of the most promising drugs promoted is a novel anti-cancer vaccine developed by Canadian YM Biosciences Inc. and Havana's Centre of Molecular Immunology. David Allan, boss of YMB, says that the drug is evidence of a Cuban ability to "think outside the box" in approaching cancer treatment. A big goal of this meeting was to dispel the belief that Cuban biotech has prospered by developing knock-off versions of already patented drugs: a common complaint against the drugs industries of poorer countries. Cuban officials say their country enforces international protocols, such as the World Trade Organisation's Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights agreement. (The Economist, 29/11/03)

**November 23:** Political prisoners Miguel Galván Gutiérrez, Pablo Pacheco Avila, Alexis Rodríguez Fernández and Manuel Ubals Gonzáles all confined at the Prison Agüica, in Matanzas, wrote in jail a document titled "A Call From the Presidio", smuggled out of the prison thanks to the help of families of the common prisoners, informed dissident sources. "Today, while the civilized world unites against international terrorism and more nations enjoy full democracies, we watch with sadness and indignation how in our homeland, government authorities persecute, imprison and revile some of its citizens, for simply dissenting", indicated the document. (Puente Informativo, 23/11/03)

**November 22:** The National Committee of the Young Communists League (UJC) has made several changes at its top ranks. In a special meeting, Hassan Pérez Casabona was appointed Education Secretary at the national level, while Yoan Cabo Mijares replaced Hassan at the head of the Federation of University Students (FEU). Other appointments were made at the national and provincial level as well. (Juventud Rebelde, 23/11/03)

**November 24:** The 15th Wemilere African Roots Festival, is dedicated to the culture of Cape Verde, according to the Organizing Committee. The reflection on African legacy will be featured with an artistic contest and creation workshops, video tape projections, galas, concerts, a literary forum and tours of Havana's historical villa of Guanabacoa, seat of the event. (Cuba Now, 24/11/03)

**November 24:** Cuban singers Silvio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés, founders of the musical movement Nueva Trova, recently started a long-distance debate over the harsh suppression of dissent, which has resulted in dozens of arrests the execution of three ferry hijackers in the spring of 2003. Milanés, author of the song "Yolanda", started the debate surprisingly criticising the lack of freedom of expression in Cuba saying in an interview with the Colombian Radio Caracol that

the government of Fidel Castro was making a mistake in not allowing open debate. But in an interview with ANSA, Rodríguez said that the revolution had the right to defend itself. Rodríguez, author of "Unicornio Azul" (Blue Unicorn), concluded by saying that he was disappointed by the fact that Europe had distanced itself from Havana because of the sentencing of the opposition members and had preferred to ally itself to such a fascist and reactionary government as that of the United States. (English Media Service, 24/11/03)

**November 24:** Members of the internal Cuban dissident movement released a declaration demanding an "immediate" amnesty for all political prisoners and the beginning of democratic changes in Cuba. The signatories of the document are Félix Bonné and René Gómez Manzano, both members of the banned "Assembly to Promote Civil Society", and Elsa Morejón, wife of dissident Oscar Elías Biscet, who was sent to jail at the end of last year. Among its twelve points, the declaration calls for the revocation of the current constitution. (EFE, 24/11/03)

**November 26:** With world wide web access restricted to only a few government-controlled web sites, increasing numbers of Cubans are hacking through Fidel Castro's censorship. The Internet offers ordinary Cubans a way to escape the clutches of a totalitarian society that regulates all flow of information. They can access unfiltered news from the outside world, and communicate with friends and family that have escaped to other countries. In Cuba, these web-surfing freedom fighters are called "informaticos." Basic internet service costs \$260 a month in Cuba. That's prohibitive, considering the average Cuban makes the equivalent of about \$192 per month. In other words, Castro has fixed it so that it's impossible for the average Cuban to afford legal access to the internet. But despite these many obstacles, the informaticos are finding a way to access the internet and circumvent Castro's censorship. Relying on the same ingenuity they use to keep 1960s-era cars running without spare parts, most informaticos acquire used laptops from friends in foreign countries and modify the hardware and software to get around government snooping and censorship. Informaticos access and trade banned web sites as text attachments, and even trade on the black market for internet passwords. They have developed their own code for words that raise red flags with government censors. (The Tallahassee Democrat, 26/11/03)

**November 28:** Patriarch Bartholomew I, spiritual leader of the world's 140 million Orthodox Christians, will visit Cuba for the first time in January to open a church, a Greek diplomat said. The small stone church with Byzantine arches and altar is being built in the garden of the cloisters of the Basilica of San Francisco in colonial Old Havana. The construction was funded entirely by Cuba's government as a gift to Orthodox Christianity and to the Istanbul-based Ecumenical Patriarchate. Most of the Greek community left after Castro's 1959 revolution. The only Orthodox church in Havana was abandoned and later became a children's theater. The building is now occupied by a theatrical company. (Reuters, 28/11/03)

**November 28:** A leader of the Cuban dissident movement Oswaldo Payá has not yet received authorization from the Cuban government to attend a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament in Brussels. As what happened in 2002 when Payá visited Strasbourg to receive the Sakharov Prize for human rights, the government may wait until "the last minute" before granting him permit. (Europa Press, 28/11/03)

**November 29:** A not-so-positive view of current times lurks behind most of the major works of art on show at the 8th Biennial of Arts, in La Cabaña and in the more than 100 parallel expositions at other venues throughout the city. A reflection of society with a multiplicity of readings can be found among the works by Cuban artists, with Cuban themes. "Autobiografía", a parallel show by Tania Brugueras at the National Museum of Fine Arts, includes a gallery painted completely white, with a rostrum, a microphone and sound equipment that emits revolutionary slogans with the sound distorted. A double line of television sets in which the screens have been replaced by black bars is what artist Yoan Capote has on show. Meanwhile, Adrián Rumbaut encloses typical scenes of Cuban everyday life in cages made of iron, some in the shape of houses. Only one cage is open. It holds a photo of a boy wearing the uniform of the "pioneers", a government-run organisation of school-age children. The boy is saluting the Cuban flag. It is a strong and well-

produced piece of art, "as one can feel the sensation of being enclosed just by entering a room that is only half-lit," said Gustavo Ramírez, an expert in art history. According to Ramírez, the Cuban presence in the biennial confirms a return to one of the predominant art trends of the late 1980s and early 1990s. "An art that is very open to social criticism, to debate," he said. (IPS, 29/11/03)

**November 30:** Thirteen people died and another 10 were injured in a rollover accident involving a truck on a road near the eastern Cuban city of Camagüey, some 530 kilometers east of Havana. The accident apparently occurred when the truck, with 35 passengers on board, passed another vehicle, left the roadway and rolled over, media outlets reported. (EFE, 30/11/03)

**November 30:** Five blind students at the "Antonio Suárez" school in Camagüey province are using JAWS, a sophisticated computer software for blind people. There are 91 students in the school, including blind, visually impaired, strabismic and partially sighted students. (Granma, 30/11/03)

## **Economy**

**November 2:** The 21st Havana International Exposition opened in Havana attracting about 1,300 enterprises from over 50 countries and regions throughout the world. At the opening ceremony at the Cuban exposition center, the secretary of the executive committee of the Cuban Council of Ministers, Carlos Lage Davila, said the participation of so many foreign companies in the exposition showed that the economic and trade blockade the United States has imposed on Cuba for the past 40 years is "unreasonable." The European Union participated with less stands than in previous years due to political tense relations with Havana. At same time, Cuban authorities did not visit the European stands as they used to do before. (Granma International, BBC, 3/11/03)

**November 3:** Spanish businessmen are still interested in doing business in Cuba, Spain's ambassador said in Havana during the inauguration of the international trade fair hosted every year by the island's communist regime, despite a significant drop in their participation at the gathering. More than 60 Spanish firms are taking part in the event. Ambassador Jesus Garcia, who toured the Spanish booths at the ExpoCuba fair, attributed the drop in participating Spanish companies - which amounted to more than 100 last year - to an interest by his country's businessmen in fairs devoted to specific economic sectors rather than a general forum. According to Garcia, the considerable drop in the number of European firms at the fair is not linked to the deteriorating diplomatic relations between Havana and EU countries, but to business trends and the island's economic situation. (EFE, 3/11/03)

**November 3:** Organizers of the 21st Havana International Exposition pointed out that there is a significant growth in the Latin American business sector at the fair this year, primarily from the Southern Cone countries. Argentina has an official pavilion for the first time, with a large group of representatives. Brazil's participation has also grown this year, with an official pavilion at the Trade Fair. Having an official pavilion means that it is sponsored by the country, which also funds part of the costs. Among the countries with pavilions are: Venezuela, Mexico, Spain, Germany, France, Belgium, Canada and Japan. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/11/03)

**November 3:** At the 21st Havana International Exposition, Roberta Lajous, Mexican Ambassador to Cuba, and Alejandro Roca, Cuban Minister of the Food Industry, inaugurated the Mexican pavilion at the Fair. In an area of over 300 square meters, Mexico exhibits agricultural products, building materials, and domestic appliances. (Granma, 4/11/03)

**November 4:** China has highlighted Cuba, Hungary, Croatia and Pakistan as nations it hopes Chinese tourists will visit. According to the report, Beijing's travel agencies hold a wait-and-see attitude for these newly opened tour destinations. (SinoCast, 4/11/03)

**November 6:** Cuba and Turkey initiated a bilateral collaboration program, during the 5th Session of the Joint Cooperation Commission that concluded in Havana. Both nations signed an agreement for a 10 million euros credit to Cuba for the purchase of Turkish products --raw materials, goods and equipments. (AIN, 6/11/03)

**November 7:** Starting in 2004, new regulations will be put in place regarding fishing activities in the Cuban shelf and territorial waters. Julio A. Baisre, head of regulations at the Ministry of Fisheries (MIP) said the ministry has decided to ban the use certain types of fishing lines - used mainly by state entities - as well as fishing in spawning zones. (Granma, 8/11/03)

**November 7:** Fidel Castro asserted that the great number of foreign signatures in the 21st International Fair of Havana, mainly from the United States, proves Cuban seriousness in business. These signatures deny those predictions that it was impossible to trade with Cuba, because it was not a serious country, Fidel Castro expressed. Castro was giving the closing speech at the awards ceremony for the International Fair, in Havana. He explained how the country makes more rational investments now. Rationality and control prevent excessive purchases and inventories, providing better assurances to people trading with the island that obligations will be met. It is true that the 21st version of the fair has not been the size of previous ones because of competing secondary events, but it has certainly been a high quality one, he pointed out. Ending his speech of almost two hours, Castro called for peace, friendship, and brotherhood among nations, which - he stressed - is what we have to pursue as members of this species, whose wisdom is what can save it from dangers of various kinds, from the existence of numerous nuclear weapons to new diseases. (Prensa Latina, AIN, 8/11/03)

