

FOCAL's Research Forum on Cuba

Chronicle on Cuba

November 2008

Highlights

Domestic Affairs: Harassment and arbitrary detentions by Cuban authorities against non-violent opposition activists continue. Hurricane Paloma destroys communication towers and hundreds of homes in Camaguey province. Cuban President Raul Castro attends a ceremony for the country's first Catholic beatification.

Economy: Cuba's economy is expected to grow 4 percent in 2008, despite the devastating effects of three powerful hurricanes. Cuban authorities announce Canada is Cuba's third largest trade partner. Russia grants Cuba a \$335 million credit line and signs other cooperation agreements with the island. Cubans apply for land by the tens of thousands for the first time since the 60's. Cuba and China agree to multiple deals on trade and loans. Cuba ranks second among the Paris Club's largest debtors.

Exile Community: US President elect Barack Obama wins 35 percent of the Cuban-American vote in Miami-Dade County.

Foreign Affairs: Cuba and Russia strengthen political and economic ties after visits of Cuba's Foreign Affairs Minister to Moscow and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to Havana. Cuba enters into the Rio Group. China's President Hu Jintao travels to Cuba. Vice President Ricardo Cabrisas presides over the Cuban delegation to the Summit of ALBA. The European Union offers Cuba 30 million euros for rebuilding areas damaged by hurricanes and other projects.

US-Cuba Relations: Fidel Castro casts doubt on the possibility that a new president would bring much change in US policy. Representatives of Cuba's internal opposition express optimism that Barack Obama's election would lead to an easing of relations. A report by the Brookings Institution recommends a near-total reversal in US policy toward Cuba. Raul Castro is open to meeting US President-elect Barack Obama on neutral ground.

Lo más relevante

Asuntos domésticos: Continúa el acoso y las detenciones arbitrarias por parte de las autoridades cubanas contra activistas pacíficos de la oposición. El huracán Paloma

destruye torres de comunicación y cientos de viviendas en la provincia de Camagüey. El Presidente Raúl Castro asiste a la primera ceremonia católica de beatificación en el país.

Economía: Autoridades gubernamentales esperan que la economía cubana crezca un 4 por ciento en 2008, a pesar de los efectos devastadores de tres grandes huracanes. Autoridades cubanas anuncian que Canadá es el tercero entre los grandes socios comerciales de la isla. Rusia le otorga a Cuba una línea de crédito por \$335 millones y firma otros acuerdos de cooperación con la isla. Por primera vez desde 1960, decenas de miles de cubanos solicitan tierras. Cuba y China conciertan varios acuerdos crediticios y comerciales. Cuba clasifica segundo entre los grandes deudores del Club de París.

Comunidad de exiliados: El Presidente electo de Estados Unidos Barack Obama gana un 35 por ciento de los votos de cubano americanos en el condado de Miami-Dade.

Asuntos exteriores: Cuba y Rusia fortalecen lazos políticos y económicos con las visitas del Ministro cubano de Relaciones Exteriores a Moscú y la del Presidente Dmitry Medvedev a La Habana. Cuba entra en el Grupo de Río. El Presidente de China Hu Jintao viaja a Cuba. El Vicepresidente Ricardo Cabrisas preside la delegación cubana a la Cumbre del ALBA en Caracas. La Unión Europea dona a Cuba 30 millones de euros para la reconstrucción de áreas dañadas por los huracanes y otros proyectos.

Relaciones Cuba-Estados Unidos: Fidel Castro arroja dudas acerca de que un nuevo presidente pueda implementar mucho cambio en la política de EEUU. Representantes de la oposición interna se muestran optimistas de que la elección de Barack Obama pueda conducir a un relajamiento de las relaciones. Un informe del Brookings Institution recomienda una reversión casi total de la política de EEUU hacia Cuba. Raúl Castro se muestra dispuesto a reunirse con el Presidente electo de EEUU Barack Obama en territorio neutral.

Domestic Affairs

November 3: The performance by the Cuban National Ballet of Swan Lake in the Cathedral Plaza, in Old Havana, was considered by the audience as a beautiful gift to the community. Thousands of people attended the performance, which was danced on a natural colonial stage under the stars accompanied by the music composed by Tchaikovsky. Among the audience were Cuban Vice-President Carlos Lage Davila, the Head of the Department for International Relations of the Cuban Communist Party, Fernando Ramirez de Estenez, and prima ballerina assoluta Alicia Alonso. Guests, including international tourists in a restaurant near the stage, left their plates on the table and rushed to the balconies to watch the ballet, while neighbours living on buildings surrounding the plaza did not miss the chance to watch the classic ballet live from home (ACN, 4/11/08).

November 4: Cell phone rates on the island are among the world's highest. Calls from one cell phone to another cost more than 50 cents a minute, while calls from a cell phone

to a land line run more than 60 cents, according to Cuba's phone company. Users also pay more than 44 cents a minute to receive calls. Some Cubans rely on text messages, which cost less. Many rarely answer their cell phones, especially if they don't recognize the number. Instead, they use them as pagers: The caller ID reveals the number, and the user returns the call from a fixed phone as soon as one becomes available. The cost of calls is one reason Cuba has the fewest cell phones per person in the hemisphere: there are 11.2 million inhabitants and just 331,000 mobile lines, according to 2007 government telecommunications figures. Cuba's government blames the longstanding US economic embargo for the island's telecom deficit, saying it prevents Cuba from connecting to underwater fibre-optic cables and forces it to use expensive satellite links (*Sun Sentinel*, 4/11/08).

November 4: Brothers and leaders of the Movement of Cuban Youths for Democracy (MCYD), Néstor and Rolando Rodríguez Lobaina, were arrested in Guantanamo by State Security officers. The dissidents were at a friends' house when they were detained and led to the provincial police station. Although the reason for the arrest was to have "a routine conversation," both opposition leaders have remained in jail. That same day activists Idalmis Núñez Reinoso and Yordelis Duvalón were arrested at a bus stop in the city of Santiago de Cuba, as well as Alcides Rivera Rodríguez, Blas Fortún Martínez and Iris Pérez Aguilera, from Villa Clara (*Cubaencuentro*, 6/11/08).

November 4: Independent journalist José Agramonte Leyva, a resident of Camagüey, was visited by an officer who introduced himself as a first officer of the Department against Subversive Activities, and who threatened him with the application of Law 88, for offering information to the foreign press and collaborating assiduously with the newspaper Nueva Prensa Cubana and the US-based radio station Radio Martí. In the last few months, the opposition member reported on the devastating effects of hurricanes Gustav and Ike in his province and various human rights violations against political prisoners, their relatives, and citizens in general (*Cubaencuentro*, 6/11/08).

November 4: Cuban doctors working on a special mission in Venezuela returned to Cuba. The more than 400-member medical brigade had worked for more than one year in Venezuela on a research study on people with disabilities who need specialized care. That population included people suffering from mental illness, physical disabilities, blindness, and hearing and speaking disorders. The main objective of the study, led by the Cuban Deputy Health Minister Marcia Cobas, was to identify the risk factors leading to disabilities, and the social, medical and educational needs of people in the areas under the study, according to National Genetics Centre director Beatriz Marcheco. Hilda Hernandez, of the Cuban Public Health Ministry (MINSAP), said the mission covered all 24 states of the South American country. "It was a beautiful job, a unique experience for us because we were able to attend every single impaired person, and they were very happy to know that somebody had finally noticed them," said disabilities expert Mayda Reina Rodríguez to the press (*ACN*, 5/11/08).

November 6: Juan Blanco, a pioneer of electro-acoustic music in Cuba and one of the most important promoters of this kind of music in Ibero-America, died in Havana. Blanco

was a founder and director of the National Laboratory of electro-acoustic music and a teacher for the younger generations since he became part of the Cuban music avant-garde of the 1960s. The artist, author of more than 200 pieces or materials for symphonic orchestras, instrumental groups and choirs, received numerous national and international awards (ACN, 5/11/08).

November 7: Boarding students in the provinces of Camaguey, Las Tunas and Holguin are being sent back home, as one of the first measures taken in those eastern provinces to protect human lives from Hurricane Paloma that is threatening to hit the island. More than 25,000 students in Camaguey and nearly 40,000 in Holguin are being sent back home as the Cuban civil defence council issued a hurricane watch for those provinces. The president of the Civil Defence Council in Camaguey, Julio Cesar Garcia, mentioned among the most pressing actions the return of all fishing boats sailing off the northern and southern coasts of the island. Shelters with a capacity for 6,000 people are being prepared, while the transportation is being coordinated for the evacuation of people from southern coastal towns to the city of Camaguey, located more than 100 km inland, said the official. People living in areas that were severely flooded by the two rivers that flow through Camaguey City will be taken to safer places (ACN, 7/11/08).

November 7: The 7th Congress of the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs), which was schedule to take place on November 8-9 in Havana, has been postponed due to the threat that Hurricane Paloma poses for the Caribbean nation. According to a note published by Granma news daily, Raquel Rendon, an official at the National Executive Board of the CDRs, explained that they made the decision to avoid the transportation of delegates from other regions of the country to Havana (ACN, 7/11/08).

November 7: Cuba put aside the work of recovering from the two powerful hurricanes that have already struck this storm season to prepare for Hurricane Paloma spinning towards the eastern half of the island. While Paloma was less powerful than hurricanes Gustav and Ike, which raked Cuba two months ago, it posed a new threat to a region where homes, power lines, roads and other infrastructure were still being repaired and damage to agriculture has contributed to a national food shortage. The damage has come at a delicate time for Cuba as new President Raul Castro shepherds the communist country following the retirement of ageing, and ailing, revolutionary leader Fidel Castro earlier this year, and as world economic woes force Cubans to tighten their belts. Cuban officials said they had evacuated at least 85,000 boarding school students and would soon begin moving people from flood-prone areas ahead of the storm's landfall. State-run television showed workers covering stores of goods with plastic to protect them from the storm and young people hastily picking fruit from trees to salvage as much of the harvest as possible. In ranching areas, cattle were being moved to higher ground. To ease potential flooding, water was being released from reservoirs still full from Ike's torrential rains. Cubans in the projected storm path viewed Paloma's approach with resignation. "Bad luck, friend. Looks like this year they want to demolish us in every way," said Antonio Linares, a tourism worker in Holguin province. "There was already a lot of destruction (from the earlier storms). We don't get out of one hurricane before another

one comes," said Genoveva Licea in Granma province. Paloma looked less forbidding, but still bad, said store worker Ofelia Hernandez in Camaguey province, where the storm was expected to make landfall. "It's a bad dream," she said. "Barely two months and once again in checkmate" (*Reuters*, 7/11/08).

November 9: Crashing waves and a powerful sea surge from Hurricane Paloma destroyed hundreds of homes in Cuba, the government said as the cyclone weakened into a tropical storm. On an island still reeling from the destruction of two recent hurricanes, early damage reports were limited. But state media said the late-season storm toppled a major communications tower, interrupted electricity and phone service and sent sea water almost a mile (1.5 kilometers) inland, ravaging Santa Cruz del Sur, a coastal community near where it made landfall. No storm-related deaths were immediately reported. Vicente de la O of Cuba's national power company told state television that damage to the power grid was far less than that caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike in late August and early September. Waves more than 10 feet (3 meters) high leveled about 50 modest houses along the coast of Santa Cruz del Sur. Civil Defense authorities said 4,000 homes were damaged, and 435 homes in the community were destroyed. Javier Ramos rebuilt his simple wood-frame house in the town after Hurricane Ike, only to watch Paloma flatten it again. Touring Santa Cruz del Sur, Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura said the area was among the hardest-hit nationwide. In the nearby community of Jagua, Herienso Rondon, a 50-year-old retired day laborer, said he was still trying to repair damage from Ike when Paloma tore away his wooden house's roof and pulverized the belongings inside, including a meager bed and mattress. "I don't have any hope," he said. "After Hurricane Ike (government officials) came to visit me and said they had no way to help and I had to buy the wood for repairs. "I have no money," said Rondon, who gets a monthly pension of 158 pesos, about \$7.50 (*AP*, 9/11/08).

November 9: Cuban First Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura met at the University of Camaguey with citizens evacuated from the coastal area of La Playa in the town of Santa Cruz del Sur, where Paloma made landfall. An estimated 400 homes were totally destroyed in La Playa by the storm, which hit this area as a category 3 with maximum winds of 240 kms/h. Julio Cesar Garcia, president of the Camaguey's Civil Defense Council, recalled that exactly 76 years earlier another hurricane hit Santa Cruz leaving more than 3,000 dead. He asked for a minute of silence on their behalf. Machado Ventura spoke to the evacuees about the magnitude of the damage across the country from recent hurricanes Gustav and Ike. He also said an analysis should be made on whether the coastal neighbourhoods and towns should be rebuilt further inland, since the effects of climate change are expected to continue. Earlier in the day when he visited Santa Cruz del Sur, Machado Ventura said that solutions will be found for those who lost their homes to Hurricane Paloma. Amid the devastating panorama, Machado noted that not one human life was lost during the storm (*ACN*, 10/11/08).

November 10: Thousands of Cubans returned to homes demolished by Hurricane Paloma even as the once-powerful storm dissipated off the coast. The hurricane washed out fishing villages, ripped the roofs off factories and ravaged roads, but the government reported that no one was killed. "Everything is gone! Oh, my God!" gasped Xiomara

Rivero, a 66-year-old retiree who burst into tears upon returning to her home. The single remaining wall was covered with seaweed. All around lay the ruined remains of her belongings, a table split in two, smashed chairs, a water-logged mattress. Juan Ramon Nunez lost everything but parts of the floor of his home. He pulled a hammer from the wreckage and held it up. "Look, this is what we saved," he said sarcastically. "I live here with my wife, my son and my mother," Nunez added. "My mother has had two heart attacks, so we will have to prepare her well before bringing her here." Outside Santa Cruz del Sur, some homes were submerged up to their flimsy metal roofs. Banana crops and other farmland was washed out, though there were no official estimates on the loss to the island's dwindling food stocks (*AP*, 10/11/08).

November 10: Cuban deputies are analyzing the results of the debates by workers across the island about changes in the social security law proposed by the Cuban Labour and Social Security Ministry to face the aging of the population. According to *Granma* newspaper, social security experts are taking part in the debates that began on November 6 in several areas of the country, including Havana City and Isle of Youth. There are also leaders of the Cuban Workers Confederation and members of parliament participating. During the months of September and October, meetings to discuss the changes proposed by the Cuban authorities were held in every single work place across the island. All the opinions and suggestions made at the debate sessions will be taken into consideration when drawing up the final bill to be submitted for approval at the National Assembly in December this year (*ACN*, 10/11/08).

November 10: Cuban President Raul Castro met with the people of El Guayabal community in the municipality of Amancio Rodriguez, Las Tunas province, and with evacuees from the municipality of Santa Cruz del Sur, in the province of Camagüey, where hurricane Paloma made landfall. Raul recalled that the most important aspect to bear in mind when facing this kind of natural phenomena is to preserve human lives. Raul participated in a meeting of the Defence Council in Camagüey accompanied by First VP Jose Ramon Machado Ventura and by Army Corps Generals Ramon Espinosa Martin and Joaquin Quintas Solas. The Cuban president recalled that more than 1.2 million people were evacuated on this occasion, which avoided the loss of human lives in contrast with what happened 76 years ago when a similar natural disaster swept Santa Cruz del Sur leaving nearly 3,000 people dead. After this meeting, Raul and the President of the Provincial Defence Council in Las Tunas, Jorge Cuevas Ramos, visited the community of El Guayabal, in the southern coastal area of Las Tunas, which was hardly hit by Paloma and where 110 houses were completely destroyed. Finally, Raul met at the University of Camagüey with citizens evacuated from the coastal area of La Playa in the town of Santa Cruz del Sur where an estimated 400 homes were totally destroyed (*ACN*, 11/11/08).