**November 7:** Contracts for over \$150 million (130, 197 million euro) in exports and imports between Cuba and other countries were signed at the 21st International Havana Fair, Cuban Deputy Foreign Trade Minister, Pedro Luis Padrón, said. Among the major contracts were those signed with companies from China, Brazil, Argentina, Italy, Chile, Mexico, Panama and the US, the minister said. Padrón also informed that the companies at the 21st Havana Fair signed a letter of intention for mutual investments, according to which some \$17 million (14,76 million euro) will enter Cuba by the end of 2003. (Spanish News Digest, 10/11/03)

**November 7:** Sherritt International Corp.'s oil, gas and power generation businesses in Cuba have grown to the point where the Toronto-based company is mulling sales of some of its other holdings in the communist Caribbean island country. Sherritt, one of the largest foreign investors in Cuba over the last decade, said it will focus capital spending on its nickel and energy assets while pursuing 'strategic options for its limited hotel and soybean operations. "In our desire to touch as much of the Cuban economy as we have, we've made those investments. We feel it's important for our relationship with Cuba to be represented across as broad a span of that economy as we can be", Sherritt chairman Ian Delaney told analysts in a conference call about the company's \$20.6-million profit in the third quarter. "We'd gone about as far as we can go on the cellular business, so we sold that back to the Cubans", Delaney said. 'I think our concentration, our principal capital expenditures (in Cuba), will be in oil and gas and nickel and, potentially, electricity there.' (The Canadian Press, 7/11/03)

**November 8:** Cuba will purchase 50,000 tons of grain from China for 16.2 million US dollars. Both sides reached the agreement during the 21st International Fair of Havana, an event that has attracted the participation of 3,293 firms from 49 nations. (The People's Daily, 9/11/03)

**November 10:** Production at the Cuban Enterprise of Oil Drilling and Extraction from the Center (EPEPC) will grow this year by nine percent, reported the digital version of the local newspaper, Giron. Statistics provided to the press noted that this indicator represents 100 thousand tons more fossil oil than in 2002, for a total production of more than one million 741 thousand tons. The Enterprise working area is located in the western Cuban Province of Matanzas where one of the island's largest hydrocarbon reserves is located. The oil extracted from this zone is considered "Heavy" dense crude with high presence of sulfur and is used in Cuba for generating

electricity and in the cement industry. (Prensa Latina, 10/11/03)

**November 11:** SunCuba, a joint venture between Cuba's state-run Cubanacan Corporation and Suntime International Economic-Trading, plans to build Havana's biggest hotel as a symbol of the new-found camaraderie between Cuba and China. The venture is currently building a 700-room hotel in the Pudong business district of Shanghai. Cuba has imported 500,000 Panda-brand televisions and is assembling a similar number at the rate of 1,000 per day to replace burned out Soviet-era sets. Plans call for other household appliances to follow. China's Liaoning MECX Group signed a contract this year to supply Cuba's food processing industry with packing machinery and materials. A similar agreement to supply light industry was signed in 2002. As part of an effort to right the trade balance, China's National Minerals and Metals Nonferrous Company agreed this year to increase imports of unrefined nickel and cobalt. Cuba was also designated China's first official tourist destination in the Latin American region, a move the local leisure industry hopes will bring 20,000 Chinese to the island next year. (The Financial Times, 12/11/03)

**November 12:** Cuba plans to invest some \$74 million in the telecommunications industry this year, Cuban Information and Communications Minister Ignacio Gonzalez Planas said. At a meeting of the Hispanic-American Association of Research Centers and Telecommunications, Gonzalez Planas said investment in the telecom sector would result in service improvements in cellular telephony, particularly in remote areas. The minister added that these efforts were in response to the growing use of computer technology in Cuba and future applications of new technologies in infrastructure, an expanding computer culture and growing research, software and customer service industries. Gonzalez Planas said he expected Cuba's current national average of six telephone lines per 100 people and 14 telephone lines per 100 residents in the capital to improve this year. (EFE, 12/11/03)

**November 13:** The Cuban economy is expected to increase by 2 percent, an expert affirmed. According to Osvaldo Martinez, chair of the Cuban congressional Economic Affairs Committee, this increase will surpass that predicted by the Latin American Economic Commission (CEPAL) for the region. Cuban authorities had predicted an increase of 1.5 %, but Martínez said that figure has been half a point bigger this year. Martinez made the announcement during a lecture on the Cuban economy in the 1990s, at the 13th OLACEFS conference (Latin American and Caribbean Superior Fiscal Entities' Organization), that took place in Havana. (Prensa Latina, AFP, 13/11/03)

**November 13:** Cuba's fast-improving energy sector - with domestic oil production now at 4.1m tons a year and accounting for 80% of the country's energy needs - is expected to eventually ease the country's current economic woes. With domestic oil and natural gas production growing at 10% a year, Cuba has begun to meet most of its energy needs without the need for imports. The high density domestic crude oil that now provides 90% of Cuba's electricity needs has forced power stations to introduce costly conversions to cope with its high sulphur content. But the long term savings in foreign exchange and the reduction in power cuts are expected to provide a considerable boost to the economy. (BBC, 13/11/03)

**November 13:** Nutec, a UK company based in Aberdeen, has signed a contract with the Cuban government to train 100 Cuban engineers in operational skills and safety in the management of offshore oil-rigs, in preparation for the day when light crude oil starts to flow for the first time in the Cuban zone of the Gulf of Mexico. The first batch of ten Cubans have started the training course in Aberdeen. The British Ambassador in Havana, Paul Hare, told the press that "this kind of UK-Cuba cooperation fits very well with our policy of constructive engagement," in contrast to Washington's policy of continuing to impose a 41-year old trade embargo. (BBC, 13/11/03)

**November 17:** The Cuban government expects economic growth to exceed its 1.5 percent target for 2003, helped by high nickel prices, recovering tourism and good weather, Economy Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez said. "Growth will be higher this year, thanks to higher performance in some areas, such as agriculture, and a favorable international environment," the minister told the press in an interview. The president of the Economic Affairs Committee of Cuba's National Assembly,

Oswaldo Martinez, predicted GDP growth would speed up to 2 percent by year's end. "That's their estimate. We have no figure yet," Rodriguez said. He added: "No doubt it will be higher than the 1.5 percent we planned for this year." (Reuters, 18/11/03)

**November 17:** Between January and September disciplinary measures have been taken against 9,643 illegalities. Penalties ranged from fines to police operations. According to the official newspaper "Granma", specialists from the National Tax Office (ONAT) said to have supervised 49% of personal income tax returns submitted by taxpayers. (EFE, 17/11/03)

**November 18:** The 1st International Conference on Energy and the Environment concluded in the eastern Cuban province of Santiago de Cuba, after sessions where experts from over ten countries exchanged experiences on these key issues in modern society. Highlighting potentialities and unexploited reserves, professionals from universities and scientific research centers exposed on local achievements in the implementation of several variants in the use of renewable energy sources, particularly solar energy. The Eastern University and the Solar Energy Research Center, based in Santiago de Cuba, hosted the conference, with collaboration of the Universities of Maribor (Slovenia) and Zurich, (Switzerland) and Canada's Suncurrent Industries. (Prensa Latina, 18/11/03)

**November 18:** Cuba's poor sugar harvest this year and the continued decline in the product's international prices are taking a toll on the state coffers, dampening hopes for an economic surge despite successes in tourism, the country's new leading money earner, and other industries. The socialist government did not officially report the results of the harvest that ended in June, but sugar industry experts say output was 2.1 to 2.2 million tonnes. This marks a low point comparable only to harvests in the early 20th century and has forced Cuba to import sugar from Brazil or Colombia to comply with export contracts and to meet domestic demand. The island might have to turn to the United States as well. (IPS, 18/11/03)

**November 18:** Oil workers in Matanzas province have extracted a million and a half tons of oil, an unprecedented result since oil prospecting and extraction began in the 1970s. (Radio Rebelde, 18/11/03)

**November 19:** Ukrainian companies "Ukrinterenergo" and "Turboatom", together with the boiler plant of Barnaul, and with Spanish capital, have joined forces to rebuild and modernize the electricity generating units of Cuban plants. (ITAR-TASS, 19/11/03)

**November 19:** Special measures to prevent from hydro and biological erosion have been applied by Cuban scientists to over 8,000 hectares of land, in the hydrographic basin of the Toa river. Authorities have made huge investments in methods such as the establishing of vegetal barriers, construction of terraces and improvements of soils, affected by the superficial dripping of waters. The Toa River basin, in the North Western part of the island, is one of the most important basins of the Antilles. (AIN, 19/11/03)

**November 19:** Cuban agricultural production increased this year at lower costs in terms of fuel and other imported resources, said Cuban Vice-President Carlos Lage. Lage said that such a production can increase in order to supply agricultural marketplaces, where prices must continue to be observed with discipline, and thus improve the food supply for the population. (AIN, 19/11/03)

**November 21:** Cuba's struggling economy has been boosted by the successful export of its medical technology abroad, and by health tourism within the country. Today the medical sector ranks sixth in terms of exports and services, providing the country with vitally needed foreign exchange that was worth \$ 250m a year in 2002. Out of that figure biotechnology alone accounted for more than \$ 150m. During the last few years the biggest earner for Cuban biotechnology has been the export of Hepatitis-B vaccine to more than 30 countries. Cuba's cutting-edge products for neck and breast cancer have caused the biggest stir in the world of

biotechnology. They have just been licensed to a German pharmaceutical company, with rights to develop the drug TheraCIM h-R3 for the European market. If TheraCim h-R3 receives regulatory approval, it could become a standard cancer treatment in Europe in four or five years, with estimated sales of around \$3bn a year. Another growing source of income is health tourism, with a number of specialist hospitals, clinics, health spas and resorts catering to foreign visitors. Last year more than 5000 foreign patients travelled to Cuba for a wide range of treatments including eye-surgery, neurological disorders such as multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's' disease, and orthopaedics. (BBC, 21/11/03)

**November 21:** The Cuban livestock sector will conclude this year with signs of recovery, assured Agriculture Minister Alfredo Jordan. Though there is still much to be done in the sector, this year's milk production will close with about 20 million liters of milk more than in 2002, the minister told the press. Jordan and Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage attended an integral analysis of this farm sector in Sancti Spiritus, 217 miles east of Havana. This area, pointed out Jordan, has been the most difficult to recover, and this year's results are due to better climatic conditions, organization and control. Cuban ranchers will produce some 400 million liters of milk this year, of which, 255 million will be assigned to the dairy industry, the minister affirmed. (Prensa Latina, 21/11/03)

**November 23:** Because of shortages of buses, trains, spare parts and fuel, Cuba's transit system only accommodates 14 percent of the passengers it moved in the 1980s, before Soviet subsidies dried up. Under the hitchhiking system more than 2,200 transportation inspectors are assigned to 1,034 designated stands or rest stops across Cuba. There they wave down all state owned cars and trucks and match them up with passengers who are going in the same direction. The service costs only 3 pesos (15 cents) for the longest trips. Officials at Cuba's Ministry of Transportation estimate that between January and September inspectors secured about 45 million rides for passengers across the island. They expect that number to jump to 70 million by the end of the year. Wielding only a clipboard and whistle, the inspectors cannot issue fines to drivers who don't stop. While rides within city limits are relatively easy to secure, travelers with faraway destinations -- especially those going to the eastern provinces can wait for days. (Sun Sentinel, 23/11/03)

**November 24:** Believing it is not in debt to Russia, Cuba refers to financial problems between the two countries as mutual liabilities. Such comments were made at a Moscow press-conference by Cuba's First Deputy Foreign Minister Fernando Remírez, who is on an official visit in Russia. "Following the abrupt breakage of foreign economic relations with Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Cuban economy suffered a major damage," said Remírez. "Our links had been developing for thirty years and when all of a sudden all agreements were denounced, all projects either frozen or discarded and all joint programmes terminated, our economy entered into a crisis," he added. (Novosti, 24/11/03)

**November 24:** The Ministry of Finance and Prices and the National Association of Economists and Accountants have concluded the 5th Verification of Internal Controls in which 5000 government entities were inspected. It is striking to note the recurrence of problems like absence of internal control mechanisms, diversion of resources, financial indiscipline, lack of control over fixed assets, the violation of safety and protection measures and illegal sale of products destined fro state enterprises. (Opciones, 24/11/03)

**November 24:** The international demand for havanos, which contracted in 2002 due to a global economic crisis, started recovering gradually in June with an increase of 20% in sales in October, said a Cuban businessman. The president of the local business group Tabacuba, Oscar Basulto, indicated that since mid year there has been an increase in sales in the 122 countries where havanos are distributed. (AFP, 24/11/03)

**November 25:** Cuba and Syria remain Russia's largest foreign debtors, according to data released by the Russian Finance Ministry. The figures show that at the start of 2003, Cuba owed the equivalent of \$19.09 billion to Russia. The figures include substantial amounts denominated

in either Soviet rubles or so-called Transfer rubles, a notional settlement currency for trade between the members of the now-defunct Comecon. Analysts argue that in reality, Russia is ready to accept steep discounts to the nominal value of such debts. "Basically they just want acknowledgment that such debt exists and some suggestion of how it can be settled," said Alexei Moisseev, an analyst with Renaissance Capital in Moscow. (Dow Jones, 25/11/03)

**November 27:** Agricultural production should be less concerned with growth and focus more on the needs of the population, emphasized Carlos Lage, secretary of the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers, in a meeting with agriculture executives in Havana. The statement comes after a visible increase of certain vegetables and other products in the markets; however, there is a lack of variety. Some prices have decreased but still remain generally high and out of reach for most people. (Radio Progreso, 27/11/03)

**November 27:** The Brazilian government has granted Cuba major credit facilities under favourable conditions for the purchase in Brazil of buses and vehicles for tourism. The credit of \$12.7 million was arranged through the National Bank of Economic and Social Development (BNDES). (Radio Progreso, 27/11/03)

### **Exile Community**

**November 2:** During the inauguration of Miami's International Book Fair, Cuban writer Zoe Valdés said she feels very proud for having been considered by Fidel Castro "one of the Cuban Revolution's major enemies". "I am very proud that Fidel Castro said in a speech that the major enemies of the Cuban Revolution were Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Reynaldo Arenas and Zoé Valdés", said the writer at the presentation of her novel "Lobas de Mar" ("Sea Wolves"), winner of the 2003 Fernando de Lara Novel Award. (AFP, 3/11/03)

**November 21:** Pope John Paul II appointed Cuban exile Felipe de Jesús Estévez new auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Miami, announced the Vatican. In 1970, Monsignor Estévez was ordained priest for the diocese of Matanzas, Cuba. However, being exiled he could not perform his ordinance because he could not return to Cuba. (Europa Press, 21/11/03)

**November 22:** A few dozen middle-aged Cuban men sent by their parents to America in the early 1960s to escape Castro's communist regime, reunited at a dedication ceremony honoring the West Kendall camp as a Cuban exile landmark and Miami-Dade's newest park. More than 4,000 young boys who fled Cuba, including US Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Mel Martínez, Director of the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Eduardo Aguirre and Latin music icon Willy Chirino, spent time at the camp waiting to be reunited with their parents. (The Miami Herald, 23/11/03)

**November 25:** The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) supports a declaration from the Cuban internal dissidence calling for the rule of law on the island. "It is a matter of principle for our organization to support any initiative from Cuba to bring about a peaceful transition to democracy," said in a communiqué CANF President Francisco Hernández. (AFP, 25/11/03)

**November 25:** Saying the required payment had a "chilling effect" on free speech, a federal judge has ordered the city of Miami to refund more than \$36,000 in concert security costs charged to a controversial band reviled by some in the Cuban exile community. Four years ago, a Miami Arena appearance by Los Van Van, one of Cuba's most popular musical groups, drew protesters by the hundreds. Although the group's songs are not political, some exiles view the band -- whose name derives from a revolutionary slogan -- as a mouthpiece for Fidel Castro. The night of the concert, tensions between concertgoers and nearby protesters flared. Miami police, some in riot gear, made sure the show went on. But the heavy police presence led to another debate, one that dragged on long after arguments over Los Van Van's alleged political leanings died down: Who should pay for all those officers? Miami officials billed the arena, which in turn

billed the band. Band promoter Debra Ohanian was forced beforehand to accept such an agreement or lose her venue. (The Miami Herald, 28/11/03)

## **Foreign Affairs**

**November 1:** Cuba's Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque traveled to the UN headquarters in New York to consider a draft resolution condemning the US blockade of the island. The Cuban top government official intends to submit at the UN General Assembly the document which demands the unconditional lifting of the genocidal economic, commercial and financial US blockade of the island. (Radio Rebelde, 3/11/03)

**November 3:** Argentina will pressure its MERCOSUR partner Uruguay to drop its "intransigent" opposition to the idea of offering Cuba membership in Latin America's oldest free trade bloc, the Argentinean ambassador in Havana has said. "We would be doing a favor to the reality that is Cuba by integrating it into Latin America. The worst thing we could do is isolate it," Argentinean Ambassador to Havana, Raul Taleb, said. He also added that his government would seek to "persuade Uruguay to rise to the circumstances". The new Argentine Ambassador said that his country wants Cuba to join other Latin American countries to negotiate with the United States over a major free trade pact. Taleb said Castro and Kirchner see a strong alliance emerging between Cuba and Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina, countries that have swung left in recent years in a backlash against free-market economic policies advocated by Washington. (EFE, Reuters, 4/11/03)

**November 3:** The Cuban doctors' brigades posted in Honduras marked its fifth year after arriving there in the wake of Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Since then, Cuban doctors have treated 3.7 Hondurans living for the most part in remote areas, according to Cuba's Ambassador to Honduras, Alberto González Polanco. (EFE, 3/11/03)

**November 3:** Turkey's Minister of Justice Cemil Cicek stated he expected many good things to come out of the Fifth Session of the Cuban-Turkish Mixed Commission, which started in Havana. Cicek stated that there is a long distance between Cuba and Turkey, but the perspectives are very clear for widening bilateral links. (Prensa Latina, 3/11/03)

**November 4:** Cuban Basic Industry Minister Marcos Portal highlighted the friendly relations Canada has maintained with Cuba even in the most difficult moments, proving the feelings of both peoples and "the friendship ties that no one could break." During the celebration of Canada's Day at the 21st Havana International Fair (FIHAV 2003), the minister said the very important connections between both nations' businesses are working very well. Canadian Ambassador to Cuba Alexandra Baugaliskis stated that her country has been sending tourists to Cuba for seven years, and they have enjoyed a high level of quality, loyalty and commitment. Although with a lower number of enterprises represented in this 21st fair, Canada continues as second trade partner of the Island, with a 100-year-old exchange history. Baugaliskis highlighted continuous faithfulness in trade negotiations with Cuba, shown in investments and the common interest for "a better future for all Cubans." As something new this year, the Canadian Pavillion opened the photographic exhibit: Cuba-Canada: A look at 100 years of relations, which records the close commercial ties between the two nations, as well as those in culture and sports. (Prensa Latina, Granma, 4, 5/11/03)

**November 4:** Once again the European Commission has condemned through its External Relations Commissioner, Chris Patten, "the ill-treatment of dissidents by Cuban authorities." "The European Union firmly objects to the continued imprisonments and Cuba's break of the moratorium on the death penalty," said Patten in the European Parliament. (EFE, 4/11/03)

**November 4:** The Mexican Chamber of Deputies condemned the recent tightening by the US of the economic embargo against Cuba, calling it "foreign interference." (Reuters, 4/11/03)

**November 4:** For the 12th straight year, the UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to end Washington's four-decade old economic embargo against Cuba, which Havana has called tantamount to genocide. The annual roasting of the United States by friends and adversaries alike was approved by a record vote of 179 to 3 with two abstentions. Opposing the resolution were the United States, Israel and the Marshall Islands: Morocco and Micronesia abstained. Only seven countries did not participate in the voting: El Salvador, Nicaragua, Kuwait, Palau, Uzbekistan, Iraq, and Liberia. (Sun Sentinel, Granma, 4/11/03)

**November 5:** The Bahamian government is mistreating asylum seekers from Cuba and Haiti by not giving them forms in their own language and by detaining their children for prolonged periods without much exercise and education, Amnesty International said. In particular, the organization questions a Bahamian government policy that provides Cuban authorities with the full names, addresses, photos, and dates of birth of undocumented Cuban immigrants, potentially putting these individuals at risk upon their re-arrival in Cuba. (The Washington Post, 5/11/03)