November 10: Non-violent opposition members Barbara Viera and José Ramón Borges were banished from the city of Fomento, in the Sancti Spiritus province, by two State Security agents. According to Viera, who is a member of the Party for Human Rights, stated that as he was headed to his brother's house on the town's main street and accompanied by his wife, the agents intercepted them and demanded that they leave town

immediately. Before taking the bus back to the city of Sancti Spiritus, Viera told the agents he had to pick up his children, aged 5 and 7, who were at a relative's house. "They told me I was playing with fire and that I could lose custody of my children if I continued my opposition activities." Barbara added that the expulsion from Fomento was due to a fast they had carried out in Sancti Spiritus in support of hunger-strikers Orlando Zapata Tamayo, Yordi García Fornier, Julian Antonio Monet Borrero and Abel Lopez Perez (*Cubonet*, 10/11/08).

November 11: Cuba's communication minister Ramiro Valdes, and the head of the national civil defence council Ramon Pardo Guerra, led a meeting to discuss solutions to the damage caused by Hurricane Paloma in Camaguey, in particular in the communication sector. Paloma's strong winds broke the communication tower of the coastal town of Santa Cruz del Sur, where the storm made landfall, into two pieces. The tower had been designed to resist gusts of up to 240 km/h according to local experts. In the meeting Juan Gustavo Cairo, director of Radio Cuba, said the town and the provincial radio stations can be now be heard on FM. In the meantime, resources are being mobilized to gradually restore television transmissions. Cairo said that the Cuban communication companies ETECSA and Movitel have been working on the design of more wind resistant towers. Maimir Mesa Ramos, ETECSA's executive president, talked about work to re-establish telephone communications in Santa Cruz del Sur. Likewise, he announced that the installation of fibre optic cable for this municipality scheduled to begin in 2009 has been brought forward to this year (*ACN*, 12/11/08).

November 12: A book titled Peace in Colombia by Fidel Castro will be presented at the Havana Convention Centre. The book reveals the content of important unpublished documents, interviews and Fidel's personal experiences in the process, and bears proof of the sustained and noble efforts of Cuba to contribute to reaching peace in the sister nation, reported Granma newspaper. The presentation of Peace in Colombia will be broadcast live on Cuban national television channels and national radio station Radio Rebelde (*ACN*, 12/11/08).

November 12: Books will once again take over Cuban parks and squares when a festival will be held to put literature lovers in contact with the creative horizon of the most famous authors from Cuba and abroad. Under the name 'Continuidad de los parques' (Continuity at Parks), named after one of the best-known stories by Argentinean writer Julio Cortazar, the Cuban Book Institute and the Federation of University Students (FEU) have organized a wide-ranging program of activities. The fair will begin simultaneously in 14 parks in all of Cuba's provincial capitals, including the Roberto Amaran Park (Pinar del Río); Vidal (Villa Clara); Carlos Manuel de Cespedes (Bayamo); José Marti (Guantanamo); Vicente García (Las Tunas); Ateneo Dionisio San Roman (Cienfuegos); and Maceo (Camaguey) (*ACN*, 12/11/08).

November 12: Cuban President Raul Castro has named United Nations Ambassador Rodrigo Malmierca to be Cuba's minister of foreign investment, state-run television said. Malmierca, a 52-year-old economist, will replace the current minister, Marta Lomas, according to the report, which did not say if Lomas would move to a new government

post or why the change was made. Cuba's foreign investment minister oversees the joint venture projects the government conducts with foreign companies, as well as the operations of nongovernmental organizations working in the Communist-run island. The change comes at a time when Cuba is facing economic challenges due to the global financial crisis and three hurricanes that inflicted nearly \$10 billion in damages on the small Caribbean nation. Malmierca was previously a vice minister in the same department. The report did not say who will replace him as United Nations ambassador (*Reuters*, 12/11/08).

November 13: Last October 31, prisoner of conscience Conrado Rodriguez Suarez was released after serving out a 3-year prison sentence in Taco-Taco, a correctional facility in Pinar del Rio. Rodriguez, a human rights activist, was convicted of pre-criminal behavior posing a danger to society. Rodriguez Suarez, 57, is the president of the opposition organization Maximo Gomez National Civic Movement (*Cubanet*, 31/11/08).

November 13: Fidel Castro looks thin and frail but alert in a photograph from October posted on the Web site of the Russian Orthodox Church. The ailing 82-year-old former president is seen standing and peering at the camera with a hint of surprise on his face. His gray hair is combed back and his wispy gray beard is neatly trimmed. As if for support, he is holding onto the arm of Metropolitan Kirill, the church's top foreign relations official. The church said the picture was taken on October 20, when Kirill was in Havana for the consecration of a new Orthodox cathedral. Cuban state media covered that meeting but did not release any images. It was the first image of Castro published since June 17, when government-controlled broadcasts showed him chatting in a garden during a visit by his close friend, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez (*AP*, 13/11/08).

November 14: The 2nd International Seminar on Nanosciences and Nanotechnologies opened in Havana, with 35 prominent experts from Germany, France, China, Japan, Britain, Spain and Russia attending. The meeting brought together experts of different professions and nationalities with young trainees to talk about the speedy development of nanoscience, and its use, according to organizers. At the opening session in the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, in Havana, scientific aide to the State Council of Cuba, Fidel Castro Diaz-Balart, gave the lecture, "The Great Challenge of the Tiny: Cuban Nanotechnology Strategy," an outlook about the current situation and future of the important project. Acting Minister of Science, Technology and Environment, Fernando Gonzalez, referred to the vertiginous boom of nanosciences and their applications in the 21st century (*ACN*, 15/11/08).

November 15: Cuban and foreign runners are taking part in the 9th annual marathon race, named Maracuba, in all the municipalities across the country. Carlos Gattorno, director general of the Marabana annual marathon held in Havana and scheduled for November 15, told the press that it is very likely that the number of participants in Marabana will increase after this race since Maracuba serves as a warm-up for the long-distance runners. He said this year's national marathon race is a challenge for the organizers of the event, due to the damage caused by hurricanes Gustav, Ike and Paloma, which in one way or another have affected the whole country (*ACN*, 15/11/08).

November 15: The president of the National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcon, stressed the importance that Cuban workers understand the need for the new Social Security Law and support it. Speaking in a meeting with deputies of the provinces of Villa Clara, Sancti Spiritus and Cienfuegos to discuss the social security draft bill, Alarcon pointed out that the law had to be put into effect as a result of development -which entails a decrease in the number of births; and after a rigorous analysis made by workers across the country. Also attending the meeting, Work and Social Security Minister Alfredo Morales said that, when the new law is put into practice, mechanisms to increase efficiency, discipline and organization at work will have to be implemented as well (ACN, 15/11/08).

November 16: The Democratic Solidarity Party led by Fernando Sanchez Lopez, issued a declaration denouncing the arrest of six of its top members. According to the communiqué, such violations hinder the political dialogue process between the European Union and Cuba. Following the agreements reached last June 18, 2008 between Cuba and a European Union Council presided over by France, with respect to democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, the government of Raul Castro stepped up repressive measures throughout the country in the week of November 10-6, the DSP stated. It added that some fifty pro-democracy activists from different organizations considered illegal by the island's regime were threatened and arrested by the political police (*Cubamet*, 24/11/08).

November 17: The Roman Catholic Church will celebrate its first beatification on Cuban soil later this month. The Archdiocese of Havana's magazine says the November 29 ceremony declaring Friar Jose Olallo Valdes blessed will be in Camaguey, where he died at age 69. The Cuban church started the process to beatify Olallo in 1989, the 100th anniversary of his death. Beatification declares a departed person's ability to intercede on the part of the faithful who pray to him. It can be a step to sainthood. After Olallo's death, a Cuban couple prayed to him, and their 3-year-old daughter was cured of a tumor. The church last year held a beatification ceremony in Spain for Cuban Jose Lopez Piteira, who was shot in 1936 during that country's civil war (AP, 17/11/08).

November 17: Mirta Díaz-Balart, the first wife of Fidel Castro, is in Havana to visit family. Díaz-Balart, 80, joined her son Fidel Castro Díaz-Balart, 59, at the inauguration of the second International Seminar of Nano-science and Nano-technology that drew 35 leading scientists from Germany, France, China, Japan, Great Britain, Spain and Russia. The event is being held at the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, in the Havana neighbourhood of Siboney, where mother and son allowed themselves to be photographed by members of the press. The photos are the first of Mirta and Castro Díaz-Balart together in Cuba that have been published in decades. "She looked radiant, very content to be together with Fidelito," noted one attendant of the ceremony in Havana. "She is a woman that has conserved herself extremely well despite her years." Castro Díaz-Balart, who is an engineering professor and scientific advisor to the Cuban Council of State, gave a talk entitled, "The Great Challenge of the Small: The Cuban Strategy for Nano-technology" and outlined the island-nation's projects in this field. After the presentation, Castro Díaz-Balart posed for pictures with his mother in the conference

room where Fernando González, Cuban minister of science, technology and the environment, was also present. Though Mirta has traveled to the island on previous occasions, this was the first time she has attended a public function, having avoided the press for years, reluctant to speak publicly about her family. Mirta has lived in Madrid since 1968 and is the aunt of US Representatives Lincoln and Mario Diaz-Balart, both Republicans of Florida (*The Miami Herald*, 17/11/08).

November 17: Yoani Sanchez's "Generation Y," won the best blog award in Bitacoras.com 2008, a competition sponsored by "the largest Spanish-speaking social network for bloggers," which boasts 250,000 users. The awards were announced during Blog España 2008, a bloggers' event held in the city of Seville. In one of her blog entries Sanchez dedicated the prize to "those who cannot have access to the site in Cuba. To them, so that they can undertake their own marathons, I dedicate this prize" (*Cubaencuentro*, 17/11/08).

November 17: Dissidents Arturo Arias, Pedro Antonio Alonso and Pedro Carballosa, were arrested in Bayamo for visiting an opposition leader. The three dissidents, all members of the Rural Workers Party, spoke with RWP President Alberto Moreno in the head office of the organization. On their way back home in the municipality of Songo, Santiago de Cuba, they were intercepted at the bus terminal by members of the State Security forces. The officers confiscated books, pencils, pens, rubber bracelets bearing the word Change, key chains and themed stickers of the project "I do not cooperate with the dictatorship" (*Cubanet*, 21/11/08).

November 18: Cooperativism in Cuba, international experiences in the field, and women's role in the management of this type of productive units are the main topics of the 3rd International Seminar on Cooperatives that began in Havana. Professionals and researchers, as well as Cuban and foreign farmers, participate in this meeting that opened at the Florencio Gelabert hall of the Habana Riviera hotel. Participants will also analyze the impact of neoliberal policies on cooperativism and they will visit production facilities to promote solidarity and cooperation among organizations of the sector. The program of the seminar, which runs through November 20, includes lectures by specialists from Venezuela, Brazil, Mexico, Italy and Cuba. The seminar is taking place under the auspices of the University of Havana, the Cuban ministries of Sugar and Agriculture and the national associations of Economists and Small Farmers, among others (*ACN*, 18/11/08).

November 18: A 21-year-old teacher in Cuba, accused of striking and killing a 12-year-old pupil in class with a chair leg, was convicted in a closed door trial in a Havana courtroom and now faces up to seven years in prison, said sources linked to the case. The trial of school teacher Joaquín Torres began on November 11 in the Provincial Tribunal of Havana under tight security. Only a limited number of family members were allowed into the courtroom. Torres is accused of throwing the chair leg at Daniel Castañeda Alayo. The chair leg lodged in the boy's skull. The incident happened in February in a classroom of the Domingo Sarmientos school in the Havana neighborhood of Lawton. The strong police presence prevented many family members of the young boy from

entering the courtroom, according to a source close to the victim's family that asked to remain anonymous. The school principal and five students were called to testify. According to the friend of the victim's family, prosecutors said they are seeking a sentence of seven years in prison for the accused and have ordered the boy's parents not to speak about the trial. Torres became a teacher through the Emerging Teachers program established by the Cuban Government in 2000 to cover a deficit of teachers by training young people in an eight-month program. He first arrived in Havana in August 2007 and began teaching classes as an "emerging teacher" a month later. The incident called into question the maturity and preparedness of the program graduates who are entrusted with children after very little training. Two months after the tragedy, Cuban leader Raúl Castro replaced Education Minister Luis Gómez with school teacher Ana Elsa Velázquez Cobiella, who holds a doctorate in education (*The Miami Herald*, 18/11/08).

November 18: Outside the People's Power building in the Regla municipality, several residents protested the shortages in the neighbourhood water supply. After 4 days without water or any word from the authorities, a large group of people showed up at the People's Power building holding dirty pots and washable baby diapers and demanding an explanation. The protesters were appeased by the police and the top municipality authority, who explained that there had been a breakdown in the city waterworks, which would be resolved shortly (*Cubanet*, 24/11/08).

November 19: Heavy rains registered over the last few days in eastern Holguin province have made rivers burst their banks and caused flooding, which has made it necessary to evacuate more than 18,000 residents in the area as a preventive measure. The situation seems more complicated toward the regions of Sagua de Tanamo and Frank País, in the province's mountainous area where water torrents abound, among them those of the mighty Sagua River. It's precisely from these places where some 15,000 people have been evacuated to neighbours' houses and to shelters. In the municipality of Mayari, there are 3,000 people protected in family houses and in 260 shelters fitted out by the territory's Defence Council. A complex situation, caused the overflowing of Grande River, near the city of Sagua de Tanamo, is presently obstructing traffic by road between the east and west of the province (*ACN*, 19/11/08).

November 19: Cuban National Assembly president, Ricardo Alarcon, was bestowed the honorary title of Emeritus Professor of the University of Havana in a ceremony. Ruben Zardoya, rector of the university, read the resolution that endorses the title in recognition of the academic and political merits of the Cuban parliament president, who is a tenured professor and holds a PhD from the University of Havana. The President of the Casa de las Americas cultural institution, Roberto Fernandez Retamar, talked about Alarcon's revolutionary career that began when he was a student. He said Alarcon has been an example for the ideological and political thought of the younger generations. Alarcon said he was honoured to receive the title which he dedicated to his late wife Margarita, to late university professor Vicentina Antuña, and to all the heroes that are part of Cuban history (*ACN*, 19/11/08).

November 19: Daniel Castellanos, a 9th grade student, was beaten by his teacher at the junior high school “Antonio Aucar Jiménez,” in the city of Santa Clara. One of his neighbours said that, according to the doctor that saw Daniel at the children’s hospital where he was taken after the assault, the young boy had a swollen cheekbone and several bruises on his head. Yaniel Basail Vera, one of hundreds of young adults trained as teachers to cope with a increasing shortage of educators in the island, beat Castellanos because he did not want to eat his so-called “healthy school snack”. Daniel's relatives were informed by the local authorities that, in accordance with the Code of Judicial Procedure, no investigation would be conducted because the medical certificate stated that the boy’s injuries had not required medical treatment (*Cubanet*, 19/11/08).

November 20: A women's group presented thousands of signatures petitioning Cuba's parliament to close the gap in the communist country's dual economy, which pays state workers in Cuban pesos but offers basics like toilet paper in another currency that few can afford. Four women wearing white "With the Same Money" T-shirts gathered outside the legislature and attempted to turn in proof of 10,000 new signatures, which they said complemented 10,837 signatures they gave lawmakers a year ago. Their leader, Belinda Sales, said legislative clerks refused to receive the new signatures, saying lawmakers were still studying last year's petition. She said more than a thousand members of her Latin American Foundation of Rural Women collected signatures across Cuba over the past two years, and found wide support even though authorities repeatedly seized petitions. "Because it does not include anything political, people aren't afraid to sign," she said. "Everyone who lives in Cuba wants to be paid in one currency and have that same currency meet all their needs." The group has not provided hard copies of the collected signatures, but Sales said legislative authorities are free to check their authenticity. She said her organization receives no funding from dissident organizations in the United States, surviving solely on donations from supporters inside Cuba (*The Miami Herald*, 21/11/08).