**November 5:** Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, begins an official visit to Bahamas. The Nassau Guardian newspaper highlights the visit noting that Perez Roque met with government officials and local business people. (Granma, Prensa Latina, 5/11/03)

**November 5:** Ciénaga de Zapata is one of the natural areas of Cuba with a strong Canadian connection forged by World Wildlife Fund Canada, an organization that has helped fund and coordinate local conservation efforts across Cuba for the past 15 years. With the help of the Canadian International Development Agency and some support from the Canadian business community, WWF Canada has offered conservation expertise and helped provide what local biologists need most: funds to help advance long-term protection. An ironic benefit of the long-standing US embargo is that rampant tourism and habitat destruction have been curbed. But there are still forces that threaten Cuba's natural areas. In some cases, burgeoning tourism is a culprit, but often it's indiscriminate agriculture and forestry that are contributing to habitat destruction. (The Globe and Mail, 5/11/03)

**November 5:** Fidel Castro has been urged to release at least 24 jailed journalists, including three who have been on hunger strike since 18 October. The calls have come from the World Association of Newspapers and the World Editors Forum. The three prisoners, Mario Enrique Mayo, director of the independent press agency Felix Varela, Adolfo Fernández Saíz, a journalist with Patria Independent Agency, and Iván Hernández Carrillo, also a journalist, began the hunger strike to protest against the holding of Carrillo in a punishment cell. "We are particularly concerned about the poor physical condition of Mr. Mayo, Mr. Saíz and Mr. Carrillo, who have already been weakened by a previous hunger strike", the WAN and the WEF said in a letter to Castro, which called for the immediate release of the journalists. (Press Gazette, 6/11/03)

**November 5:** Cuba's highest-profile advocate for democracy called on the UN General Assembly to condemn "the cruelty" with which the Fidel Castro regime treats its political prisoners. Oswaldo Paya, this year's winner of the European Union's Sakharov Award for the promotion of human rights, issued a statement, the day after the General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to condemn the four-decade-old US embargo on trade with the Communist-ruled island nation. "If the governments represented in the United Nations are truly concerned about the welfare and the rights of the Cuban people, and are morally consistent, they must demand the Cuban government to stop its cruel and degrading treatment of political prisoners and release them," Paya said in a communique made public in Havana. "They must also demand the Cuban government respect human rights and the right of Cubans to peaceful changes leading to democracy," he added. (EFE, 5/11/023)

**November 6:** The second Cuban medical brigade arrived in the Bolivian city of Vallegrande to work for two years assisting the inhabitants of that place and its surroundings. Cuban professionals will work in this historical city, that kept for almost three decades the remains of

Argentinean guerilla Ernesto Che Guevara and those who fought with him. (AIN, 6/11/03)

**November 6:** The Cuban Foreign Affairs Ministry delivered a note during the visit by Minister Felipe Pérez Roque to Bahamas. The note highlights the interchange with Bahamians authorities on health, education, tourism, agriculture, drugs, and illegal migration. (Radio Rebelde, 7/11/03)

**November 6:** Argentina became a focus of public attention at the Havana International Trade Fair after announcing the sale, in cash, of 50,000 tons of wheat to Cuba and reiterating its interest in bringing Cuba into the MERCOSUR. Argentina's new Ambassador to Cuba, Raúl Taleb, said Argentina supports the integration of Latin America and it favours the creation of a "4+1" agreement between Cuba and the MERCOSUR (formed by Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil). (World Data Service, 6/11/03)

**November 6:** United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan, asked the United States to lift the economic embargo which it has imposed on Cuba for more than four decades. "What has been pointed out is that sanctions should be eliminated and I personally agree with that", said Annan in Santiago de Chile, where he's on a visit as part of tour of Latin America. (Europa Press, 6/11/03)

**November 7:** In response to a proposal from the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples, the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba agreed to confer the Medal of Friendship on Piero Gleijeses, the eminent intellectual of Italian origin and professor of Foreign Politics at John Hopkins University. Jorge Risquet Valdés, member of the Central Committee of the Party, pinned the medal on Gleijeses' chest as an acknowledgement of his reiterated demonstrations of friendship and solidarity with Cuba and its Revolution and for his contribution to publicizing the realities of the Cuban presence in Africa. (Granma International, 7/11/03)

**November 8:** Spain and Portugal criticized the way Cuban authorities have treated diplomatic missions accredited in Havana. However, they are willing to dialogue. These pronouncements are part of the conclusions of the Spanish-Portuguese Summit, which took place in Figueira da Foz, Portugal, under the presidency of the respective heads of states of Spain and Portugal, José María Aznar, and José Manuel Durao. (El Nuevo Herald, 9/11/03)

**November 8:** Clara Chepe, mother of dissident imprisoned Oscar Espinoza Chepe, has sent a letter to the Ibero-American Heads of State that will meet in Bolivia. In the letter, Clara denounces the ill treatment received by her son in jail, and asks the leaders to vote against Cuba at the 2004 UN Human Rights Commission, in Geneva. (Cubanet, 8/11/03)

**November 9:** Around 11,000 Cuban intelligence agents would have entered Venezuela in the course of a month in order to "defend" President Hugo Chávez's government, reported the local press. The daily El Universal indicated the agents arrived in the Maiquetía airport in 73 flights from Havana between September and October. (Notimex, 9/11/03)

**November 10:** Cuban ambassador in Botswana Ana Vilma Vallejera announced that another contingent of Cuban doctors and other health specialists will soon be sent to Botswana to help in the struggle against AIDS. Vallejera highlighted that most of this specialized staff will go to the City of Francistown. (Prensa Latina, 10/11/03)

**November 10:** A report by Amnesty International states that "cases of spurious criminal charges filed against human rights activists, including journalists, and complaints of defamation or other forms of desacato (disrespect to authority) offences have risen dramatically over the last two years, especially in Cuba, Guatemala and Colombia". Speaking from Brazil during her first visit to the country, Irene Khan, Amnesty International's Secretary General, launched the report "Essential actors of our time: Human Rights defenders in the Americas. "Human rights activists are an essential component of an open civil society," Ms Khan said. (Amnesty International, 10/11/03)

**November 11:** Prominent Cuban dissident Oswaldo Paya made an impassioned appeal to organizers of an Ibero-American summit to speak out on human rights in communist-ruled Cuba. "Silence has been the watchword at all the summits," Paya said in a letter released to the foreign media, even "given the grave human rights situation in Cuba." The letter says that denial of "space" for reading of the message would "extend to the Summit the regime of exclusion that reigns in Cuba." The document recalls that during the 1999 Summit in Havana, Cuban dissident groups issued the "All United" manifesto which proclaimed "the peaceful vocation and the shared principles and values of the majority of non-governmental Cuban organizations." In the document, Paya notes that ever since the Havana conference, he has sent similar missives to every Ibero-American summit, "calling them to solidarity with the Cuban people," and urging them to demand that the island's communist regime "fulfill its commitments to respect human rights and democratize" Cuba. He points out that the majority of the activists who co-signed those documents with him every year are among the 75 peaceful dissidents who were summarily sentenced by Havana to long prison terms in March. (EFE, AFP, 12/11/03)

**November 11:** Venezuela's Supreme Court threw out the government's appeal of a lower court's decision to suspend a program putting hundreds of Cuban doctors to work in Caracas slums. The decision was a blow to a program that President Hugo Chávez has hailed as a cornerstone of his professed "revolution" for Venezuela's poor majority. The program is one of several initiatives into which the government has poured millions of dollars ahead of a possible recall referendum on Chávez's rule next year. The ruling was a victory for Venezuela's medical establishment, which argues the so-called "Inside the Slum" program violates laws requiring foreign doctors to pass equivalency exams before practicing in Venezuela. Chávez's political foes claim the program seeks to indoctrinate the poor with socialist ideals, charges the government denies. (The Miami Herald, 12/11/03)

**November 11:** Two years after relations with Mexico entered the deep freeze, Mexican officials have said they are ready to discuss warmer ties with Havana at a high-level meeting. Mexican Deputy Foreign Minister Miguel Hakim Simón said that Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and his Mexican counterpart Luis Ernesto Derbez would probably meet at the upcoming Ibero-American Summit in Bolivia. "The meeting is planned with the aim of continuing to work at all levels" to improve relations," Hakim told a news conference. "It is a fact that we want to better these ties," he added. (EFE, 12/11/03)

**November 12:** The 13th assembly of OLACEFS (Latin American and Caribbean Superior Fiscal Entities' Organization) began sessions in Havana with the participation of one hundred delegates and guests from 30 countries. Cuban Audit and Control Minister Lina Pedraza told press that the meeting will allow for the exchange of ideas and experiences, promote relations and cooperation, and present Cuba's experiences in this field. Cuba has been an OLACEFS member since 1991, has participated in training courses within the organization, and has signed agreements with other members, mainly in technical cooperation, science, and culture. (Prensa Latina, 12/11/03)

**November 13:** Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage is en route to Bolivia to attend the XIII Ibero-American Summit in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Lage will preside over the Cuban delegation at the meeting of heads of State from Latin America, Spain and Portugal that will have the challenge of finding solutions to the main social problems of those nations, as identified in the 12 previous summits. A note in Granma daily informed that Chancellor Felipe Pérez Roque, Assistant Chancellor Pedro Nuñez Mosquera, and the Cuban Ambassador to Bolivia Luis Felipe Vázquez are among those accompanying Lage to deal with the central theme of the Summit: Social inclusion, the motor of development, as well as in the bilateral encounters normal for this forum. (Prensa Latina, 13/11/03)

**November 13:** Cuban dissidents released a letter addressed to the Ibero-American leaders gathering in Bolivia, reminding them that while they discuss issues with representatives of the Castro regime, scores of prisoners of conscience are languishing in Cuban jails. Two coalitions claiming to represent more than 90 percent of Cuba's internal opposition called for a review of

how each of the countries participating in the Ibero-American Summits "fulfills or breaches" resolutions adopted at the annual conclaves. Representatives of the All United Movement and the Assembly for the Promotion of Civil Society provided journalists with the text of the letter. The activists complained about the crackdown earlier this year that landed 75 dissidents, independent journalists and human rights activists in prison for terms averaging 20 years. As a result of these arrests, they said, Cuba has become the world leader in the number of prisoners of conscience relative to the size of its population. And even for those outside of jail, "the life of most of our fellow citizens is characterized by total deprivation of civil and political rights," the letter reads. (EFE, 13/11/03)

**November 13:** Cuba's Vice President Carlos Lage stated that a busy work agenda prevented Fidel Castro from attending the 13th Ibero-American Summit of Heads of States and Governments. When meeting a group of journalists at Tajibos Hotel, venue of the summit of 21 Latin American nations, Spain and Portugal, Lage stated that "everybody knows the Cuban leader's intense dedication, and his personal and conscientious attention to special domestic programs". Lage explained that the president dedicates considerable time to internal social programs and the country's foreign relations, which are led by him. These are the reasons that prevented Fidel Castro from being in Santa Cruz, which "he asked us to pass on to Bolivian President Carlos Mesa", said the vice president. (Prensa Latina, 13/11/03)

**November 13:** A Cuban official delegation, headed by Minister of Government Ricardo Cabrisas, arrived in St. Lucia. The Cuban minister is attending CARICOM's 3rd Special Meeting of the Council for Development, Economy and Trade and the 9th Special Meeting of Heads of State. (Radio Rebelde, 14/11/03)

**November 14:** The first Joint Commission Cuba-Sudan was concluded with the signing of five bilateral agreements between the two countries. Yousif Suleiman Takana, the Sudanese Minister for International Cooperation, said the meeting was the beginning of a new era in relations between the two countries. During his visit to the island the Sudanese diplomat held talks with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque and the Deputy Ministers of Public Health, Education, Agriculture, the Sugar Industry, Trade and Sports. (Radio Habana Cuba, 15/11/03)

**November 14:** Foreign Minister of Mexico, Luis Ernesto Derbez, and of Cuba, Felipe Pérez Roque, discussed the main issues on the bilateral agenda at a meeting in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. This is the second high-level meeting between the two nations in less than two months. (Europa Press, 14/11/03)

**November 14:** The Czech Protestant Church urged the Cuban government to release all political prisoners. In a letter sent to the Cuban embassy in Prague, leaders of that religious group said to be sending a message in favour of the 75 human rights activists and dissidents sentenced to between 15 and 28 years in jail earlier this year. (Radio Martí, 14/11/03)

**November 14:** Several anti-Castro organizations sent a letter to the heads of state meeting at the Ibero-American Summit in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. The letter calls for Cuba's exclusion of international fora. (Puente Informativo, 18/11/03)

**November 14:** A group that defends media freedom and imprisoned journalists worldwide has urged heads of state in Latin America, Spain, and Portugal to press the regime of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro to release 75 political dissidents, who earlier in 2003 were arrested and sentenced to up to 28 years in prison. "Reporters Without Borders" said in a statement at the opening of the two-day Ibero-American Summit held in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, that the dissidents were working to "build democracy and the rule of law" in Cuba. Such work corresponded with the final declaration issued at the 2002 Ibero-American summit, said Reporters Without Borders. The imprisoned dissidents include journalists, human rights activists, trade unionists, librarians and political activists. (AFP, 14/11/03)

**November 16:** During a conversation with reporters, Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage expressed his satisfaction for the results of the meeting of Iberoamerican Heads of State and Government. Lage underscored the idea contained in an accord to set up a General Secretariat of these summits. He considered very important to follow standards and avoid bureaucratization. (Radio Rebelde, 16/11/03)

**November 16:** Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage addressed a mass rally at the Tahuachi Stadium in Santacruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. Lage was a speaker at the rally, together with Bolivian activist Evo Morales and Venezuela's president, Hugo Chávez. According to a report, it was an emotional moment of the rally, which closed the Alternative Social Forum to the 13th Ibero American Summit. (Radio Rebelde, 16/11/03)

**November 17:** A Cuban diplomat defended his country's literacy program for New Zealand's Maori minority, rejecting charges that the project was a veiled attempt at Marxist indoctrination. "In its cooperation with the Maori community, Cuba is not going to indoctrinate or export any political or economic model," ambassador Miguel Ramirez said in a statement published in local newspapers. "We only want to contribute to a higher standard of living for this part of the population," he explained. (EFE, 17/11/03)

**November 17:** In Havana, delegates from 30 countries from Latin America and the Caribbean began discussions on fostering basic products in the region, confirmed the event's organizers. The regional gathering is fostered by the Cuban Foreign Trade Ministry and the Common Fund for Commodities, based in Holland, and will explore the possibility to finance long-term projects for sustainable development. (Prensa Latina, 17/11/03)

**November 17:** Cuba said that foreign debt is one of the obstacles to the development of economies which depend on exporting raw materials. Cuban Economy and Planning Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez said protectionism and agricultural subsidies are two other obstacles that hamper the economic growth of poor nations. Rodriguez, addressing the opening ceremony of the regional Round Table of Promotion of Basic Products in Latin America and the Caribbean, also said the intent to control basic products like petroleum was behind the United States' aggressive policies on anti-terrorism. (Xinhua, 18/11/03)

**November 18:** Cuba reiterated its denunciation that the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) is a US economic domination instrument, at the opening session of the 6th Regional Meeting of the Round Table Discussion on the Development of Basic Products in Latin America and the Caribbean. The FTAA is a US mechanism to exploit and absorb Latin American countries, warned Cuban Economy Minister José Luis Rodríguez. (Radio Rebelde, 18/11/03)

**November 18:** Cuban sports authorities reiterated their interest in making the island an Olympic host. Cuban Olympic Committee president Jose Fernandez told the local press that the country meets every condition to organize the Olympic Games. Fernandez reminded that the island is one of the bidders for the 2012 Olympics and pointed out that next June, it will be known whether or not the country will become a candidate or be eliminated. (EFE, 18/11/03)

**November 18:** Nicaraguan poet and priest Ernesto Cardenal rejected once again the application of the death penalty; however, he regretted that only Cuba is condemned for applying it against the three hijackers of a ferry and not other nations like the United States, which also apply such extreme punishment. Cardenal is in Havana attending the launching of his books at Casa de las Américas. (AP, 18/11/03)

**November 19:** Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Fernando Remírez began a visit to Russia to strengthen inter-ministerial contacts and bilateral relations between Havana and Moscow. Two official Russian delegations, one from the Foreign Affairs Ministry and the other from the Federation Council -- the Upper Chamber of the Russian parliament -- recently visited Havana. They advocated improved relations between the two countries and called for an end to

Washington's hostile policies against the Cuban Revolution. (Radio Habana Cuba, 21/11/03)

**November 20:** A Spanish documentary about Cuban refugees in the United States is on the short list of films to be nominated for an Academy Award. The film, "Balseros", tells the stories of seven Cubans who fled their communist-ruled homeland and recounts their lives in the United States. It was directed by Spaniard Carles Bosch and Josep M. Domenech and has been well received this year at several US film festivals. (EFE, 20/11/03)

**November 20:** The International Labor Organization is blasting the communist government of Cuba for its systematic repression, including the jailing on trumped-up charges, of would-be union organizers. In a report issued in Geneva, the UN agency's Committee on Freedom of Association pointed to "the long-standing issue of the authorities' recognition of only one trade union central, which is controlled by the state and by the Communist Party, and the consequent prohibition of independent trade unions." (EFE, 20/11/03)

**November 20:** The United Nations labor agency considers Cuba as "an urgent case". The 177-nation International Labor Organization (ILO) cited Cuba and Zimbabwe "for infringements of the principle of freedom of association and violation of trade union rights." In the case of Cuba, the ILO noted "the extremely harsh sentencing" of seven officials of independent trade unions, who were sentenced to between 15 and 26 years imprisonment. The Cuban government prohibits any unions outside the sole recognized trade union, which is controlled by the state and by the Communist Party, ILO said. (The Washington Post, 21/11/03)

**November 23:** The Cuban anti-doping laboratory has received official certification by the Director of the International Olympic Committee's Medical Commission, Patrick Schamasch. Schamasch handed over the certification to Mario Granda, Director of the Sports Medicine Institute, who called the certification something very valued. (AIN, Notimex, 23/11/03)

**November 23:** Cuban and Malaysian delegations concluded a five-day working session in Kuala Lumpur after evaluating current bilateral commercial relations and their prospects. Cuban Communications Deputy Minister Magali Gonzalez headed the Cuban delegation, which also included the Vice President of the Cuban National Bank Benigno Regueira and representatives of commercial, financial and educational entities. (AIN, 23/11/03)

**November 24:** Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Fernando Remírez de Estenoz has expressed his optimism about the island's relations with Russia. At the end of an official visit to Moscow, the Cuban official stated that "both sides agree on the need to advance in the development and strengthening of bilateral relations." Cuba's deputy foreign minister told reporters at a news conference in Moscow that there are prospects to develop greater interests and benefits in trade between Cuba and Russia, especially in the areas of tourism, machinery, the construction industry and the scientific-technical sphere. (Radio Habana Cuba, 24/11/03)

**November 24:** The European Union (EU) has announced that it will not enter into political dialogue with Cuba in December, as it has done for the past two years, and that it has no intention of revising its common position on the island. In an interview with the press, an official said that the basis for meeting simply was not there. Such meetings have been held annually since 2001. The next one was due to take place in the Cuban capital, Havana, next month but a recent crackdown on dissidence on the island followed by diplomatic sanctions from the EU have soured relations. (WMRC Daily Analysis, 25/11/03)

**November 24:** The Spanish government refused to regularize the situation of a former Cuban high-ranking official who requested protection, informed the digital newspaper Libertad. Although it does not disclose his name, the paper indicates the claimant is a former member of the "Central Commission of Officials", who are directly appointed by the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers. (Encuentro en la Red, 24/11/03)

**November 24:** World Trade Organization (WTO) General Director Supachai Panitchpakdi is completing a comprehensive work agenda in Cuba, as part of a tour that also includes Honduras and Guyana. His program on the island includes meetings with Council of Ministers Executive Committee secretary Carlos Lage, Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Perez Roque, and Congressional Economic Committee chair Osvaldo Martinez, among other officials. On his arrival in Cuba, the WTO general director highlighted that the objective of this regional trip is to increase the countries' participation in the Doha Development Round, launched at the 2001 ministerial meeting in Qatar. (Prensa Latina, 14/11/03)