November 20: The prefect emeritus of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins, will preside at the Mass of Beatification of Brother Jose Olallo Valdez on November 29 in Camaguey, in the first such ceremony ever to take place on Cuban soil. In an interview with the magazine Palabra Nueva of the Archdiocese of Havana, Father Felix Lizaso Barruete, the general postulator of the Hospitable Order of St. John of God, pointed out that while Father Olallo will not be the first Cuban blessed, “He deserves to be recognized because Cuba needs him. Cuba deserves to have a saint.” “I think he will be canonized soon because the people have a lot of devotion to him and that devotion will only grow. Olallo is today God’s blessing for Cuba,” he added. The Mass will be celebrated by Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins and concelebrated by all the Cuban bishops, including Archbishop Juan de la Caridad Garcia Rodriguez of Camaguey, president of the Bishops’ Conference of Cuba (*CNA*, 20/11/08).

November 20: The first Thematic Festival of Poor Cinema, dedicated to pay tribute to Cuban filmmaker Humberto Solás, who died on September 17, began in Cienfuegos, as part of actions carried out by Cuba to promote films made with few resources. Present during the inaugural ceremony were important figures of Cuban films, like Verónica

Lynn and Enrique Pineda Barnet, who will be in charge of the world premiere of the documentary "El Charentón del buen día". The Festival, which will run until November 23, will also be attended by prestigious actors and actresses, like Isabel Santos, Violeta Cooper, Luisa Maria Jimenez, Eslinda Nuñez and Adela Legra, among others (ACN, 20/11/08).

November 21: Ace pitcher Yadel Marti and star outfielder Yasser Gomez have been thrown off Cuba's top league team for "a grave act of indiscipline," likely ending their hopes of playing in the 2009 World Baseball Classic. The one-sentence announcement in the Communist Party newspaper Granma offered no details on why Marti, picked to the all-tournament team at the 2006 WBC, and Gomez, a former Olympian, were released from Havana's Industriales. Two people close to the team said the action came after the pair was caught trying to defect to the United States. The two people spoke on condition of anonymity and did not elaborate, fearing it could lead to problems with the Industriales. Marti talked publicly about how Cuba would seek revenge during the 2009 WBC and he was expected to again be one of the national team's stars in the tournament this spring. But the announcement virtually guarantees neither he nor Gomez will play baseball for Cuba again in any capacity (AP, 22/11/08).

November 23: The sustained increase of the live-birth indicator reported in Cuba from January through October of 2008, compared to last year, is good news and it could turn the demographic course of the country. Preliminary information published by the National Statistics Office (ONE) reveals that the number of live births surpassed the figure reported in 2007 by 7, 996 children, standing for 8,8 percent on the birth rate; such an indicator is only comparable to the rate reported in 2005. All Cuban provinces saw their birth rates increase; though the phenomenon is more significant in the eastern territories of Guantanamo, Ciego de Avila, Granma and Holguin, while lower indicators were reported in western Havana City, Pinar del Rio and Cienfuegos. The statistics were compiled from figures collected in health centers and other data contributed by the Statistics Department of the Public Health Ministry, plus estimates made by ONE of births that took place out of health institutions. The ONE report says that such a growing trend could continue this year up to June 2009. Any prediction will be difficult to make later, since the birth rate will be affected by the impact by recent weather phenomena on many Cuban families (ACN, 23/11/08).

November 23: A large angry group of students roamed the hallways of the High School Institute for Exact Sciences Studies "Jose Maceo," in Guantanamo city, protesting against the boarding school's decision to quarantine the facilities due to a conjunctivitis outbreak. A group of students bearing placards voiced their disagreement with the school authorities' decision to cancel their weekend furloughs. The institute has been under quarantine for nearly a month due to an outbreak of acute hemorrhagic conjunctivitis and no students are allowed entry or exit. The poor hygienic and sanitary conditions, meager food and disruption of the furlough schedule has put the students on edge. Several school officials have been fined by the Hygiene and Epidemiology Department, but the students are expected to remain quarantined for the duration of the outbreak (*Cubaencuentro*, 27/11/08).

November 25: Individual initiative is foundering in the shoals of collectivism, a critical article in the Cuban newspaper *Trabajadores* said. The government's plan to spur production by paying more to workers who produce more is running into "multiple reefs," the paper says, using a bakery in Villa Clara province as an example. Workers there are complaining that although their bakery has been highly productive and has surpassed its own sales targets for the past nine months, the government has paid them stimulus wages only on four occasions. Why? Because there are 11 other bakeries in the area and the government rewards the 12 as a group, not each individual bakery or individual baker. So, if a few bakeries slack off, no workers are rewarded, no matter how hard they have worked. Is that fair?, the workers ask. Labor Ministry Resolution 9, which established the merit-pay system, set August 31 as the deadline for its application nationwide. That deadline was "notoriously unobserved," *Trabajadores* says. In fact, as of that date, the Labor Ministry "had no reliable information" as to how many companies were linking wages to production. "Faced with this bitter reality, [the ministry] had to extend the deadline for the redesign of the pay-for-results systems," Labor Minister Alfredo Morales Cartaya wrote in a letter to national labor leaders. The redesign is expected to continue until December 31 (*The Miami Herald*, 25/11/08).

November 25: The lengthy "apagones", or blackouts, so familiar to Cubans just three years ago are rapidly becoming part of the island folklore. Generous deals with China and Venezuela averted the collapse of an obsolete and inefficient electrical generation and transmission system made up mostly of aging Soviet-bloc equipment. Moving in to a new apartment in Vedado neighbourhood though, brought a new reality: parts of the Vedado have been losing power sporadically much of the past month. The lights go out for 15- to 30-minute intervals, usually during the day. At times it will be down two to three hours. "I was stuck on an elevator for more than an hour," said Juana Espinal, 49. She was delivering eggs to a fifth-floor apartment near the Foreign Ministry when the lights went out Friday. "No one noticed I was on the elevator. I sat on the floor and waited calmly. These things happen. This is Cuba." Like many things on the island, there is no clear explanation for the blackouts. Some attributed the problem to local construction. A power company representative said the "sporadic outages could be caused by ongoing efforts to upgrade the power grid." Economic czar Carlos Lage said hundreds of new fuel oil generators will provide the island with some 1,700 megawatts of power by late 2010 (*Sun Sentinel*, 25/11/08).

November 26: Cuba leads Latin America and the Caribbean in Education for All (EFA) according to a report released by the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO). The document notes that Cuba and Aruba are the only countries of the region that have achieved the objectives of the EFA program approved during the World Education Forum held in Dakar in 2000. Cuba's achievements in this field - which includes primary education, adults' literacy, quality of education and gender equality, among other aspects - were recognized by UNESCO in 2007. The UNESCO report, entitled "Overcoming Inequality: Why Governance Matters", makes an urgent call for a revision of policies in the sector to reduce the inequalities that exist in the region and in the world, in general (*ACN*, 26/11/08).

November 26: Cuba's governing body has named General Ulises Rosales del Toro to the long-vacant post of agriculture minister as it struggles with shortages following three hurricanes. Rosales moves from the post of sugar minister. He also is a member of the Communist Party's select Politburo. The announcement in the party newspaper Granma says Rosales was picked for his "wide management experience and political authority" and the need to improve agricultural production. Agriculture Vice Minister Maria del Carmen Perez Hernandez had been overseeing the ministry. The sugar minister's job now goes to Rosales' deputy there, agronomist Luis Manuel Avila Gonzalez (*AP*, 26/11/08).

November 26: From the Guantanamo prison known as 'Combinado', political prisoner Isael Poveda Silva declared that "a paramilitary group made up of highly dangerous inmates led by Alexander Lopez," has beaten the rest of the prisoners on several occasions. Poveda Silva said that the gang resorts to intimidation to rob other prisoners of their belongings with the tacit approval of prison authorities and claims to be harassed and threatened every day by Lopez, who is serving a 30-year sentence (*Cubaencuentro*, 26/11/08).

November 26: With the beatification of Brother Jose Olallo Vales just days away, the bishops of Cuba issued a message on November 1st, calling on Cubans to learn the lesson of charity and love of God from the future blessed. "We hope that the example of holiness of Father Olallo awakens in all Cubans the desire to turn towards God and remain in Him, and strengthens in each one the decision to go with Mary to encounter Jesus Christ, since He is the face of true love experienced by Father Olallo," the bishops said. Most Cubans refer to Olallo as a priest even though he was a consecrated religious brother. According to the Fides news agency, the bishops underscored in their message how the virtue of charity "was lived out by him with a courageous and creative, generous spirit towards those who found themselves in desperate situations, never worrying about his life, his health, the wear on his body, or fatigue." They recalled that Brother Olallo turned the hospital in which he worked into "a great family, in spite of the many differences among the patients," and that he "prayed in the morning, afternoon, and evening, walking down the "Calle de los Pobres"" a street that is now named after him, helping the poor materially and spiritually. He helped the imprisoned, gave food to the hungry, and evangelized through his famous evening talks in which he educated many in the faith, saving marriages and reconciling enemies. In this manner, he became a father and mother to a countless number of people" ([Mensaje de los Obispos por la beatificación](#); *CNA*, 26/11/08)

November 27: The Cuban Democratic Directorate informed that political prisoner Abel Lopez Perez, who has sewn his mouth shut several times in protest, was allowed to continue to serve his sentence under house arrest after a 39-day hunger strike. Lopez Perez, a member of the Movement of Cuban Youths for Democracy and of the Council of Rapporteurs on Human Rights, was imprisoned last April in the Combinado correctional facility, in Guantanamo, for his activism with the Council of Rapporteurs on Human Rights. Due to his critical health, he had been allowed to serve time under house arrest for a limited period but was denied an extension. Lopez Perez went on a hunger strike to

protest against the 3- year sentence imposed on him for challenging the authority of Fidel Castro (*Cubaencuentro*, 27/11/08).

November 27: Blogger again wins award she can't collect. Yoani Sanchez's "Generation Y" blog won the BOBs Award (for Best Of the Blogs) presented in Berlin by the German broadcast-media company Deutsche Welle. In April of this year, Sánchez's blog, which explores the lives of ordinary Cubans and is often critical of the Cuban government, won the Ortega y Gasset Award presented by the Spanish newspaper El País. In neither case could Sanchez travel abroad to accept her award; the government would not issue her an exit permit. "Yoani Sánchez gives voice to an entire generation of Cubans and provides the world with a window into Cuba through her clear and poetic writing", the BOBs international jury of bloggers and media experts said. "Sanchez called the award a 'personal joy' and added that she hoped it would encourage more Cubans to begin writing and publishing their own independent blogs". Deutsche Welle pointed out that "Sánchez is able to publish her blog [...] only by e-mailing her entries to friends outside Cuba, who put her words online" (*The Miami Herald*, 28/11/08).

November 27: Cuba reported that 0,1 percent of its population is infected with the AIDS virus, a figure that is considered by experts as the lowest in the Caribbean, though there is a trend towards an increase, according to local reports. "In the island the AIDS-related mortality rate and the mother-child transmission of the disease is very low," said Rosaida Ochoa, director of the National AIDS Prevention Center in statements to a Cuban radio station. However, Ochoa explained that the epidemic is steadily spreading particularly among men. "Up to date, 80 percent of the Cuban zero positives are men, and of them 85 percent have sex with other men," said the expert, as quoted by DPA. Currently, there are 8,607 people living with HIV-AIDS in the island, and more that 3,000 are receiving antiretroviral therapy, according to the National AIDS Prevention Centre's director Manuel Hernandez. So far in 2008, 1,050 new cases have been reported, while more that 1.7 million diagnosis tests were carried out, Hernandez said (*Radio Cadena Agramonte*, 28/11/08).

November 28: After several visits to police stations and offices of the Ministry of the Interior, the authorities informed the members of Agenda para la Transición (APT) that they were not authorized to carry out any activities to celebrate Human Rights' Day on December 10. Vladimiro Roca Antúnez, Guillermo Fariñas Hernández and Marcelo López Bañobre, members of the coordinating board of APT, tried to submit a permit request at a police station in Havana, but the authorities refused to accept it. Then, they tried the Revolution Square offices of the Ministry of the Interior (MININT) and they were told that the office was under orders not to accept any written request. APT described the government's actions as "discriminatory" because "it multiplies its members by zero, turning them into 'non-entities' under the Constitution of the Republic." The request signed by Vladimiro Roca and Martha Beatriz Roque, asked for authorization to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at a Nuevo Vedado residence, "with approximately a hundred people in attendance," including members of the diplomatic corps and foreign press (*Cubaencuentro*, 28/11/08).

November 29: Cuban President Raul Castro attended a ceremony for the country's first religious beatification in another sign of warming relations between the Communist-ruled island and the Catholic Church. Dressed in a dark suit, Castro sat in the first row at the mass conducted with a Vatican envoy for Father Jose Olallo, the first Cuban to receive such honours on the island in its more than 500 years of Catholic history. After Fidel Castro came to power in an armed revolution in 1959, Cuba expelled priests and Catholics faced decades of official atheism. Ties improved after Cuba guaranteed religious freedom in 1992 and Pope John Paul II visited six years later. Cuban state-run television showed several thousand people packed into a plaza in Camaguey, around 330 miles from Havana, for the ceremony for Olallo, who worked with cholera sufferers and died in 1889. Catholic beatification is the third of the four steps to sainthood. In a rare move, the state-run newspaper Granma dedicated the front page of its November 28 edition to Olallo's recognition by the Church. In 2007, the Pope beatified another priest born in Cuba, but he was raised and died in Spain. The Vatican said in February Pope Benedict would like to visit Cuba at the invitation of Raul Castro and his ailing brother (*Reuters*, 29/11/08).

Economy

November 1: Cuba's said its economy grew by 6% in the first half of 2008, but won't maintain that pace because of damage caused by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Economy Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez said the rise in gross domestic product in the year's final six months won't match the results of the first, which finished with six per cent growth. Rodriguez said the principal challenge is the reconstruction of the country, whose losses were initially calculated at \$5 billion but which are seen now as far higher. He offered no new estimates. Civil Defence Chief Ramon Pardo Guerra told visiting Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva that collective damage from the storms had reached nearly 8.7 billion convertible pesos, or about \$9.4 billion. That makes them nearly twice as costly as officials originally believed. Rodriguez projected last year that the economy would grow 8% cent in 2008, but he and other officials began warning in July, even before the hurricanes hit, that rising global food and oil prices would cause "inevitable adjustments and restrictions" (*The Canadian Press*, 1/11/08).

November 2: The Havana International Fair will welcome a record 1,300 business people representing 457 firms from 56 countries, organizers said. Cuba's largest trade and business event expects its 26th edition to break the records set last year in terms of the number of countries participating, leased exhibition space and business people taking part, Havana International Fair organizing committee chairman Abraham Maciques told the media. Spain, Canada, China, Italy and Germany will have the largest presence at the fair, with businesses from Venezuela, Brazil, Mexico and Panama leading the way among Latin American participants. Fair organizers plan to highlight Cuba's need to "import resources to deal with problems like those in the agriculture and housing sectors," especially in the wake of the hurricanes, Maciques said. During the 2007 trade fair, Cuban state-owned food company Alimport purchased more than \$300 million worth of

food from businesses based in Canada, China, Venezuela and the United States. Cuba imports more than 80 percent of the food it consumes (*EFE*, 3/11/08).