**November 25:** The Committee to Protect Journalists is honoring Cuban journalist Manuel Vázquez Portal and three other journalists with its 2003 International Press Freedom Awards. Mr. Vázquez, serving an 18-year prison term in Cuba, won't be traveling to New York City's Waldorf-Astoria to pick up his prize. But his wife, Yolanda Huerga, 44, said he knows about the award. "I told him about it by telephone and there was silence. He was surprised. And later, after he recovered from the shock, he told me it's an award for all of Cuba's jailed journalists. He's very proud." Mr. Vázquez, 52, was among 75 dissidents, pro-democracy activists, librarians and journalists - some sentenced last spring to up to 28 years in prison - after the biggest crackdown on the political opposition in decades. (The Dallas Morning News, 25/11/03)

**November 25:** The musicians of late son singer Francisco Repilado, known around the world as Compay Segundo, will be invited by Pope Juan Paul II to Christmas celebrations in December. Salvador Repilado told the press about the friendship between the Holy Pontiff and other Church authorities with his father, and the group's performance in the Vatican in 2001. As part of the celebrations for the 96th birth anniversary of Compay Segundo, US actor Michael Douglas and his wife, actress Catherine Zeta-Jones, invited the orchestra to Mallorca for a charity event by the foundation over which the Oscar winner presides. (Prensa Latina, 25/11/03)

**November 25:** The head of the World Trade Organization shared views about global economic problems with Fidel Castro before wrapping up his visit to the island. "During the meeting with the president it was most interesting for me to learn of his global will, to learn of his concerns on behalf of developing countries," WTO director general Supachai Panitchpakdi said in comments aired on Cuba's state television. "I was impressed by many remarks," Panitchpakdi said. "But one of the remarks I was most impressed with is that he realizes that this is a chaotic world but at least the WTO is doing its best to make sense of this world." (AP, 25/11/03)

**November 26:** Cuban immigrants in Spain asked President José María Aznar to adopt "a consistent position" with regards to Cuba and allow them to regularize their situation in that country as political refugees. "We think it is a contradiction that on the one hand the government seems to understand the Cuban people live in a dictatorship and on the other, it turns down almost automatically all requests for political asylum, visa exemption, or regularization by a job offer," indicated a document released in Madrid by the Cuban Centre of Spain and the Spanish-Cuban Foundation. (El Nuevo Herald, 27/11/03)

**November 27:** Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque maintained that encouraging signs surround the future of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), while emphasizing that the 4th Summit of Heads of States and Government should relaunch the forum. In statements to the press, Perez Roque asserted that the ACS Foreign Affairs ministers meeting taking place in Panama has great importance, as it will complete preparations for the Summit scheduled for February 2004. A new Secretary General will be elected, he explained, and the final touches put on air transport collaboration proposals and the protocol to declare the Caribbean a sustainable tourism zone. (Prensa Latina, 27/11/03)

**November 27:** President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva granted an official audience to Havana's Ambassador to Brazil Jorge Lezcano. The diplomat is soon to conclude his mission in the South American nation. Lezcano told the press that Lula's gesture of receiving him amidst his tight agenda including a tour of the Middle East "is an example of the level of the bilateral relations."

The Brazilian government had presented the Cuban diplomat with the National Order "Cruz Azul", in a meeting to honor him at the Itamaraty Palace. (Prensa Latina, 27/11/03)

**November 27:** Cape Verde Foreign Affairs Minister Dr. Maria de Fatima Lima da Veiga considers the cooperation with Cuba is very positive and that such collaboration has had an important impact on education, public health and agriculture. At the opening of the 13th Inter-Governmental Joint Commission between the two countries, the official predicted more promising results in sports, environment, tourism and assistance to youth. (Prensa Latina, 27/11/03)

**November 27:** Cuba has told European diplomats not to bother sending Christmas presents this year. That's how much relations have soured since the Europeans waged a "cocktail war" over human-rights issues on the island, diplomats said. Fidel Castro's government has closed its doors to European diplomats in Havana, in retaliation for European criticism of Castro's crackdown on dissent. According to diplomats, the EU complained to Cuba that the lack of access keeps its embassies from functioning properly as provided for in the Vienna Convention. The freeze-out is hindering consular matters, leaving visiting European tourists at risk, and also causing problems for businessmen, the Europeans complained. A Cuban official replied that the EU was meddling in Cuba's internal affairs, one diplomatic source said. (Reuters, 28/11/03)

**November 27:** Venezuela's President, Hugo Chávez, gave Fidel Castro a 2000 series Falcon 900 jet. The aircraft - acquired by the Venezuelan state company PDVESA, at a cost of de \$27 million - "will be at Fidel Castro's disposal, though it will retain Venezuelan registration." According to information published in the Caracas daily El Nacional, Cuban pilots and crew are training in Panama to learn to fly the plane. (El Nuevo Herald, 30/11/03)

**November 28:** The Olympic committees of China and Cuba have expressed their will to strengthen the sports cooperation on the way of the Beijing 2008 Olympiad. This was mentioned during a meeting between the head of the Cuban Olympic Committee, José R. Fernández, and the Undersecretary General of the Chinese Olympic Committee, Wang Jun, who arrived in the Cuban capital. (Xinhua, 28/11/03)

## Security

**November 5:** Putting together common policies on disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean, policies expected to influence the world, is one of the objectives of the regional conference that began in Havana. Over 150 delegates from 50 nations, including 33 Latin American and Caribbean signers of the Tlatelolco Treaty, are attending the 28th OPANAL session (Proscription of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean). Seven international organizations and 12 NGOs are also participating in the Havana meeting. The main objective is to declare Latin America and the Caribbean the first densely-populated zone on the planet, free of nuclear weapons. Enrique Román Romey, a representative of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, is attending the Conference. OPANAL is an inter-governmental organism created as a result of the 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco. Cuba ratified the Treaty of Tlatelolco on October 23, 2002. (Radio Rebelde, Prensa Latina, 5/11/03)

**November 5:** Opening the 18th OPANAL Conference in Havana, Fernando Remírez de Estenoz, first deputy minister of foreign affairs, affirmed that "despite continuing to be the victim of the blockade, aggression and threats, our country's military expenditure has not grown; on the contrary, it has dramatically fallen in the last 10 years, while we have decided to maintain and increase spending in the sectors prioritized by our Revolution: education, public health, social security, culture and sports." (Granma International, 7/11/03)

**November 6:** The approval of the Havana Declaration, in the regional conference on nuclear disarmament, has a transcendental value, establishing a common position in Latin America and the Caribbean toward the threat of these weapons, affirmed Ricardo Alarcon de Quesada,

president of the Cuban Congress, who closed the OPANAL session (Organism for the Proscription of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean) To declare the region a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (FZNWs) was one of the essential objectives of this two-day meeting at the Havana Conference Center. Alarcon stressed that it is not enough that the Tlatelolco Treaty ratify the commitment to only use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, because if there are military enclaves within their borders, there are actions contrary to its object. It is not enough for the Zone to apply the Treaty, he emphasized, if some powers appropriate the right to use atomic weapons in determined circumstances in this nuclear-free territory. (Prensa Latina, 6/11/03)

**November 20:** Current developments across the world have prompted Moscow and Havana to further strengthen their cooperation, Russian Security Council Secretary Vladimir Rushailo said. "The acute nature of the current situation in security matters throughout the world underscores the need for strengthening and advancing Russian-Cuban cooperation," Rushailo said at a meeting with Cuba's First Deputy Foreign Minister Fernando Remirez in the Kremlin. During their meeting, Rushailo and Remirez addressed a wide range of security issues, according to a Security Council press release. "The two men exchanged their views on a wide range of issues of international security, strategic stability, disarmament, the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the fight against international terrorism. The situation surrounding Afghanistan and Iraq was discussed as well," the press release says. (Interfax, 20/11/03)

## **Terrorism**

**November 6:** Rogelio Pfirter, General Director of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), visited the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology. Pfirter praised the cooperation received from Cuban authorities during the on-site inspection of two Cuban facilities that utilize organic chemical substances in the manufacturing of various products. "Both verifications were positive and confirmed the information given by (Cuban) authorities in a report on last year's industrial operations," said Pfirter. (AIN, Europa Press, 7/11/03)

**November 10:** The US Supreme Court agreed to hear two appeals over whether hundreds of terrorist suspects in secret custody are being held unlawfully. The case involves the overseas detention of some 660 men from about 40 countries, said to be al Qaeda or Taliban fighters. Some have been held for as long as two years at the US Navy base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, without access to lawyers or family. (CNN, 10/11/03)

**November 10:** Omar Khadr, a Canadian teenager held at Guantanamo Bay, is blind in one eye and can't use one of his shoulders, his grandmother said. Canadian officials, who have visited the 17-year-old at the US military base where he is held in Cuba, have never publicly mentioned such injuries. Representatives from Canada's Foreign Affairs Department said they would try to confirm the extent of Mr. Khadr's injuries. The US military says Mr. Khadr tossed a grenade that killed a 28-year-old Army medic during a 4½-hour gun battle in a remote Afghan village in July, 2002. He was 15 at the time. Mr. Khadr was shot twice in the chest by U.S. soldiers as they raided the building in which he was hiding with other suspected al-Qaeda members. He was the only one of the group captured alive. Mr. Khadr is now being held without charge. (The Globe and Mail, 10/11/03)

**November 24:** The US has returned 20 people held at Guantanamo bay in Cuba to their countries of origin - only to bring in 20 new prisoners from an undisclosed location. This means the US naval base still holds some 660 people suspected of terrorism, many seized two years ago in Afghanistan and Pakistan. So far 84 have been released in their countries, and four have been transferred to Saudi prisons. (The Guardian, 25/11/03)

**November 24:** A Canadian citizen has been quietly released from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and those close to him say he wants to return to Toronto to talk about his two years as a detained

terrorist suspect. Abdul Rahman Khadr, who turns 21 next month, has been released back to Afghanistan, where he was arrested as an alleged al-Qaeda fighter two years ago. But supporters of Mr. Khadr say Canada is refusing to let him come home. Canadian officials had tried but failed to visit Abdul Rahman Khadr while he was locked up as one of nearly 700 uncharged enemy combatants in Cuba. He is now a free man somewhere in the Middle East. This much was confirmed by Canada's Foreign Affairs Department. "Canadian government officials were made aware a few weeks ago that Mr. Khadr would be released," said spokesman Reynald Doiron. "Privacy concerns limit our ability to provide information on his current whereabouts." (The Globe and Mail, 25/11/03)

**November 31:** More than 100 prisoners will be released from US custody at the detainment camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and more will follow, military officials said. The first of two new transfers is scheduled for the end of December, and the other in January. The official did not say where the prisoners would be sent and a military spokeswoman declined to provide details about future transfers from the US base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. (AP, 1/12/03)

**November 31:** Ending a long odyssey that took him from a Cuban prison camp to Afghanistan and the Balkans, former Guantanamo Bay detainee Abdul Rahman Khadr returned to Canada, flying into Toronto's Pearson Airport from London. Mr. Khadr looked to be in good physical health, but said he had been treated poorly at the US detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. (The Globe & Mail, 31/11/03)

## **US-Cuba Relations**

**November 1:** The US special envoy for Latin America condemned the presence of Cuban intelligence operatives in Venezuela. Otto Reich said "the only involvement by intelligence operatives Venezuela has told me about are Cuban operatives, and I think that is no secret," said Reich in an interview with Caraca's Quinto Día. (El Tiempo, 3/11/03)

**November 2:** At the fair ground's most visible pavilion, after the central building reserved for Cuban companies, the US food companies had set up 26 stands. A banner above them read: "The New Flavor of Cuba." The banner was decorated with packs of Clorets, Dentine, Trident, Chiclets and other brand-name US products. "The presence of US companies is evidence of the growing movement in that country for trade and normal relations," Foreign Trade Minister Raul de la Nuez said, as he opened Cuba's most important commercial event. Fair organizers said 153 US businessmen, representing more than 50 companies from 19 states, were attending. Cuba to date has purchased and contracted for about \$500 million in food products, including shipping costs, Pedro Alvarez, Chairman of state food-importer Alimport, said. "We plan to sign \$100 million in contracts at the fair, around half with the Americans," Alvarez told the press. "The US companies here demonstrate the contradictory nature, irrationality and absurdity of US policy (...) it is very important they are here," Vice President Carlos Lage, in charge of Cuba's economic development, told the reporters. "It is good business, a good market for us," said Joel Coleman, export sales director for Carolina Turkeys from North Carolina. "We have sold the Cubans 3.5 million pounds of turkey and hope to sign another contract. This business is important to our company," he said. (CNN, 2/11/03)

**November 3:** Cuba bought \$20 million worth of food, paper and lumber from US companies, the first day of Havana's international trade fair where the communist nation promised to purchase \$50 million in US goods. "We have bought more than \$500 million worth of US products since December 2001," said a glowing Pedro Alvarez, chairman of Cuba's state food importer Alimport, as he signed one contract after another at the trade show. "We plan to sign more than \$100 million in contracts at the fair, around half with the Americans," Alvarez said. (Reuters, 3/11/03)

**November 3:** Some 22 US experts, members of the International Coalition of Art Deco Societies, are expected to attend the third annual meeting organized by the Cuban National Council of

Cultural Heritage, the Tribuna de La Habana weekly said. The meeting is expected to bolster bilateral information exchange and produce projects aimed at restoring Cuba's Art Deco structures. Experts from the University of Havana, Havana's Office of the City Historian and the Union of Architects and Engineers of Cuba are expected to be in attendance. (EFE, 3/11/03)

**November 4:** Casting itself as the terminator, the United States wished Cuba's Fidel Castro "hasta la vista, baby" before a vote in the UN General Assembly on the US embargo against Havana. "Cuba's best day is when the Cuban people have terminated Castro's evil Communist dictatorial regime and said to him, 'Hasta la vista, baby,'" US representative Sichan Siv told delegates before the vote. California's Governor-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger uttered the oft-quoted line in the film "Terminator 2: Judgment Day." Angry at the insult to Castro, Havana's Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque shot back: "It is the people of Cuba who say 'Hasta la vista' to the blockade, 'Hasta la vista' to genocide." (Reuters, 4/11/03)

**November 4:** Mississippi, long considered one of the most politically conservative states in the nation, is cultivating a small but burgeoning trade relationship with Cuba's communist-run government. Ships laden with an extensive and growing list of US food and agricultural products such as beef, chicken, rice and cheese now sail regularly from Gulfport and Pascagoula to Havana, the Cuban capital. "Mississippi has been very aggressive to put itself in a position to increase the amount of trade to Cuba," said Don Allee, executive director and chief executive officer of the Mississippi State Port Authority at Gulfport. More than 20,000 tons of cargo, or about 1 percent of the port's total shipments, went to Cuba last year. "When the embargo is lifted, whoever has a relationship with the Cubans has an advantage," Allee said. (Reuters, 4/11/03)

**November 4:** The Cuban authorities said that if Washington lifts its embargo on the island, it would become an important market for agricultural products from the United States, particularly rice. With the end of the embargo, Cuba would increase its rice imports from the United States to over 300,000 tons every year, Pedro Alvarez, director of Cuban state-run company Alimport said. Alvarez made the remarks at a press conference with US rice producers participating in the 21st International Fair of Havana. He revealed that over the last two years, business between both sides totaled 554 million US dollars and the amount is expected to increase to over 620 million dollars this year. (People Daily, 5/11/03)

**November 4:** At a forum for Democratic presidential candidates, retired Army General Wesley Clark said he would lift the trade embargo that was imposed against Fidel Castro's regime. In response to a question on Cuba, Clark said "When you isolate a country, you strengthen the dictator in it." (The Miami Herald, 5/11/03)

**November 4:** In a wide-ranging luncheon address to the Capital Tiger Bay Club Democratic presidential candidate Howard Dean said that he favors lifting the travel embargo on Cuba - but not right now. Reporters asked Dean after his speech about relations with Fidel Castro, who is hated by thousands of Cuban-American exiles in Miami-Dade County. "I was originally in favor of that," Dean said of easing relations with Havana. "The only problem is, it's an inopportune time. You can't appear to reward Castro for imprisoning dissidents, which is what he's just done." (The Tallahassee Democrat, 5/11/03)

**November 4:** Bringing defense witnesses from Cuba to testify at a hijacking trial in the United States could strain already touchy relations between the two countries, prosecutors argue. "A point of concern for both governments is that such witnesses, once in the US, may refuse to return to Cuba," Assistant US Attorneys Harry C. Wallace Jr. and John J. DeLionado told US Magistrate John O'Sullivan in court papers. Six Cubans are charged with conspiracy, air piracy and interfering with a flight crew, accused of using knives to commandeer a domestic Cuban flight with 31 passengers and forcing it to Key West on March 19. Their trial is to begin in December, in Key West. If convicted, they could spend the rest of their lives in prison. (AP, 4/11/03)

**November 5:** Cuba, the world's eighth largest sugar producer, is in talks to buy sugar from the

United States for its domestic market, the president of the Cuban food import agency Alimport, Pedro Alvarez, said. Cuba's sugar output has declined dramatically in recent years, forcing the closure of half its unproductive mills last year. The communist-run government has had to import sugar from Brazil for local consumption because much of its production is under contract for export. "There is a US company interested in selling us sugar and we are interested in buying," Alvarez told the press. He hoped a deal could be struck during the trade fair in Havana. Talks are focusing on US export quota availability, a business source said. (Reuters, 5/11/03)

**November 5:** A US jury took one hour to convict a man described by federal prosecutors as "one of the best in the business of human trafficking" of 55 counts of smuggling Cuban migrants for up to \$10,000 a head. Remberto Moya, 39, of West Palm Beach, Florida, faces up to 15 years in prison and additional smuggling charges in a separate case, said Assistant US Attorney Lynn Kirkpatrick. "Prosecuting people engaged in human trafficking is one of the top priorities of the government of the United States," Kirkpatrick said at the end of the trial in Key West. (Reuters, 5/11/03)

**November 6:** The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted 13-5 in favor of legislation to end the Cuba travel ban first imposed by President Kennedy in 1963. The legislation, sponsored by a bipartisan group headed by Senator Mike Enzi, Republican - Wyoming, would bar the president from restricting travel to Cuba, except when the two countries are at war. Enzi also joined Senator Max Baucus, Democrat - Montana, and others in urging House and Senate leaders to retain language easing the travel ban that both chambers included in a \$90 billion bill to fund Transportation and Treasury department programs in the 2004 budget year. The White House has threatened a presidential veto if the spending bill includes the Cuba language, giving those negotiating a compromise the incentive to remove the provision before it goes back to the House and Senate for a final vote. But Enzi and Baucus, joined by Senators. Larry Craig, Republican - Idaho, and Christopher Dodd, Democrat - Connecticut, said removing the provision would be a direct act against the will of Congress and a majority of Americans. Congressional leaders will also have to decide how to deal with Cuba language included in a \$17 billion agriculture and food spending bill being debated by the Senate. (The Washington Post, 7/11/03)

**November 6:** Lawmakers from the House and Senate rejected an attempt by House Majority Leader Tom DeLay to assist rum manufacturer Bacardi-Martini Inc. by attaching a measure to an annual defense authorization bill. The Texas Republican tried to slip the provision into the huge defense legislation without going through the usual process of public hearings. But after a series of news reports stirred controversy, Representative Duncan Hunter, a California Republican who leads the House Armed Services Committee, announced that the Bacardi amendment would not be allowed into the bill that is being finalized in a House-Senate conference. DeLay's measure, a revision to an obscure trademark law, is intended to award the Bermuda-based Bacardi the rights to a Cuban rum label "Havana Club." Pernod-Ricard, a French company, sells rum under that name in partnership with the Cuban government. The two rum makers have been involved in a long-standing legal fight over the label. (Tribune News Service, 8/11/03)

**November 7:** The United States' ADM and Cuba's state-owned Alimport signed a \$17 million contract to sell crude and refined cooking oil, soybeans, soy flour and cornmeal to the island. "We're very proud to be suppliers of food and fodder to Cuba, and we're also proud of everything we have done for Cubans," said ADM vice president Robert Cook. (EFE, 7/11/03)

**November 7:** A federal magistrate has ordered the US government to ask Cuba to let witnesses fly here to testify in an upcoming hijacking case -- for the defense. Cuban government officials and airline workers have come to the United States in the past to testify for prosecutors in skyjacking cases, but lawyers in this case could not recall defense witnesses doing so. Magistrate Judge John J. O'Sullivan's ruling came two months after three defense lawyers said they were thwarted from interviewing key witnesses on the island. They are defending three of six men accused of hijacking a flight on March 19 from Cuba's Isle of Youth to Key West using kitchen knives and a hatchet. (The Miami Herald, 8/11/03)

**November 9:** Senator Hillary Clinton defended her vote in favor of allowing Americans to visit Cuba, claiming that tourists could "rebut" the Castro regime on vacations to the communist island. "This was an embargo on American travel to Cuba," she said at an afternoon news conference in response to a question from The New York Sun. "It made absolutely no sense to me (...) We certainly should allow a free flow of people to Cuba." She said American visitors to Cuba could "support dissidents" and "be there as a rebuke to the Castro regime." (The New York Sun, 10/11/03)