November 3: Cuba opened its top annual trade fair, welcoming thousands of business leaders from 56 countries who are interested in selling everything from lumber to lollipops, cars to construction materials on the island. Cuba's government controls well over 90 percent of the economy, but Foreign Trade Minister Raul de la Nuez said during the fair's opening ceremonies that through September, the country had seen a 39 percent increase in foreign trade as compared to the first nine months of 2007. He said its top trading partners are Venezuela, China, Canada, Spain, Brazil and Vietnam. De la Nuez did not provide details on why foreign trade was up, but Pedro Alvarez, head of Cuba's food import company Alimport, said the government has been forced to increase its buying of agricultural products from abroad after Hurricanes Gustav and Ike ripped through the island in August and September, crippling food production. "Agriculture was totally destroyed," he said (*AP*, 3/11/08).

November 3: Some 20 Cuban tourism companies are participating in the 13th International Tourism Fair of Latin America that is underway in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The event, regarded as the most important of its type in the continent, is being attended by the companies Gran Caribe, Cubanacan, Isla Azul, Gaviota, Habaguanex, Hoteles C, Oasis, Sol Melia, Sandals and Accor, as well as Havanatur, Ecotur, Gaviota Tur, Paradiso, San Cristobal, and Cubertura, among others. The director of the Cuban Office of Information and Tourist Promotion for South America, Mario Ramos Alvarez, told Prensa Latina news agency that in the middle of the financial turbulence that affects the world, Cuba is promoting its main attractions in Buenos Aires as evidence of the consolidation of its tourism industry (*ACN*, 3/11/08).

November 3: Cuba's economy is expected to grow 4 percent in 2008, despite the devastating effects of two powerful hurricanes that caused more than \$5 billion in damage, Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage said. He also said 2.4 million Cubans are receiving additional food rations to help them through shortages caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike, which struck the Caribbean island two months ago. Lage did not say what would account for the economic growth. Before the storms and the financial crisis that hit the global economy, Cuba had predicted its socialist economy would grow 8 percent this year. "There are no doubts that the effects of the hurricanes have produced a strong blow," Lage told reporters at the opening of Havana's annual international trade fair. But, he said, "the economy is going to grow more than 4 percent. It's the estimate and it's going to create conditions to keep advancing in the following years," he said. The storms destroyed 30 percent of Cuba's crops, which touched off food shortages that led the government to increase, in the hardest hit areas, the monthly food ration provided to Cubans (*Reuters*, 3/11/08).

November 3: Cuban Vice-President Carlos Lage presided at the opening ceremony of the 26th Havana International Trade Fair. With an attendance of 1,420 companies from 56 countries, this fair has set new records for attending firms and countries, as well as showground space. Raul de la Nuez, Cuba's Foreign Trade minister, also present at the

inauguration, underscored that this event will enable participants and the host country to complete sales and identify business opportunities in order to raise the living standards of the Cuban people. De la Nuez said the country had seen a 39 percent increase in foreign trade through September as compared to the first nine months of 2007. He said its top trading partners are Venezuela, China, Canada, Spain, Brazil and Vietnam. FIHAV 2008 will run till November 8, the only day when it will open to the public. Also attending the opening ceremony were Cuban VPs Jose Ramon Fernandez and Ricardo Cabrizas, as well as Cuban Informatics and Communications Minister Ramiro Valdes and Transport Minister Jorge Luis Sierra (*ACN, VNA, 3/11/08*).

November 4: At Havana's International Trade Fair (FIHAV 2008), it was announced that by the end of September this year, Canada was Cuba's third largest trade partner, with a 9.4 percent growth in trade over 2007. During the inauguration of the Canadian Pavilion at the 21st FIHAV, the Cuban Minister of Foreign Trade Raúl de la Nuez said that trade between the two nations has amounted to 1.4 billion USD so far this year. In addition, Canadians represent 30 percent of the country's tourists, with more than 667,000 last year, and a 9 percent growth over last year. The Minister highlighted the cooperation between the Canadian International Development Agency and the Cuban Ministry for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, within the context of the 2004-2008 bilateral program, with a 24 million CDN budget and 83 cooperation projects. Canadian Vice Minister of Foreign Relations and International Trade Alexandra Bugailiskis expressed Canada's willingness to cooperate in Cuba's recovery efforts after Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, by way of the program for humanitarian support of more than 10 million dollars. Erik R. Ordoñez, market manager for Latin America and the Caribbean of the Canadian Wheat Board Company, and Pedro Álvarez, president of Cuba's Alimport, signed an agreement for the sale of 150,000 tons of Canadian wheat to Cuba (*ACN, 4/11/08*).

November 5: An agreement to manage the exchange of legal and technical information and investment projects was signed in Havana by representatives from Cuba and Brazil. The accord was penned by Alessandro Texeira, president of the Brazilian Agency for the Promotion of Exports and Investments (APEX) and by Anaiza Rodriguez, Head of the Department for the Assessment and Management of Investment Projects at the Cuban Ministry for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation (MINVEC). The ceremony was attended by MINVEC Minister Martha Lomas, and by the APEX representative in Cuba, Hipolito Rocha. Texeira, who is visiting Cuba on the occasion of the recent inauguration of an APEX office in the Cuban capital and the ongoing 26th Havana's International Trade Fair, is also the president of the World Association of Agencies for the Promotion of Investments (*ACN, 4/11/08*).

November 5: "Cuba has trade relations with more than 3,000 firms from 176 countries in spite of the strengthening of the US economic blockade against our country," said the Cuban Foreign Trade Minister, Raul de la Nuez. Speaking to reporters at the 26th International Fair of Havana (FIHAV) that is underway at the EXPOCUBA exhibition centre in the Cuban capital, de la Nuez added that 1,420 companies from 56 countries are attending this event to sign agreements and to identify business opportunities. De la Nuez

explained that the Americas account for 53% of the total Cuban foreign trade, while Europe accounts for 22% and Asia and the Middle East account for 21%. He recalled that Cuba's main trade partners are Venezuela, China, Canada, Spain, Brazil and Viet Nam (ACN, 6/11/08).

November 5: The efficiency of the 57 sugar industries involved in this campaign will determine the fulfilment of the 2009 plan, said Ulises Rosales del Toro, Cuban Sugar Industry Minister. Rosales del Toro assured that next harvest's output can be bigger than last year's, depending on the extracting of all the sugar from the canes, whose number will be larger as well, despite the passing of hurricanes Gustav and Ike through the Caribbean nation. Next month the sugar industries whose crops have reached a bigger level of ripeness will start the harvest, one of the ways to achieve over-10 percent dry weight in the sugar canes and thus profitability (ACN, 6/11/08).

November 5: The Cuban government informed that bilateral trade between Cuba and Mexico grew by 89 percent between January and September in comparison to the same period in 2007 and it is expected that by the end of 2008 the increase will reach 100 percent. Marta Lomas, the Cuban Minister for Foreign Investment and International Cooperation, indicated that trade with Mexico reached 280 million USD just in the third quarter of 2008, which is indicative of a "growing trend." Bilateral trade fell short of the 300 million USD mark in 2007, reaching only 270 million USD in 2006 (EFE, 6/11/08).

November 5: Iranian Vice Foreign Minister Alirza Salari said in Havana that his country was interested in increasing commercial, economic and political ties with Cuba. During a meeting with Cuban Vice Foreign Minister Marcos Rodriguez, visiting Salari said both countries should work together to raise the level of their economic exchanges, and there was a need to tap into the potential of mutually beneficial trade. Cuba and Iran have yearly meetings between their foreign ministers to review and deepen bilateral relations. During his stay in Cuba, Salari also visited the Havana International Trade Fair, Cuba's top annual business expo, with the participation of thousands of businessmen and women from 56 countries (Xinhua, 6/11/08).

November 6: Two planes from Toronto and Montreal, Canada, opened the tourist high season in Santiago de Cuba, a season forecasted to witness an increase in the number of visitors. Around 190 tourists, who arrived in the two planes from the Canadian tour operator Sunwing, chose city and beach hotels in eastern Santiago de Cuba province, while others continue to Marea del Portillo resort, in the neighbouring Granma province. During the high season 13 flights a week will arrive in this city from Canada and from France, Spain, Italy, Dominican Republic, Haiti, among other countries. Also from Canada, specifically from its capital city, Ottawa, there will be a weekly night flight from December 11 until April 30, and all the three Canadian cities will have straight flights to Santiago de Cuba (ACN, 6/11/08).

November 6: The 26th International Trade Fair of Havana (FIHAV 2008) concluded successfully with participants closing business agreements worth \$ 350 million. During the closing ceremony of the event at the Convention Center, the president of the

Organizing Committee, Abraham Maciquez, praised the results of the fair. Maciques referred to the enormous damages caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike, which hit the Caribbean nation last September. Products from Cuba, Spain, Germany, Brazil, China, Italy, and Venezuela won gold medals during the event while the First Prize of Integral Communication was for the Cuban Telecommunications Company ETECSA. Other awards were granted in the categories of design and advertising, among others. The closing ceremony was attended by Ramiro Valdes, Minister of Information and Communications, and Jose Ramon Fernandez and Ricardo Cabrisas, vice presidents of the Council of Ministers, among other government officials (ACN, 7/11/08).

November 8: Raul Castro and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin met in Havana to continue negotiations on trade, aid and joint ventures. A reading of Russian news sources discloses that during Sechin's 10-hour stay, Russia granted Cuba a \$335 million credit line until December 31, 2010; the Russian company Nornickel signed a cooperation pact with the state-owned Cubaniquel; and a memorandum of understanding was signed allowing the Russian oil company Zarubezhneft to develop designs for the extraction of natural gas and the oil company Transneft to modernize Cuba's oil pipeline. According to Transneft's president, Nikolai Tokarev, who traveled with Sechin, "[the Cubans] have very old pipelines that need to be rebuilt." Studies are already under way for the reconstruction of the entire infrastructure, including the construction of new conduits, Tokarev told reporters. Several new joint projects in the aviation, shipbuilding and rail transportation sectors were examined. The Avtovaz company agreed to deliver 630 new Lada cars to Cuba this year and 2,000 next year and create an assembly and repair plant for the Ladas and other Russian-made vehicles. The Cuban press limited itself to reporting that the Castro-Sechin meeting dealt with "matters of bilateral interest regarding cooperation in various sectors." This is Sechin's third trip to the Caribbean island in three months. His visit came at the end of a tour that included Nicaragua and Venezuela (*The Miami Herald*, *BBC*, 10/11/08).

November 9: Rainfall associated with Hurricane Paloma has increased the volume of water in the reservoirs of eastern Las Tunas province by around 15%. The 23 reservoirs controlled by the Regional Office of Water Resources are holding some 285 million cubic meters, which represent close to 85 % of their total capacity. Nine reservoirs of the municipalities of Manatí, Amancio, Majibacoa, Puerto Padre, Colombia and Jobabo, and two pertaining to the latter -Las Mercedes and Jobabito- are draining water. This situation is benefiting the province, characterized by long droughts (ACN, 9/11/08).

November 10: Cuba will begin mining gold and copper-zinc deposits in the central Cuban province of Villa Clara under the framework of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) agreement. In statements to the Cuban weekly newspaper *Trabajadores*, Armando Garcia, chief of operations for the Geominera del Centro Company, said that the gold mine is located in the municipality of Placetas and the copper-zinc mine in Manicaragua. The company will use similar technology currently being used in other mines in Cuba (ACN, 10/11/08).

November 11: Iran's Wagon Pars Company has planned to export wagons, worth 25 million euros, to Cuba and China by the end of the current Iranian year (March 20, 2009), the company director Gholamreza Razzazi said in Tehran. The company's exports to Cuba and China reached 19 million euros last (Iranian) year, he said. This is while in the first half of the current year, the exports hit a high of 16 million euros, he added. The company has so far exported 1,500 cargo wagons to Syria, Sudan, Cuba, 67 passenger wagons to Bangladesh, and 160 passenger wagon bogies to China, Razzazi noted, according to Iscanews news agency (*Tehran Times*, 11/11/08).

November 11: Cuba will present its first results in its effort to obtain a vaccine against bird flu during the November 30-December 5 Conference Biotecnologia Habana 2008, the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Centre, or CGIB, announced in Havana. The head of the CGIB's Animal Biotechnology division, Mario Pablo Estrada, said at a press conference that his agency was working "to achieve an effective vaccine against bird flu." The scientist said that, "at this time they're performing some tests at the laboratory level on birds" with the two experimental vaccines the communist island has in hand. He explained that the current phase of the experiments constitutes the initial steps toward showing that this preliminary vaccine "can produce an interesting response in the immune system of birds," and therefore what will be presented at the conference are the "first results" in obtaining a vaccine. In addition, Cuba will take to the congress new experimental vaccines to control ticks in dogs and hemorrhagic fever in rabbits, as well as "very convincing results" of a new product against classic swine fever, Estrada added (*EFE*, 11/11/08).

November 11: Cuba has suffered almost \$10 billion in damages from the three hurricanes that struck the island this year, President Raul Castro said in a report aired on state-run television. He made his comments during a visit to Camaguey province, where officials said 8,000 homes were damaged when Hurricane Paloma struck over the weekend, the report said. "We're almost getting to \$10 billion in losses in the last three months, that's how the economy is," Castro said. Paloma followed hurricanes Gustav and Ike, which struck 10 days apart in late August and early September and caused destruction across much of the island. Officials said almost 450,000 homes were damaged by the storms. Initial damage estimates from the first two storms totaled \$5 billion but officials have been raising the number in recent days. Raul Castro, dressed in military clothes, went to Camaguey a day after Paloma spun itself out over Cuba. The lengthy television report showed Raul Castro talking with storm victims and promising to rebuild their homes, most of which were built of wood near the sea (*Reuters*, 11/11/08).

November 13: The actions taken so far to compensate for the damage caused by Hurricane Ike have made it possible to repair almost 1,900 homes in eastern Baracoa city, one of the municipalities hardest hit in Guantanamo province. The work, conceived in three stages up to December, 2009, initially prioritized the repair of houses that had partially collapsed or had roofing damage, and to the solution of problems related to electricity, roads, water services, the coffee harvest and food production. A total of 70 from the 88 apartments severely damaged by the impact of sea waves in Cuba's First City, Baracoa, have also been repaired, and work is now being done on buildings located

in areas of the seafront, six of which have been waterproofed. Maisi, another of the devastated territories, where losses equivalent to 300,000 five gallon drum of coffee grains have been calculated, has managed to control the explosive ripening of this crop and the municipality is about to meet its figures for the harvest (ACN, 13/11/08).

November 13: Cuban Central Petroleum Perforation and Extraction Company celebrated the arrival to the one million tons of crude oil (7 million barrels) extracted in their facilities during 2008. It is the fourteenth time that they reach this figure in a 12-month period, a 14 percent increase from what they achieved last year (ACN, 14/11/08).

November 14: Some 1,368 acres of different crops were damaged by the recent passing of hurricane Paloma through Las Tunas, according to local preliminary reports. The Agriculture Ministry's office in this province, 670 km to the east from Havana, announced that the biggest damage was done to 677 acres of root crops and vegetables and 123 acres of plantains, which is the main crop of this area. The hurricane also affected 289 acres of beans, 170 of corn and 106 of yucca, while other vegetable harvests were damaged by the heavy rains. The major damage was reported in Amancio, the municipality next to Santa Cruz del Sur, where Paloma made landfall (ACN, 14/11/08).