**November 9:** Phoenix resident Dana Pankey makes his fourth trip to Cuba, where he plans to work with Christian churches across the Communist-ruled island. It will be the first time he is allowed to preach openly, because Pankey is traveling using a religious visa issued by the Cuban government. Previously, he has traveled using a tourist visa. Pankey, 75, operates Missionary Action Projects, which sponsors Christian pastors in more than a dozen countries. (The Arizona Republic, 9/11/03)

**November 10:** Cuba exposed how the United States has manipulated a list of 636 persons allegedly prevented by Havana from emigrating to that country within the framework of the bilateral agreement signed in 1994, despite having their visas. The list "has been manipulated in a gross and lying way by the US authorities, accusing Cuba of violating the migratory agreement, the text affirms. The Cuban Foreign Ministry states that the list "is plagued by falsehoods and bears absolutely no relation to reality." The Cuban government acknowledged that 196 Cubans had been barred from leaving the socialist island on US visas, but it said a US list of 636 such cases was riddled with inaccuracies. Of the total 636 persons, there were errors in the case of 414; in other words 66.2% of the total names included on the list. (Granma International, The Miami Herald, 10/11/03)

**November 11:** Joni Scott, a teacher at a Christian school who went to Cuba to distribute bibles, sought help from Congress to block a government fine of \$10,000 for violating the US ban on travel to the island. Scott met with lawmakers ahead of a decision expected in Congress on whether funding should continue for President Bush's enforcement of the travel ban. The issue is being considered by the Senate and House of Representatives as part of the 2004 appropriations bill for the Treasury Department. "I went to Cuba to deliver bibles, and it's amazing that now I'm being fined \$10,000 by the government," Scott told the press. (Reuters, 11/11/03)

**November 12:** Congressional bargainers dropped efforts to end the government's ban on travel by most Americans to Cuba, awarding a victory to President Bush. Though the House and Senate had each approved provisions earlier this year ending the travel restrictions, negotiators from the two Republican-led chambers omitted that language from a compromise spending bill. There's no alternative other than dropping the provision" from the final bill, argued Senator Richard Shelby, Republican-Alabama, a chief author of the final bill. Senator Byron Dorgan, Democrat-North Dakota, an advocate of lifting the ban, tried persuading lawmakers to settle for a narrower provision allowing travel to the communist-run country by farm groups promoting sales of agricultural products. But it died when House bargainers refused by voice vote to accept it. American farmers can sell to Cuba if they are paid with cash. (CNN, 13/11/03)

**November 13:** Cuba accused the Republican leaders in the US Congress and other anti-Cuban sectors in that country of having used anti-democratic methods to eliminate an amendment that would soften restrictions on US citizens traveling to Cuba. A statement by the Cuban Foreign Ministry (MINREX) states that this action once again shows that US policy on Cuba is a total failure and must change because it does not represent the real and legitimate interests of the US people. (Prensa Latina, 13/11/03)

**November 14:** On his third trip to Cuba David Heslop was nabbed with a fine for US\$7,513.50 by US authorities. Heslop became one of hundreds of people that the US government is trying to punish for illegal travel to Cuba. Enforcement has been spotty, but now the Bush administration is

cracking down. (NewsObserver.Com, 14/11/03)

**November 14:** Defense attorneys representing six Cuban men charged in the March hijacking a Cuban Douglas DC-3 that landed at Key West International Airport will not be allowed to tell jurors about difficult economic and political conditions in Cuba. In a ruling handed down in Miami, US District Judge James Lawrence King said the current destitute conditions in the communist country are "irrelevant as to whether defendants are guilty of the crimes charged," and ordered that any evidence demonstrating such must be excluded from the jury. In addition, it was announced the Cuban government will allow government witnesses from that country to come to Key West to testify on behalf of the prosecution, but that no non-government witnesses -- private Cuban citizens -- will be allowed to testify for the defense. Defense attorneys were told they needed to go to Cuba to obtain depositions. (The Keys News, 18/11/03)

**November 15:** Democrat Presidential contender, Dennis Kucinich, defined the United States' policy against Cuba as "a failure" in reference to the decision by the US Congress to maintain restrictions on North Americans traveling to the island. The Congressional Representative for the State of Ohio said that the aggressive and hostile rhetoric used in relation to Cuba must stop, suggesting that recent political decisions taken in the US Congress were designed to placate anti-Cuban sectors in Miami. (Radio Habana Cuba, 15/11/03)

**November 15:** Cuban Vice-president, Carlos Lage, criticized the United States for attempting to introduce a declaration against Cuba at the Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government. Lage, who arrived in Santa Cruz de la Sierra in Cuba in place of President Fidel Castro, said that is a "common and ordinary" practice by Washington. (AFP, 16/11/03)

**November 17:** The government of the United States has again denied visas to the wives and daughter of two of the five Cubans accused of conspiracy and imprisoned in that country, Havana's Chancellery informed. MINREX, the Foreign Relations Ministry of Cuba, reported that for almost five months, petitions to travel have been refused for Olga Salanueva Arango and Ivette González Salanueva, wife and daughter of René González, and Adriana Pérez Oconor, Gerardo Hernández' wife. (Prensa Latina, 18/11/03)

**November 19:** Sugar is among the new products Cuba hopes to buy from American farm producers as it varies the goods purchased under an exception in the US trade embargo, a leading import official said. "Cuba is ready to buy sugar from the United States," Pedro Alvarez, president of the Cuban food import firm Alimport told a news conference held to announce a new goodwill agreement with the Port of Manatee, Florida. "We are just waiting now on the American companies." (AP, 19/11/03)

**November 19:** Cuban import company Alimport and Port Manatee officials signed an agreement to ship commodities from the Tampa Bay seaport. The agreement came during a trade mission by Port Manatee officials to Cuba, the port said in a statement. It is the latest in a series of moves to increase shipments of food from Florida ports to Cuba. (AP, 19/11/03)

**November 20:** Cuba's First Deputy Foreign Minister Fernando Ramirez said at the Russian University of Foreign Policy (MGIMO) that the policy of Cuba's political isolation had ended in fiasco. He said that Cuba was maintaining diplomatic and consular ties with 182 countries. The country is actively developing economic ties, 355 contracts involving foreign capital have been signed. "At the same time, the US administration is persecuting any attempts to establish cooperation with Cuba," the Cuban deputy foreign minister went on to say. (ITAR-TASS, 20/11/03)

**November 20:** A Cuban writer who has been imprisoned since March, Manuel Vazquez Portal, is one of four recipients of the international press freedom awards of the Committee to Protect Journalists. "He's in jail for the stories he wrote about the grim reality of life in one of the world's worst dictatorships," said Ann Cooper, executive director of the group. (The Miami Herald,

21/11/03)

**November 21:** Cuba denounced the US refusal to extend visas to Cuban officials Ciro Perez and Misael Lima, scheduled to speak at the 45th Central American and Caribbean Sports Organization (ODECABE) Assembly. A press release from the Cuban Olympic Committee (COC) says that "the new provocation is part of a hardening of US policy against the island". Perez, ODECABE second vice president, Lima, the COC executive director, and a Cuban delegate could not participate in the assembly or the Executive Committee meeting to be held in Saint Croix, US Virgin Islands. (Prensa Latina, 21/11/03)

**November 21:** Cuban purchases from the United States since the end of 2001 "have a political content" and do not pose a risk to commercial relations with other countries, said Cuban vice Foreign Minister Angel Dalmau. "Every purchase we make from the United States not only saves us money, but has a higher political value" in the efforts to "defeat the US embargo," added Dalmau. (El Nuevo Herald, 22/11/03) **Noviembre 24:** The Cuban government has released an Official Note refuting the statements made by vice minister of Foreign Affairs Angel Dalmau on US sales to Cuba. The note says that establishing mutually convenient, economic, scientific and cultural relations with the US has been the objective of Cuban policy, always based on respect for independence and sovereignty. In the communiqué Havana indicated that purchasing food in the US goes beyond the lifting of the over four-decade blockade imposed on the Caribbean island. Such trade operations began two years ago after Cuba suffered great losses caused by Hurricane Michele, under the condition that Havana pay in cash and the prohibition of using its merchant fleet for shipments. (Milenio, Prensa Latina, 24/11/03)

**November 24:** Fidel Castro has "taken a personal interest" in an upcoming federal hijacking trial and Cuba is manipulating which witnesses can go to the United States to testify, a defense attorney alleged in court papers. Lawyers involved in the case learned that Cuba would permit some prosecution witnesses to travel to Key West for the trial. But other witnesses who could help exonerate the accused hijackers will stay behind, according to defense attorney Ana Jhones, who filed the papers in federal court in Miami. Six Cubans are scheduled to go on trial Monday in Key West. They are accused of air piracy, conspiracy and interfering with a flight crew during the March 19 skyjacking of a Cuban DC-3 with 31 other people on board. If convicted, they could spend 20 years to life in a US prison. (Sun Sentinel, 25/11/03)

**November 25:** A Californian biotech company is seeking US permission to license a promising Cuban cancer drug that is barred from the United States by trade sanctions, Cuban scientists said at a biotechnology conference in Havana. CancerVax Corp, based in Carlsbad, California, wants to conduct joint research on cancer vaccines being developed in Havana, the director of Cuba's Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, Luis Herrera, said. CancerVax, which made its debut on Nasdaq, said in its IPO prospectus filed with the US Securities and Exchange Commission, that it had signed letters of intent with Cuba's Center for Molecular Biology (CIM) and Canada's YM Biosciences (YM.TO) relating to the license of an antibody that can slow or halt tumors by acting on the body's immune system. (Reuters, 25/11/03)

**November 26:** Having visited Cuba recently, Kansas Agriculture Secretary Adrian Polansky said he would like to return to the island nation to pursue trade agreements covering grain and other products. Polansky said the United States should make trade with Cuba easier to foster democracy there and build relationships for when aging dictator Fidel Castro is no longer in power. And Barry Flinchbaugh, a Kansas State University agricultural economist who went with Polansky to Cuba, said five decades of effort to isolate the Castro regime had failed to dislodge it, meaning the United States should try another approach. "They're not accomplishing our purpose to any degree," Flinchbaugh said. "Find me an embargo that works. They don't work." (AP, 27/11/03)