November 14: Cuba welcomed its 2 millionth tourist of 2008 with a salsa band, strong mojitos and word that the island expects to set a record this year for foreign visitors despite three hurricanes and a global economic crisis. Authorities hung a red-and-white banner reading "welcome visitor" in five languages just outside the customs area as Air Canada Flight 370 from Toronto touched down at Havana Airport. "Is this a nice way to start? I'll say!" said Helen Lueke, a secretary in her 60s from Sherwood Park, Canada, who comes to Cuba about once a year — but has never been greeted at the airport with mojitos. Cuba didn't single out a visitor No. 2 million, rather symbolically marked the flight's arrival along with similar celebrations at international airports in the eastern city of Santiago and in Varadero, the famous beach resort northeast of Havana. Alexis Trujillo, first vice minister of tourism, said Cuba has surpassed 2 million annual foreign visitors every year since 2004. But November 14 is the earliest date the communist nation has ever reached the mark, he added, leading Cuba to predict it would pass its 2005 record of 2.3 million visitors. Trujillo said tourism is up 10.7 percent compared to last year, despite Hurricanes Gustav, Ike and Paloma, which destroyed nearly half a million homes and did more than \$10 billion in damage when they roared through the island in recent weeks (AP, 15/11/08).

November 14: Cuban Construction Minister Fidel Figueroa, who is on an official visit to Angola, visited works destined to restore the Quibaxe-Bula Atumba road, in Bengo province, 50 kilometres north of Luanda the Angolan capital. Figueroa expressed his satisfaction for the contribution made by Cuban volunteer workers in this project, which will speed up the transportation of people and products to the capital -like coffee, the region's main means of support. The Minister highlighted the historical ties linking Angola and Cuba, Prensa Latina news agency reported. Angolan Deputy Minister for Public Works, Manuela Becerra, said that the visit of the Cuban Minister is part of the

accords signed by Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos during his most recent visit to Cuba, in September 2007 (ACN, 14/11/08).

November 16: Cubans are applying for land by the tens of thousands for the first time since the 1960s as part of the Communist government's reform of the state-dominated agriculture sector, a top farm leader said. The president of the National Association of Small Farmers, Orlando Lugo Fonte, told members at a meeting in eastern Guantanamo province that some 80,000 land requests have been made by workers, private farmers, cooperatives and state companies since applications began in September. Lugo's comment, reported in state-run media, was the first to give any national data for the land lease program, though he did not say how much land had been requested, how much had been leased so far or to whom it had been given. The land is supposed to be granted from 45 to 100 days after application, but three hurricanes and the Caribbean island's state bureaucracy have slowed the process, according to sources. Cuba has not handed out land on such a large scale since shortly after the 1959 revolution when large landholdings were nationalized and some of the acreage given to small farmers (*Reuters*, 17/11/08).

November 17: While giving an update on the renegotiation of the island's debt to Pebercan, a representative of the Canadian oil company said the international recession and the impact of the hurricanes are affecting the Cuban government's actions. The company reported that the outstanding debt of Cuba Petróleo (Cupet) has reached 108.5 million USD and that its 2009 investments plan will depend on the results of the new negotiation. Pebercan extracts oil from sites on the north-western coast of the island, selling its entire 6,000 barrels-per-day output to Cupet. Cuba produces nearly 80,000 barrels per day. Despite frequent contacts with its Cuban partner, no concrete steps have been taken to address the delays in payment, said the company source. The Cuban debt had been restructured a year earlier, but Cupet fell into arrears once again, pointed out the Canadian company's representative ([Pebercan Press Release](#); *La Jornada*, 17/11/08).

November 17: Chinese President Hu Jintao arrived in Cuba for a two-day visit to promote further economic ties with the island struggling to recover from three hurricanes and the ongoing effects of the global financial crisis. The two nations are agreeing multiple deals on trade and loans as China bid to strengthen its links with Latin American and Caribbean nations. China is now Cuba's biggest trading partner after Venezuela, with bilateral trade at \$2.3bn (£1.5bn) in 2007. And across Latin America, China has seen its trade climb from \$13bn in 2000 to more than \$100bn in 2007. "My visit is aimed at increasing friendship and co-operation between our two nations, and working together with our Cuban comrades to build a promising future," Mr Hu said in a statement. China offered Cuba soft loans to help it through the difficult 1990s, and these loans are now beginning to come due. Restructuring their repayment is likely to be one topic on the agenda when the two leaders meet. Other agreements already signed, or set to be signed, reportedly include Chinese purchases of nickel and sugar from Cuba, Chinese-backed energy prospecting in Cuba, and other deals in education and health. The island's state-run news agency AIN reported the two countries had reached "almost a dozen" agreements, including plans to rehabilitate the island's aging ports and earthquake detection systems. The Asian giant currently buys about 400,000 tons of sugar annually

from Cuba and is estimated to get close to half of Cuba's annual nickel production of 75,000 tons a year. Although both Cuba and China are run by Communist parties, they have pursued very different economic models. China has adopted market economics while Cuba still has a command system with most of the economy under state control. Cuban state newspaper Granma praised the Chinese model but highlighted "an unequal distribution of wealth in the country, marked difference between city and countryside and the erosion of the environment" (*BBC, AP, Reuters, 18/11/08*).

November 18: Chinese President Hu Jintao agreed to put off some of Cuba's debt payments and gave the island \$80 million for hospital modernization and other projects during a visit to strengthen ties between the Communist-run countries. His two-day stopover, which included a meeting with former leader Fidel Castro, deepened China's already-substantial involvement in Cuba and provided aid for the island's economy, battered by three hurricanes and the effects of the global economic crisis. The two countries signed accords that put off for 10 years payments for an unspecified trade debt Cuba ran up through 1995, and for five years a \$7.2 million credit China granted in 1998. The two countries have not disclosed the full amount Cuba owes the Asian giant, but loans are starting to come due at a time when Cuba, which suffered \$10 million from hurricanes Gustav, Ike and Paloma this year, could ill afford it. The two countries had signed a dozen accords calling for, among other things, China to continue buying Cuban sugar and nickel and to provide agricultural products. China is Cuba's second largest trading partner after Venezuela at \$2.3 billion in 2007. It buys 400,000 tons of sugar from the Caribbean country each year and close to half its annual output of 75,000 tons of nickel, which is Cuba's top export (*Reuters, 19/11/08*).

November 19: An agreement for the modernization and assembly of heavy trucks was signed in central Cienfuegos province, between Cuba's Construction Ministry (MICONS) and Ukraine's AutoKraz Company. The letter of intent foresees the complete repair, shortly, of 450 units, coming from all over the island, after some thirty years of exploitation on construction work. The Mechanical Solutions Enterprise (SOMECE), in Cienfuegos, will receive the first 15 containers of spare parts necessary to restore the fleet of vehicles, which will then improve their performance and efficiency. A second stage of the accord will be devoted to the assembly of no less than 500 vehicles, in order to satisfy the demands of the Cuban construction industry. First Deputy Minister of MICONS, Jorge Luis Rodríguez, said that this agreement between Cuba and Ukraine will maintain technology already mastered by mechanics and technicians, besides reducing current expenditure on the purchase of spare parts (*ACN, 19/11/08*).

November 20: The tourists keep coming to Cuba despite the American trade embargo, the high prices, or the vicious storms. Take Stan, a 57-year-old engineer from Clearwater who was sipping a mojito cocktail at Havana's old Hotel Nacional. He offered the barman a dollar for his copy of the Communist Party daily Granma. The front page was a photo of Chinese President Hu Jintao clasping hands with the ailing Fidel Castro. "It is still Fidel's Cuba but we don't know how much longer he'll be around," said Stan, who declined to give his full name because he traveled illegally to Cuba via a third country. "I wanted to come and see it while Fidel was still alive. I wanted to be here before it

changed." With history -- and dollars -- in mind, Cuba's Ecotur travel agency is offering a tour package for the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, which will be celebrated next January 1st. About 150 tourists have signed up for the package, which includes tours of the mausoleum where the remains of Argentine-born Che Guevara rest, in the central city of Santa Clara, and the huge farm where the Castro brothers were born and raised in Holguin Province. The last stop is in Santiago de Cuba for festivities marking the half-century anniversary of the 1959 revolution. "They will be reliving Cuban history throughout the island," said Marlene Martinez, an Ecotur representative. "It should be a very emotional experience" (*Sun Sentinel*, 20/11/08).

November 20: Russian metals giant Norilsk Nickel is considering the possibility of becoming an operator in a metals plant construction project in Cuba, the company's CEO said. Vladimir Strzhalkovsky said it would take between six and nine months to complete a feasibility study, after which Cuba would apply to Russia for a loan to implement the project. "I believe that Cuba has a good chance of getting it," he said. In mid-November, Norilsk Nickel and Cuba's Cubaniquel signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in prospecting for solid serpentinites at Cuba's Nicaro Mines. They also agreed to exchange specialists and share experience in mining, marketing and environmental issues. Norilsk Nickel is Russia's largest diversified mining and metals company, the world's largest producer of nickel and palladium, and one of the world's largest producers of platinum, rhodium, copper and cobalt (*RIA Novosti*, 20/11/08).

November 21: Cuba's First Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura stressed the need to increase the saving of resources in order to boost the country's development. The top Cuban government official toured different economic and social centers in eastern Granma province. "We need to get the most out of all available resources," said Machado Ventura at the end of the tour, in which he was joined by the First Secretary of the Communist Party in the eastern province, Lazaro Exposito Canto. Some of the centers visited by Machado Ventura included a shipyard in the locality of Manzanillo, where he was briefed about ongoing ship repairs and other initiatives aimed at replacing imports like the production of telephone boots. The Cuban First VP expressed interest in the current water supply situation in two cities of the eastern region and in the plans aimed at increasing food production. He also held an exchange with neighbors at the Las Caobas community, which was hit by floods brought in by the most recent cold front that affected the eastern Cuban region. Machado Ventura insisted that the efficient use of available resources in each locality requires discipline and organization (*ACN*, 21/11/08).

November 22: Russia has announced plans to invest in Cuba's oil and nickel industries, ahead of President Dmitry Medvedev's upcoming visit to the island. Moscow is considering a number of deals, which require certain Russian firms to explore Cuba's coastal waters for offshore oil in the Gulf of Mexico, Russia's Ambassador to Havana Mikhail Kamynin said. Cuba is already in talks with firms from Spain, Norway, India, Canada, Vietnam, Malaysia, Venezuela and Brazil to explore prospects of offshore drilling. Should Moscow and Havana ink the deals, Russian firms would be responsible for developing crude oil and oil derivative storage facilities as well as modernizing the island's oil pipelines, Kamynin said. The planned deals include one between Russia's

NorNickel and Cubaniquel to build a plant in Holguin province. In October, Cuban officials said the island's crude reserves were almost twice what they had predicted to be, claiming that the Caribbean nation had a crude reserve of 21 billion barrels. The Russian president, who embarked on his Latin American tour, is expected to arrive in Havana on November 27, after making stops in Peru, Brazil and Venezuela (*TV Press*, 22/11/08).

November 23: Cuba's tobacco industry will fulfill all "commitments" for the remainder of this year and 2009 on both the domestic and international markets despite the damage from the hurricanes that ravaged the island, the official press reported, citing high-level officials. "All the commitments made for exports, domestic consumption and the cigar industry in what is left of this year and 2009 will be fulfilled," Osvaldo Encarnacion, vice president of state-owned TABACUBA, told the official daily Granma. The tobacco industry official said Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, which hit the island in late summer and caused \$8.65 billion in damage, arrived before the 2008-2009 season had started, so "the losses in agriculture were minimal." Hurricane Ike, which battered the island on September 7-9, and Gustav, which hit western Cuba on August 30, wiped out hundreds of thousands of hectares of farmland, damaged or destroyed 500,000 dwellings and caused extensive damage to infrastructure (*EFE*, 23/11/08).

November 24: Cuba's government has trimmed its growth estimates for 2008, largely as a result of the hurricanes that hit the country at the end of August and in September. To some extent, the global credit crunch is also indirectly hurting the economy. At the end of 2007, Cuba's minister of the economy projected that GDP growth in 2008 would be 8%. In early November, the vice-president, Carlos Lage, said that damage caused by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike would cut full-year growth to around 4%, compared with growth in the first half of 6.2%. The direct impact on Cuba of the global credit crunch has been relatively slight because of Cuba's limited access to international credit before the crisis. Nonetheless, it has contributed to a curtailment of import capacity that has restricted growth. There have been reports that some repayments have had to be rescheduled because it has become harder to raise new money. This has coincided with lower nickel export prices and an estimated \$1USbn rise in the food import bill (to \$2US.5bn) owing to higher world food prices this year. In this context, new financing facilities offered by Spain, Russia, Mexico and Brazil will be significant, in addition to continued financing from Venezuela and China (*Business Latin America*, 24/11/08).

November 25: China National Petroleum Corp., the nation's largest oil explorer, and Cuba's state oil company agreed to jointly develop oil and gas fields. The companies signed an agreement to cooperate in oil field engineering services and oil equipment trading, the Beijing-based company said in a statement on its Web site (*Bloomberg*, 27/11/08).

November 27: Cuba, Argentina and Peru are the Paris Club's three largest Latin American debtors, according to a list disclosed by the group of creditor nations, which was formed over 50 years ago. The list shows that Cuba owes 29.7 billion USD, ranking second after Indonesia that owes 36.2 billion dollars (*AP*, 27/11/08).

November 27: The 5th Session of the Cuba-Lesotho Joint Intergovernmental Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation wound up in Havana with the signing of a final document that further strengthens bilateral cooperation links between both nations. Lesotho's Foreign Minister Mohlabi Kenneth Tsekoa and Cuba's First Deputy Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation Ramon Ripoll penned the final document of the session, which among other aspects stipulates that a 10-member Cuban medical brigade currently working in Lesotho will continue to offer its services in that African nation. Lesotho expressed its interest in exploring cooperation opportunities in significant areas, such as energy and the construction of solar panels in particular. Cuba also offered the African nation 10 scholarships for medical studies (*ACN*, 27/11/08).

November 28: Cuba and Bolivia signed an economic complementation agreement in Montevideo, host to the Latin America Integration Association (ALADI), to boost bilateral commerce and cooperation relations. The accord was signed by Cuban ambassador to Uruguay, Marielena Ruiz Capote, and by Pablo Guzman, Bolivian deputy minister for Economic Affairs and Foreign Commerce. Both officials represent their countries at ALADI, *Prensa Latina* news agency reported. The new agreement adheres to Bolivian President Evo Morales's initiative known as The Peoples' Commerce Treaty, of which Cuba is a signatory country; the treaty aims at the enhancement of cooperation and economic complementation to achieve greater regional integration. The protocol stipulates the mutual granting of tariff and non-tariff preferences, the recognition of original standards and reciprocal investment promotion and protection. The agreement particularly refers to areas such as services, commercial cooperation and industrial property (*ACN*, 28/11/08).

November 29: Cuba's trade minister said the Caribbean nation is seeking more business with Canada to bolster his country's economy during the global economic crisis. Raul de la Nuez told the press he hopes to boost the volume of trade between the two countries in the months ahead. De la Nuez met with his Canadian counterpart, International Trade Minister Stockwell Day, as well as Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz. "I think that we have an opportunity to improve or to increase the volume of trade that today we have," De la Nuez said. "We think that the relationship between both countries is important to us, and I think during this meeting we had the opportunity to discuss some of these issues." A spokeswoman for Day said the two ministers spoke about Canada supplanting Spain as Cuba's third-largest trading partner, and about the growing number of Canadian tourists vacationing there. Day also assured De la Nuez that Canada would make every effort to ease exports of agricultural goods and fertilizer to Cuba after three massive hurricanes swept over the island in the last two months. De la Nuez said there's a need in Cuba for food, chemicals, fertilizers, machinery and commercial and high-tech equipment from Canada. In exchange, he said Cuba can provide Canada with nickel and ore concentrate, cigars and other traditional Cuban products. Trade between Canada and Cuba totalled \$1.6 billion last year (*The Canadian Press*, 29/11/08).

November 30: Cuban Vice President Esteban Lazo visited central Ciego de Avila province to assess the recovery process from the wake of Hurricane Ike that battered this

region last September. During his tour, residents spoke to Lazo about food production destined for several other provinces and about the conclusion of several economic and social projects as a tribute to the 50th anniversary of the Cuban revolution, reported Granma newspaper in its digital version. Lazo spoke with residents from the community of Pesqueria where the La Cuba Farm Company is based. The farm is an important producer on the national level, supplying root and other vegetables to several provinces. Lazo also visited the municipality of Venezuela and inspected a project that is constructing 20 “petro houses” —built using derivatives from the oil industry— as part of an agreement between Cuba and Venezuela under the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA). Lazo also visited the Juventud Heroica Farm Company. An official from the provincial ministry of Agriculture, Benito Migoya Diaz, explained how after several years of difficulties the firm is now showing positive results and a leader in planting the next potato crop (*ACN*, 1/12/08).

Exile Community

November 3: Cuban doctor Ivette Domínguez, who walked away from an international mission in Zimbabwe in 2002, is determined to get what she considers to be her most basic right as a mother: contact with her youngest son, who still lives in Cuba. But her prospects aren't good, given a pending lawsuit in a Cuban court to strip her of her parental rights. "I think I have the right to demand a normal relationship with my son," said Domínguez, 37. "It is inhuman what is happening. I'm destroyed." Domínguez, who specialized in internal medicine, has lived in Málaga, Spain, since leaving Zimbabwe in 2004. Her oldest son from her first marriage, Alexander, 16, lives with her after having obtained paternal permission to emigrate to Spain in August of 2007. Her 10 year-old son, Alfredo Chapur Domínguez, is at the center of the legal dispute and currently lives with his father, Alfredo Chapur Hernández, 37, in the city of Santa Clara, Cuba (*The Miami Herald*, 3/11/08).

November 4: Miami's trio of Cuban-American Republican congress members survived their toughest challenge yet. Voters returned hard-line anti-Castro Representatives Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Mario Diaz-Balart to Washington. It was a major coup for the trio. With Barack Obama heading the Democratic ticket and a newer, more moderate generation of non-Cuban Hispanic voters emerging throughout Miami-Dade, the Democrats had targeted the Diaz-Balart brothers for defeat. Mario Diaz-Balart survived the closest race, narrowly outpolling Joe Garcia, the former chief of the Miami-Dade Democratic Party, to win his fourth term. Lincoln Diaz-Balart scored a remarkably large double-digit win over former Hialeah Mayor Raul Martinez to win his ninth term on Capitol Hill. Ros-Lehtinen cruised to her 11th term with 58 percent of the vote to vanquish her challenger, Colombian-American businesswoman Annette Taddeo. Ros-Lehtinen said she fretted that an unpopular president, an unpopular war, a plummeting economy and an "Obama wave" might have added up to a perfect storm for the Democratic challengers. "It had all the makings of me going down," Ros-Lehtinen said. "If I can make it in this election, I can make it in any election" (*The Miami Herald*, 5/11/08).

November 6: According to Bendixen's exit polls, US President elect Barack Obama won 35 percent of the Cuban-American vote in Miami-Dade County, nearly 10 points higher than John Kerry's showing in 2004. Within that community, the generational difference was stark. For example, 84 percent of Miami-Dade Cuban-American voters 65 or older backed McCain, while 55 percent of those 29 or younger backed Obama. For evidence of the potential divide among Cuban Americans, consider Miami's Pujol family. Alexandra Palomo-Pujol, 24, helped persuade her mother Rose, a lifelong Republican, to back Obama -- but those arguments failed with her grandparents, who emigrated from Cuba in 1959. The family's debates over the election at times ended in slammed doors and days spent without speaking, Palomo-Pujol said. Meanwhile, Rose Pujol, 53, became an enthusiastic Obama supporter, attending the Democratic Convention, volunteering for the Florida campaign and putting up a life-size cutout of Obama in her Coconut Grove offices. When she went to tell her parents that she and her daughters were backing the Democratic candidate, they were appalled. "I could see the hair rising up on their arms, even though I kept telling them that it's OK to realize 50 years later that the party you're part of needs to be revamped," Pujol said. Despite the political divide in families like the Pujols, Cuban-American political observers say this year's presidential election did not signal a departure from the past (*The Miami Herald*, 6/11/08).

November 9: With Democrats in control of the White House and Congress, the Cuban American National Foundation is sitting pretty after wandering the political wilderness for eight years. Jorge Mas Santos -- scion of the architect of US policy toward Cuba before ultra-conservatives walked out of CANF in a huff in 2001 -- now has the ear of President-elect Barack Obama. Mas Santos' father, Jorge Mas Canosa, was brilliant at positioning CANF as a human rights group backed by Republicans and many Democrats in Congress during the Reagan years. When George H.W. Bush was running for re-election in 1992 against Bill Clinton, Mas Canosa tried to straddle both sides. Even though he personally embraced the GOP, he did not want CANF or Cuban Americans to ever be taken for granted, as blacks had been by the Democratic Party. Human rights, he noted, have no party affiliation. The Bushes never forgot the slight. When George W. Bush ran in 2000, he expected allegiance from CANF. By then, Mas Canosa had died, and Mas Santos vowed to keep his father's bipartisan approach. CANF was locked out. Instead, the Cuban Liberty Council, formed by CANF's break-away old guard, had an open door at the White House and pushed to tighten travel and remittances to Cuba. The result? With Fidel Castro all but dead and his brother Raúl in charge, the US government has had no sway on the regime and the opposition is floundering. With Obama's win CANF is positioned to have immense influence on Cuba policy (*The Miami Herald*, 10/9/08).

November 18: Inside her bedroom on Cuba's Isle of Youth, 7-year-old Daviana González prays to be reunited with her mother after more than five years, relatives say. In Camagüey, Marta Daniela Batista, another little girl separated from her parents, is said to suffer from mental health problems. The girls are children of Cuban medical professionals living in Miami who deserted their posts in various nations where the Cuban government sent them. But the price for desertion was higher than the families believed possible: The Cuban government is denying the little ones permission to leave,

even though they have US visas that would allow them to travel. "Marta isn't to blame for what her parents did, and yet they punish her," said her mother, Melvis Mesa, 42. "She's just a child, and children have a right to be with their parents. What the Cuban government is doing is a terrible abuse." Mesa and Daviana's mother -- Yaisis González - - are among more than a dozen Cuban health workers working with the Cuban American National Foundation, or CANF, on a campaign to get their children back. CANF representatives plan to file complaints against the Cuban government with international organizations, such as the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations. A press conference is planned to call for other Cuban medical professionals in the same situation to come forward and join their cause. The Cuban government is "holding the children hostage" to punish those who leave official missions, López said (*The Miami Herald*, 18/11/08).

November 19: A Cuban man who lost both of his arms -- after he tried to escape from prison following a failed attempt to reach Florida -- denounced the Cuban government for keeping his family on the island even though they have been issued visas to join him in the United States. In March 2007 Jorge Albart Rodriguez detailed how he injected petroleum into his own arms during the 1980s in an attempt to escape from a Cuban prison. "All of the frustration and pain I felt while locked up does not compare to the suffering of not having my family reunited," he said "They should already be in Miami, but the Cuban government has delayed the authorization for their exit without offering an explanation." He said he suspected that the publicity given to his ordeal never sat well with Cuban authorities who have blocked the departure of his wife, Judith, and their sons Jury, 9, and Jorge, 19. His family had been due to arrive to the United States in September. "The nightmare is not over and I don't know what else I can do," Albart said (*The Miami Herald*, 20/11/08).

November 20: Two veterans of the Elián González saga are expected to be named to top posts in Democrat Barack Obama's administration, infuriating some Cuban-American Republicans who haven't forgotten the 6-year-old boy seized in Miami and sent back to the communist regime. The Associated Press is reporting that Obama's top choice for US attorney general is Eric Holder, who served as deputy attorney general during the 2000 raid in Miami. Greg Craig, who represented González's father in the custody battle, is expected to be named White House counsel. "This is a clear sign that the Obama administration is diametrically opposed to the concerns and views of the Cuban-American community," said state Representative David Rivera of Miami, who helped organize the June protest. "It is a blatant and disrespectful slap in the face" (*The Miami Herald*, 20/11/08).

Foreign Affairs

November 1: The Cuban Government has decried the recent attack by the US army on a small Syrian village bordering Iraq, killing eight civilians, and has demanded that the US government stop these military actions immediately. The Cuban Foreign Ministry issued an official statement, published by the official daily Granma, stating Cuba's position on

the aggression, which it described as inadmissible and illegal. The Cuban government also expressed its solidarity with the Syrian government and people (*ACN*, 1/11/08).

November 1: Latin American residents in Brisbane, Australia have joined a project called "Lend a Hand to Cuba," to collect funds to contribute to the recovery of the island from the damage caused by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. *Prensa Latina* reported that close to 5,000 Australian dollars were collected by the Cuba-Australia Friendship Association at a meeting held at a Spanish Club in Sidney, the capital of Queensland. Other members of the organization in the city of Perth reportedly led a rally in front of the US consulate to protest about Washington's embargo against Cuba. Among the participants in the rally were members of different unions, and the Australian Communist Party (*ACN*, 2/11/08).

November 2: President Hugo Chavez expressed hope that Barack Obama wins this week's US presidential election and that "as a black man" he ends the 46-year-old US trade embargo on Cuba. "We don't ask him to be a revolutionary, we don't ask him to be a socialist, only that, as a black man about to become president of the United States, he take his place in history," Chavez said in a televised speech from south-eastern Barinas state (*AFP*, 2/11/08).

November 3: Cuban First Vice-President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura held official talks with Bounthong Chitmany, President of the Organizing Commission of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Party of Laos (PPRL) at the building hosting the Communist Party Central Committee. In the friendly encounter both leaders exchanged views on the current situation of their respective parties and countries, the excellent performance of bilateral relations, as well as international matters. Machado Ventura reaffirmed the priority and importance that relations with the Laotian Revolutionary Party and government mean to the Cuban Communist Party and government (*ACN*, 3/11/08).

November 3: The Medal of Honour of Dominica was granted to Fidel Castro, for his contribution and services in favour of the people of this Caribbean island. According to *Granma* news daily, the medal was presented to Cuban Vice President Esteban Lazo, who traveled to Dominica to receive the medal on behalf of Castro. The presentation took place in front of more than 5,000 people who were celebrating the 30th anniversary of Dominica's independence. The Cuban delegation was welcomed with a long ovation and then, the President of Dominica, Nicholas J. O. Liverpool, presented Lazo with the medal (*ACN*, 3/11/08).

November 3: The positive impact of Cuban medical missions on other nations was highlighted in Havana, during celebrations to mark the 45th anniversary of Cuba's cooperation in this field with the Third World and the 10th anniversary of the Integral Health Program (IHP). More than 1,000 delegates, graduates from Havana's Latin American School of Medicine, internationalist health workers, and Cuban journalists, exchanged their experiences, challenges, and perspectives in terms of this humanitarian work. Cuban Foreign Ministry official Tania Perez told the press that, from 1960 to August, 2008, more than 270,000 Cubans have offered their technical assistance to more than 160 countries. She stressed that of all Cuban internationalist missions, those related

to medical aid have been the largest, by way of which 185,000 health professionals and technicians have offered their services in 103 countries (ACN, 3/11/08).

November 3: Jose Blanco, the deputy general secretary of the governing Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), will visit Cuba, where he will hold talks with government authorities and Spanish businesspeople on the Caribbean island. Blanco will arrive on November 5 in Havana, where he will attend a meeting to commemorate the 14th anniversary of the Association of Spanish Businesspeople in Cuba, reported the Prensa Latina news agency. A communiqué released by PSOE in Madrid explained that Blanco's trip "is to support Spanish business people and the development of future activities" (ACN, 3/11/08).

November 4: Chinese President Hu Jintao will attend the G-20 summit of government leaders in Washington later this month, to discuss tackling the world financial crisis, before heading south to visit US ideological foe Cuba. The Chinese President will also pay state visits to Greece, and Costa Rica; in Cuba will be meeting fellow Communist leader Raul Castro. Castro may be hoping for Chinese help to weather the global financial crisis, which has come as a painful blow to the small island nation, already reeling from two powerful hurricanes and soaring import prices (Reuters, 4/11/08).

November 4: Panama's ambassador in Havana, Luis Gómez, described current relations between the two nations as excellent. On the occasion of the 105th anniversary of his country's independence on November 3, Gómez compared current status of bilateral ties to those of the times of General Torrijos and Fidel Castro. The diplomat expressed that, in terms of cooperation, accords of mutual understanding have been signed in the fields of medicine, education, energy, sports, and science, and that another in the sphere of trade is in process (ACN, 3/11/08).

November 5: Brazil congratulated US president-elect Barack Obama, saying that "hope won out over prejudice" to hand the first black US president the key to the White House. Foreign Minister Celso Amorim compared Obama's win to the 2003 victory of Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, a former union leader. Lula's leftist record was a great concern to traditional business interests. Amorim also said he hoped that Obama's administration would improve ties with Latin America, "particularly decreasing tensions with Venezuela and Cuba" (AFP, 5/11/08).

November 5: Cuba's ambassador to Angola, Pedro Ross, held talks with Angola's new Prime Minister, Antonio Paulo Kassoma, whom he congratulated on his appointment. The exchange included an assessment of cooperation between the two countries since the visit to Cuba of President José Eduardo dos Santos in September 2007, the Cuban Foreign Ministry's website reports. The two top officials spoke about current plans to increase bilateral support, especially in the fields of health, education, and construction (ACN, 6/11/08).

November 5: A high-level delegation of the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF) led by its President Huynh Dam is on a working visit to Cuba at the invitation of the Committees

for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR). During talks with CDR Co-ordinator Juan Jose Rabilero, the leader of Vietnam's largest mass organisation praised the brotherhood between the two nations and the two organisations, and expressed his admiration at the Cuban people's steadfast revolutionary spirit to overcome difficulties caused by two hurricanes and the US economic blockade. The official thanked the Cuban people for their wholehearted support and assistance to the Vietnamese people during the wartime and affirmed Vietnam's determination to reinforce the traditional rapport with Cuba (*Nhan Dan*, 6/11/08).

November 5: A delegation of the Socialist Workers Party of Spain (PSOE) arrived in Havana for an official visit at the invitation of the Central Committee of Cuba's Communist Party (PCC). According to Granma news daily, the group is led by Jose Blanco Lopez, General Undersecretary of the PSOE. During their stay in Cuba, the visitors will meet with Government officials and PCC leaders. They will also visit places of economic, historic and social interest (*ACN*, 6/11/08).

November 6: Cuba's Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque will pay a visit to Russia on November 8-12. According to Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko, Perez's visit will intensify the political dialogue and mutually beneficial cooperation. "Perez plans to meet with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov and discuss a wide variety of pressing world policy issues. The two men will consider the key issues of bilateral ties to synchronize the approaches to central modern problems," Nesterenko said. The senior Russian diplomat described Cuba as "a traditionally friendly nation and one of Russia's key partners in Latin America." "Cuba's authorities stand for the further strengthening of Russia's stance in world affairs and approve the intensive development of bilateral economic cooperation and the trustful political dialogue," he said. "The similarity of Russian and Cuban approaches to many world and regional problems and our countries' drive for active interaction within the framework of the United Nations are the basis for the constructive cooperation on a wide variety of issues," he said. "Cuba was one of the first to have backed Russia in connection with the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict and our efforts aimed at the settlement of the conflict in Transcaucasia," he said. "Russia consistently works for normalizing the situation around Cuba and its re-integration into regional and world processes," Nesterenko said. According to Nesterenko, "much attention at the upcoming talks will be paid to the intensification of trade and economic ties." The ministers will discuss the opening of the Russian cultural and scientific center in Cuba. The news comes as Russia said it had approved up to \$335 million in state loans to Cuba to buy Russian goods and services (*Itar-Tass, Stratfor*, 6/11/08).

November 6: The government of Guyana through the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB) has donated six containers of rice to hurricane-ravaged Cuba. During a ceremonial handover, the Guyana Foreign Affairs Director General, Ambassador Elizabeth Harper, said Cuba had been a loyal ally to Guyana, providing numerous forms of aid and support for government initiatives through the years and, as such, she noted that the government felt it necessary to show its solidarity to the people of Cuba at this time of crisis. Cuban Charge d'Affairs, Pedro Arteaga Cardonas said that his country

recognized that this was a big gesture on Guyana's part and he expressed his government's gratitude. He noted that Guyana has shared a strong diplomatic relationship with Cuba since 1972 and has signalled Cuba's commitment to strengthening this drive. Cardonas also praised Guyana's government for its support for ending the trade embargo against Cuba by the US (*Caribbean Net News*, 7/11/08).

November 6: The Solomon Islands government is believed to have accepted an offer by Iran to meet the travel costs for Solomon Islands medical students studying in Cuba, the daily Solomon Star reported. Iran's offer to meet airfares and to provide computers for the students were agreed in talks in New York when Prime Minister Dr Derek Sikua was attending the United Nations General Assembly. Many of the students who were accepted for training in Cuba could not travel this year because of a shortage in funding. With the new funding source, more students will be on their way to Havana. The training of Solomon Islands medical students in Cuba was first initiated by the government of Manasseh Sogavares. Under the arrangement, the Solomon Islands government was to pay students travel costs to and from Cuba while the Havana government meets lodging and other internal costs. As part of the scheme, Cuban medical doctors would be sent to work in Solomon Islands hospitals. At least two are already working at the National Referral Hospital in Honiara (*Pacnews*, 6/11/08).

November 6: The deputy leader of Spain's governing Socialist Party held what he described as a "frank dialogue" in Havana with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. Jose Blanco told journalists after a luncheon at the Foreign Ministry that he and the Cuban official discussed matters "of mutual interest for both countries." "It seems to me it was a very frank dialogue, though it cannot be doubted that we maintain some disagreements about some things. But it is in the ambit of private conversation, which is what we had," the Spaniard said during a stroll around Old Havana. Blanco traveled to Cuba at the invitation of Spanish businessmen taking part in the Havana International Fair, and he joined his compatriots at a dinner with two of Cuba's vice presidents, Jose Ramon Fernandez and Ricardo Cabrisas. But the visitor's first formal encounter with Cuban officials came when he went to the offices of the Communist Party Central Committee for talks with the party's head of international relations, Fernando Ramirez de Estenoz. Blanco told the press that his conversations with Ramirez centered on the changes launched this year by Cuban President Raul Castro, who is trying to energize the island's economy while preserving the Communist Party's monopoly on power (*EFE*, 6/11/08).

November 6: The Christian Democrat International (CDI) unanimously appointed Oswaldo Paya Sardiñas as its honorary vice-president, announced the Christian Liberation Movement (CLM). According to the opposition organization, the honor conferred upon Oswaldo Paya and, by extension, on Cuba constitutes an acknowledgement of the Cuban people at a time when the international community is hoping for a peaceful transition. Paya was grateful for the confidence in the Cuban Christian Democrats, perceived also as a responsibility. The CLM leader said that it was not just a personal distinction because it brought attention to the Christian humanist movement, inside and out of Cuba, "especially to our brothers who are imprisoned." Payá

added that all the other opposition groups of the country were just as deserving of recognition. The CDI conference was held at Centro Fox, in Guanajuato, Mexico, where world political leaders debated the issue of effective humanism. Participants included presidents, prime ministers and parliamentary authorities seeking a new centrist politics approach based on human dignity and development (*Cubaencuentro*, 6/11/08).

November 6: In an exclusive interview with the local press, Iran's Deputy Minister for Americas Affairs, Alireza Salari regretted that bilateral relations between Cuba and Iran in the economic field have not reached the same level as the political relations. Alireza Salari, who is in Cuba attending the 2008 Havana International Trade Fair, described his first visit to Cuba and Latin America after occupying his current position five months ago as excellent and he mentioned how educating it had been for him meeting with the Cuban leaders. "We have vast relationships in this continent, where we have very good relations with Cuba and Venezuela; we fully enjoy the best relationships on which my government confers great importance" said Salari on the relations between his country and the Latin American region. He added that, with the aid of the Iranian Embassy in Havana, and with all the knowledge it can provide to Iranian businesspeople on the economic situation of the Caribbean nation, the commercial exchange will increase exponentially in the next few years. Tourism was one of the main topics on the working agenda discussed between the Iranian official and Cuba's Foreign Affairs deputy minister Marcos Rodriguez. "We think tourism is a good source of income for Cuba and also a source of strengthening our relations" said Salari, who considers that health tourism from his country, especially in the form of tour groups will help Cuba to boost its tourist industry (*ACN*, 7/11/08).

November 7: Two Panamanian former government officials, ex Justice Minister Arnulfo Escalona and ex Police Chief Carlos Barés, will face trial for abuse of authority in releasing Luis Posada Carriles and three of his accomplices in 2004, after they were granted an anti-Constitutional pardon by former Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso. A note published by Granma news daily says that the top Panamanian anti-corruption prosecutor, Mercedes de León, announced that Panama's 12th Criminal Court is also to bring charges against Javier Tapia, former deputy immigration minister, for having procured the illegal release on August 26, 2004, before the pardon was made public. Posada, Pedro Crispín Remón, Guillermo Novo Sampoll and Gaspar "Gasparito" Jiménez Escobedo were arrested in Panama on November 17, 2000. They were allegedly planning to blow up the capital's university amphitheatre while Fidel Castro was speaking. Castro was in Panama at the time attending the 10th Ibero-American Summit (*ACN*, 6/11/08).

November 8: Cuba's Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Perez Roque arrived in Russia on an official visit at the request of his counterpart, Serguei Lavrov. Upon arriving in Moscow, Perez Roque told the press about how much Cuba appreciated Russia's support in the fight to have the US put an end to the economic, financial and commercial blockade against the island, said Prensa Latina news agency. The Cuban Minister noted that he expects this visit to Russia will help strengthen economic ties up to the same level as political relations. Andrei Nesterenko, Russia's Foreign Minister spokesperson said relations with Cuba are experiencing an increasing trend. He noted that since 1996, eight visits of the foreign ministers from both countries have taken place. Nesterenko

announced that a meeting between the Russian First Vice-President, Igor Sechin, and the Cuban foreign minister has been scheduled. Sechin is the co-chairman of the Russia-Cuba top-level intergovernmental commission (*ACN*, 8/11/08).

November 8: Felix Gonzalez, Executive Secretary of the Cuba-Arab Countries Friendship Association and the official Cuban Friendship Institute, visited the Syrian Arab Republic and later the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. In his one-week long visit to Syria, Gonzalez was received by the Minister of Information, Mohsen Bilal, along with Osama Adi, president of the Syria-Cuba Friendship Association, who is also a member of the Al Baas Party Regional Command. Meanwhile, Gonzalez met with the General Secretaries of the Workers and Farmers federations, as well as with a group of Syrians who graduated in Cuba headed by the Executive Secretary of the Syria-Cuba Friendship Association, the Cuban Foreign Affairs Ministry's website reported (*ACN*, 8/11/08).

November 8: Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin met with Cuban President Raul Castro, Cuban media reported. It was Sechin's third trip to Cuba in the last three months, though this time he first stopped in Nicaragua and Venezuela and was accompanied by officials and businessmen. This visit was scheduled to last only a few hours during which Sechin attended a meeting on bilateral business, Russian officials told the press in Havana. The official *Juventud Rebelde* newspaper said the Russian official was on "a working visit" as part of "the intense process of development in relations between the two countries." Castro and Sechin conversed about matters of mutual interest and the current international situation, including the financial crisis, the paper reported. Sechin arrived in Havana on the same day that Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque began a visit to Moscow at the invitation of his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov. *Juventud Rebelde* said that Castro thanked Russia once again for the reconstruction aid it provided, just as Cuba was enduring its third hurricane of the year, Paloma, which made landfall during the night in the eastern part of the island (*EFE*, 9/11/08).

November 10: The European Commission issued a communiqué praising the Cuban Government's response to the threat posed by Hurricane Paloma, which hit the eastern region of the country. In the note, the European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Assistance, Louis Michel, highly commended the efforts of the Cuban authorities that managed to evacuate more than one million people before hurricane Paloma made landfall in the town of Santa Cruz del Sur in Camaguey province. The communiqué expresses the willingness of the European Commission to contribute with more emergency assistance to face the effects of hurricane Paloma "in solidarity with the people of Cuba, which have been seriously affected by three hurricanes in less than three months." The European Commissioner has also been working with a technical commission that will visit Cuba in order to evaluate the existing needs in view of a potential increase of current EC assistance (*ACN*, 10/11/08).

November 10: Cuba's top diplomat in Toronto is confident his country will rebound from the ravages of four hurricanes that have battered the Spanish-speaking Caribbean nation since September. "We are a fighting people. We never surrender," Cuban Consul General

Laureano Cardoso said while receiving a cash donation for hurricane rehabilitation work in Cuba. The presentation of a \$1,327 cheque at the Consulate General of Grenada in Toronto was made by Allister Romain, the new chairman of the Toronto Support Group of the National Democratic Congress. Another \$1,327 donation will be made shortly to the Haitian consular representative in Toronto to assist Haiti in its hurricane recovery efforts. The monies represent proceeds from donations collected at the first anniversary gala of NDC Toronto held September 27, and which was addressed by Prime Minister Tillman Thomas and Foreign Affairs and Tourism Minister Peter David (*Caribbean Netnews*, 12/11/08).

November 10: Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque discussed prospects for bilateral trade and economic ties in Moscow. The sides stressed progress in developing Russian-Cuban relations, as well as cooperation in a number of other areas. The Russian government earlier announced it had approved a state loan to Cuba of up to \$335 million to buy Russian goods and services. In 2007, trade between Russia and Cuba totaled about \$300 million (*RIA-Novosti*, 10/11/08).

November 11: Cuban President Raul Castro will visit Russia next year, the Kremlin said, in a new sign that Moscow is reviving a Cold War-era trade and military alliance. Moscow also repeated calls for Washington to lift the economic embargo imposed on the Caribbean island in 1962 when Castro's brother, Communist revolutionary Fidel Castro, was in power. "Next year we await (...) Raul Castro in our country and this will be yet another contribution to the development of ties," Russian President Dmitry Medvedev told Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque in Moscow. "Your visit is yet more evidence that relations between Cuba and Russia are developing in a very dynamic way," Russian national TV showed Medvedev saying. Moscow was Havana's main benefactor during the Cold War but the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 dealt a heavy blow to Cuba's economy. Relations soured in the 1990s. Medvedev said the two countries had "overcome that pause" and contacts were now intense. Perez Roque handed Medvedev an invitation to visit Cuba, NTV television said. Perez Roque held talks with his Russian counterpart Serguei Lavrov during the last day of his official visit to Russia. Asked by a reporter whether he would advise US President-elect Barack Obama to scrap the embargo, Russian Foreign Minister Serguei Lavrov said: "We hope that the voice of the international community which has been heard in the United Nations yet again will of course be taken into account" (*Reuters, ACN*, 11/11/08).

November 11: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque thanked Moscow for a recent declaration passed by the Russian Duma (Parliament) demanding the release of the five Cubans who remain imprisoned in the United States. "We appreciate the solidarity of the Russian people and particularly the declaration approved by the Duma regarding this injustice against the Five," Perez Roque told the press. As part of a two-day official visit to Russia, the Cuban diplomat met with the First Vice President of the Council of the Federation (Senate), Alexander Torshin, and by the Vice President of the Duma, Liubov Sliiska (*ACN*, 11/11/08).

November 11: As Hurricane Paloma battered parts of Cuba and rescue teams searched for students and teachers trapped when a school collapsed in Haiti, Catholics on St. Kitts gave generously to their cause. The second collection during Saturday night of November 8 and Sunday morning mass will go towards the two Caribbean republics to assist them in the aftermath of recent hurricanes. Two weeks ago, St. Kitts and Nevis Prime Minister Hon. Dr. Denzil L. Douglas presented a cheque for EC\$100,000 to the Resident Cuban Ambassador to assist Cuba in its recovery (*Office of the Prime Minister*, 11/11/08).

November 11: Top Cuban and Ethiopian officials said relations between their countries are excellent, and spoke out in favour of their further diversification and expansion. Cuba's Deputy Foreign Minister, Marcos Rodríguez, and Ethiopia's Minister of State for Foreign Relations, Tekeda Alemu, met at the Foreign Office in Havana. During their conversation, Rodríguez made reference to the success of cooperation projects between Ethiopia and Cuba, in health and education among other sectors, which includes the training of young Ethiopians in Cuban universities. After expressing his satisfaction with his visit to Cuba, Alemu stressed the important role played by Cuban soldiers in the 1970's in the preservation of Ethiopia's territorial integrity and stability (*ACN*, 12/11/08).

November 11: Spanish Foreign Affairs Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos defended closer economic cooperation with Cuba before a hearing of his country's senate in Madrid. Moratinos said he was in favour of better understanding between Cuba and Spain to continue improving commercial relations between business from the two countries. "Our approach is dialogue, trust, openness and a willingness to work with Cuban authorities— and we will maintain that stance," Moratinos stressed (*ACN*, 11/12/08).

November 12: Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Li Jinzhang said that the Cuban people have the right to decide their own developing path. "That is why we have always supported their efforts to defend their national independence and sovereignty," he added. In an interview published by Granma news daily, the Chinese official said that Cuba's stability and development contributes to the well-being of its people and the prosperity of Latin America and the Caribbean. He expressed his country's solidarity with Cuba for all the suffering and material losses caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike recently and expressed his confidence that, under the leadership of the Cuban Government, the Cuban people will overcome the consequences of these natural disasters (*ACN*, 12/11/08).

November 12: Phase two of the Jamaica-Cuba Eye Care Programme has now turned its focus to the southern sections of Jamaica, paying special attention to cataracts, according to programme co-ordinator, Claudette Yeard. "The objective of phase two of the project is to reduce the prevalence of blindness. Cataract is one of the leading causes of blindness, therefore the aim is to find those persons with cataracts to have surgery to prevent blindness," Yeard told the Observer. "We have covered areas like Franfield Health Centre, Lionel Town, Mandeville Regional Hospital and now we are actually at Mile Gully. Since we have been in Mile Gully [in Manchester] we have selected over 66 cataract patients." The 66 patients were selected from 1,260 patients who were screened from October 13 to 31 in that community. Meanwhile, Yeard said 1,115 patients have received surgeries under the programme - which sees patients travelling to Cuba for

surgery - since the beginning of the year. This brings to more than 5,000 the total number of Jamaicans that have received surgery since the programme started in 2005 (*Jamaica Observer*, 12/11/08).

November 12: Spain's secretary of state for Ibero-America, Trinidad Jimenez, said that her government is maintaining its contact with Cuban dissidents and that it has always been concerned about human rights and the situation of political prisoners in its dialogue with the Castro regime. Jimenez, at a breakfast forum, rejected the criticism of those who accuse the Spanish government of moving away from the Cuban opposition in favour of the Havana authorities. Her remarks came after the visit of Spanish Socialist Workers Party, or PSOE, deputy secretary-general Jose Blanco several days ago to Cuba, during which he did not meet with dissidents because, she said, nobody from that group came to him to ask to speak to him, despite his having said that he was "open to dialogue." "We have always maintained contact (with the dissidents) and it has been visible on many occasions," the Spaniard said. She said that it was possible to make advances in the dialogue with the regime and, at the same time, to put forward proposals in favour of the opposition through the mechanism on human rights agreed to when Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos visited Havana in April 2007. Jimenez insisted that Madrid's aim is to defend all of Cuban society, including dissidents, and to act with "discretion" in that area (*EFE*, 12/11/08).

November 12: Cuba presented a new book by Fidel Castro, who has not appeared in public since undergoing emergency intestinal surgery in July 2006 but who authorities claim spent more than 400 hours working on the manuscript. "La Paz en Colombia," or "Peace in Colombia," explores Cuba's role in attempts to end Colombia's civil war, which has raged for more than four decades. The 265-page book was presented during a Havana ceremony that Castro did not attend, though one of his sons was there, as was Ricardo Alarcon, head of the country's rubber-stamp parliament. Several rounds of peace talks between the Colombian government and the National Liberation Army, Colombia's second-largest guerrilla group, were held in Havana but did not lead to any major agreements. Castro's latest book contains documents pertaining to Colombia's peace process, as well as Castro's memories of the country. It includes the ex-president's musings on a number of topics, including his opinion that Colombia's problems with cocaine and heroin production and smuggling have been caused solely by demand for drugs on US streets. Speaking at the ceremony, Jose Arbezu head of the island's Communist Party's Americas Department, scoffed at the notion that Cuba had armed Colombian rebels in decades past, even though the island was known to have supported leftist causes around the region. Culture Minister Abriel Prieto called Castro's latest book a "tribute" to Manuel Marulanda, co-founder of Colombia's largest guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, who died of a reported heart attack in March. In addition to its publication in hard copy, the book will be offered electronically on Cubadebate, a Web site that Castro uses to post his essays (*AP*, 12/11/08).

November 13: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque expressed in Moscow his satisfaction for delivering a message of gratitude, friendship and respect from the Cuban people to the people of Russia. Minutes before leaving Moscow after a four-day official

visit, Perez Roque also expressed his satisfaction for the excellent welcome he received from the Russian authorities. During his visit to Moscow, the Cuban diplomat met with high-ranking government officials such as President Dmitri Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. He added that during his meeting with his Russian counterpart, Serguei Lavrov, they confirmed a common interest in further developing bilateral relations. At the end of the official talks, Perez Roque and Lavrov signed a Joint Declaration and a plan for political consultations between the foreign ministries of both countries (ACN, 13/11/08).

November 13: Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva said that US president-elect, Barack Obama, has the authority and the political power to change relations between his country and Cuba, as well as to lift the embargo on Cuba. During a press conference in Italy, Lula pointed out that 185 countries had passed a resolution at the United Nations General Assembly requesting the U.S to end the embargo on Cuba. He added that this was not the first time it happened, although this time he was certain that the new U.S president would hear the call and take significant action. "Lifting an already pointless embargo is the first step towards a transition in the island, the Cold War is over and the Berlin wall has been knocked down," he added (*Notimex*, 13/11/08).

November 13: The Foreign Minister of the Republic of Guinea, Amadou Lamarana Bah, arrived in Cuba for an official visit at the invitation of his Cuban counterpart Felipe Perez Roque. During his stay in Cuba, Lamarana Bah will hold official talks with Perez Roque and with other government leaders (ACN, 13/11/08).

November 13: The government of India donated two million US dollars to Cuba to help the Caribbean nation's efforts to recover from the devastation caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike, which left thousands of houses destroyed and significant economic losses last September. The donation was made by the Indian ambassador in Havana, Mitra Vasisht, during a meeting with Ramon Ripoll, the Cuban First Deputy Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation (MINVEC). According to Granma news daily, also present in the meeting were Alberto Blanco, head of the Asia and Oceania Department at the Cuban Foreign Ministry, as well as other Cuban and Indian officials (ACN, 13/11/08).

November 14: Cuba is celebrating its entry into the Rio Group of Latin American nations as an example of futile US efforts to isolate the island nation. Cuba became a full Rio Group member at a foreign ministers meeting in Zacatecas, Mexico. Now it says it will work to get other Caribbean nations to join. Cuba thanked the member countries for their support in an editorial published in the Communist Party daily Granma. The Rio Group was founded in December 1986, coming out of the Contadora Group and the Contadora Support Group, related to the effort to bring peace to Central America. It has held 20 summits and four times increased its membership to all Latin American countries except Cuba ([Declaración del Gobierno Revolucionario](#); AP, ACN, 14/11/08).

November 14: Russian President Dmitry Medvedev will visit Cuba, as well as Venezuela and Brazil, after attending the November 22-23 APEC summit in Peru, a

presidential spokeswoman said. "The big Latin American tour is connected with the APEC summit in Lima, after which the president will visit Venezuela, Brazil and Cuba," Natalya Timakova said. An invitation to visit Cuba from President Raul Castro was given to Medvedev by Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, who visited Moscow recently (*RIA-Novosti*, 14/11/08).

November 14: Amadou Lamarana Bah and Felipe Perez Roque, Guinea Conakry and Cuba Foreign Ministers, respectively, met in Havana. The two Chancellors met at the building hosting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Havana for official talks, when they went through the developments of the bonds between their countries, which established diplomatic relations August 30th 1960. Perez Roque recalled that Guinea Conakry was the first African country to have diplomatic relations with the Cuban Revolution, and reiterated the willingness of the Caribbean nation to strengthen the ties with the African country. Meanwhile Lamarana Bah expressed his condolences for the damages Cuba suffered by the passing of the three hurricanes that battered the Caribbean nation recently. Over 800 Guinean students have graduated in Cuba, 674 from higher education centres, while there are almost a hundred young Guineans studying in Cuba at the moment. Also there are 17 Cuban health professionals and 4 construction advisors cooperating with the African country (*ACN*, 15/11/08).

November 14: Spain and Japan have contributed to the United Nation's World Food Programme (WFP) fund to help compensate the damage caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Sonsoles Ruedas, WFP's representative in Cuba, told the press that the Spanish government has donated through its International Cooperation Agency for Development, one million euros. Meanwhile, the Japanese government contributed with 800,000 dollars to the programme (*ACN*, 15/11/08).

November 14: Twenty-nine undocumented Cuban migrants traveling in a flimsy boat were intercepted near a small island off the coast of this Caribbean resort city, the Mexican navy said. The Cubans were coasting with the boat's lights off when they were surprised by a navy patrol 19 nautical miles from Isla Mujeres. Doctors at a naval station on Isla Mujeres said the migrants - 24 men, four women and a child - were in good health, aside from slight signs of dehydration. The group was then turned over to immigration authorities. The Cubans told the sailors their boat ran out of fuel and that the currents propelled them toward the Mexican coast. Mexico and Cuba signed an accord last month under which Havana agreed to take back all undocumented Cubans detained by Mexican authorities (*EFE*, 14/11/08).

November 15: The Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Príncipe, Joaquim Rafael Branco, arrived in Cuba. This visit will contribute to strengthening the bonds of friendship and cooperation between the governments and people of Cuba and Sao Tome and Príncipe (*ACN*, 15/11/08).

November 15: An official with Cuba's Foreign Affairs Ministry said Chinese President Hu Jintao's upcoming visit would have "a historic significance." The Cuban government has attached importance to President Hu's visit, which would help solidify the long-

standing friendship between the two countries, said Alberto Blanco Silva, director of the ministry's Asia and Oceania Division, in an interview with Xinhua in Havana. The Chinese president will pay a visit to the Caribbean country from November 17 to November 19 after his participation in the G20 summit in Washington. The Cuban diplomat said the relationship between the two countries was "splendid" and based on continuous contacts between high-ranking officials as well as mutual support on international issues. Cuban leader Fidel Castro had paid much attention to the bilateral relationship, Blanco Silva added (*Xinhua*, 15/11/08).

November 16: China's President Hu Jintao travels to Cuba for a close-up look at the government of new President Raul Castro, a fellow communist struggling to lead his island nation through the devastating effects of three hurricanes and the international financial crisis. Hu visited Cuba in 2004 to oversee the signing of 16 cooperation agreements and was expected to sign more on the economy, trade, education and other areas during his two-day stop, the Chinese government said. Hu, who attended the Group of 20 global economy summit in Washington, was to stop in Costa Rica before starting his two-day visit to Cuba. He will go to Peru later in the week for the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, then on to Greece. Cuba's economy was still suffering from the demise of the Soviet Union during Hu's last visit but has rebounded largely due to integration with oil-rich Venezuela and Chinese loans. China is now Cuba's largest trading partner after Venezuela at \$2.3 billion in 2007 -- four times what it was in 2004 -- despite stark differences in their economic policies and little direct Chinese investment. "Cuba is indispensable for China in its bid to strengthen links with Latin American and the Caribbean countries," the Chinese ambassador to Cuba, Zhao Rongxian Zhao, said of Hu's visit in an interview with China's Xinhua news agency (*Reuters*, 16/11/08).

November 17: A group of 25 Solomon Islands High School graduates are on their way to Cuba to join another 25 already there studying to become doctors. The airfares of this second group are expected to be paid for by Iran. Solomon Islands under-secretary for healthcare, Dr Cedric Alependava, has told Radio Australia the country needs a lot more trained doctors. "Actually there are 60 doctors serving in Solomon Islands and one doctor serving roughly 9,000 people and the benchmark which WHO requires a country to have in ratio to population is one to 500" (*Radio Australia*, 17/11/08).

November 17: Cuban President Raul Castro greeted visiting Sao Tome and Principe's Prime Minister Joaquim Rafael Branco, who arrived in Cuba for an official visit. According to Granma news daily, earlier the African leader was officially welcomed by First VP Jose Ramon Machado Ventura at the Revolution Palace. During this meeting, Machado Ventura expressed his satisfaction at Branco's visit while the distinguished visitor thanked the Cuban government and people for their assistance to Sao Tome and Principe, particularly in the fields of health and education. The Sao Tome and Principe delegation includes Education and Culture Minister Jorge Bonjesus; Benjamin Vera Cruz, Minister of Public Works, Infrastructure, Transportation and Communications; and Ana Paula Alvin, Coordinator of Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Business, Cooperation and Communities (*ACN*, 18/11/08).

November 17: The Chinese government delivered a humanitarian cargo for the victims of hurricanes that recently hit the Caribbean nation. The cargo arrived in Havana in the same Air China aircraft that brought Chinese President Hu Jintao, who is on a two-day official visit to Cuba. Chinese Trade Minister Chen Deming and Cuba's Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation Rodrigo Malmierca presided over the official ceremony of the donation delivery at one of the protocol halls of the Jose Marti International Airport in Havana. Deming expressed the solidarity of the Chinese people with Cuba and recalled that his country had already donated \$1.3 million in cash aid to help Cuba recover from the damages caused by the hurricanes. He added that China will also give Cuba construction materials for the reconstruction of houses. For his part, Malmierca thanked the Chinese official for their friendship and said that Hu Jintao's visit will further strengthen bilateral ties (*ACN*, 18/11/08).

November 18: Chinese President Hu Jintao was on a triumphant tour through Havana as his country expanded its already extensive economic relationship with the communist-run island. Hu laid a wreath at a monument to Cuban independence hero Jose Marti a day after he arrived in Havana as part of a Latin American tour to build China's political and investment ties in the resource-rich region. Hu, who was accompanied by a large delegation of Chinese businessmen, was met at Havana's international airport by First Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura and a throng of chanting Chinese residents of Cuba, who waved tiny Cuban and Chinese flags. A Cuban youth troupe performed a traditional dragon dance on the tarmac. Hu also visited Cuba in 2004, when he met with Fidel Castro, who retired early this year due to ill health and was succeeded by his younger brother Raul. China has transformed its economy by embracing market reforms even as its Communist Party has maintained strict control over politics. Raul Castro is said to be an admirer of the Chinese economic reform model, though top Cuban officials have said they have no interest in implementing such policies in this country (*AP*, 18/11/08).

November 18: Cuban President Raul Castro presided over the official welcoming ceremony to China's head of state Hu Jintao, after which the two government leaders held talks. Hu Jintao, who arrived in Havana on his second official visit, was honored by the air, land and sea military forces in correspondence to his position as head of state. Present at the ceremony were Cuban First Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura; other Cuban Vice-Presidents Esteban Lazo, Carlos Lage and Ricardo Cabrisas; and the head of international relations of the Cuban Communist Party Central Committee, Fernando Remírez de Estenoz. Cuban Foreign Relations Minister Felipe Perez Roque, and the island's ambassador to China Carlos Manuel Pereira, also participated in the ceremony (*ACN*, 18/11/08).

November 18: China's President Hu Jintao accompanied President Raul Castro on a visit to a school for Chinese students, where the Cuban leader sang snippets of a song in Chinese praising late Communist Party Leader Mao Zedong. "I learned to be a student like you, young like you and will remain so all my life," Castro told Hu and 300 Chinese students in the town of Tarara, east of Havana. During the ceremony, President Hu thanked the Cuban authorities for supporting young Chinese students in Cuba, noting that

by 2011, some 5,000 Chinese will have learned Spanish in Cuba since the inception in 2006 of the exchange program which he called a "sign of friendship and cooperation ... between the Cuban people and the Chinese people." During his 36-hour visit -- his first to Cuba since 2004 -- Hu also visited convalescing former president Fidel Castro, 82. The Chinese leader held a "long conversation" with the former Cuban leader and described finding Castro "very recovered," according to the Chinese official Xinhua news agency. The two appeared in a picture published on the website (*AFP*, 19/11/08).

November 18: Raul Castro's first official trip abroad since assuming Cuba's presidency will be to Venezuela. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said he received a letter from Castro and will announce the date of the Cuban leader's visit soon. Chavez said that the visit could take place within days, adding that he was pleased Castro had chosen Venezuela over Brazil, China, Russia and other countries as his first destination abroad. Chavez has long been a close ally of former Cuban president Fidel Castro (*AP*, 18/11/08).

November 19: Chinese President Hu Jintao concluded his state visit to Cuba and left for Lima, Peru to continue his five-nation trip, in which he will attend the Economic Leaders' Meeting of the Asia-Pacific Cooperation Organization (APEC) scheduled for November 22-23. This was President Hu's second state visit to the Latin American country since his first in November 2004. In Havana, Hu held talks with Raul Castro, president of the Council of the State of Cuba, on expanding friendly and cooperative bilateral relations. The two countries also signed documents of cooperation in the economic and educational sectors in a ceremony witnessed by both Hu and Castro. China and Cuba set up diplomatic ties in 1960. In recent years, the two countries have maintained frequent high-level visits, deepened mutual trust and expanded trade and economic cooperation (*Xinhua*, 19/11/08).

November 19: Brazil will offer Cuba financial aid for industry, energy and infrastructure projects during a December visit by President Raul Castro, a senior government official said. "We'll discuss the production of buses, building roads, as well as oil investments," Marco Aurelio Garcia, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's foreign policy adviser, told the press. Brazil's state development bank, BNDES, was looking at ways to finance the projects, despite the global financial crisis, he said. "There's always money to export services," Garcia said in reference to a government line of credit to export Brazilian goods and services. Castro will participate in a summit of Latin American and Caribbean leaders in Salvador de Bahia on December 16 and subsequently visit the capital Brasilia. "He is coming, it's confirmed," Garcia said (*Reuters*, 19/11/08).

November 19: Aleida Guevara, daughter of legendary guerrilla Ernesto Che Guevara, visited Amr Moussa, general secretary of the League of Arab States, in Egypt. Moussa talked with Guevara, at the building hosting the pan Arab organization in Cairo, as part of a courtesy visit, before the Cuban participated in a meeting with several diplomats organized by the Egypt-Latin America Friendship association. Guevara was the guest of host Mona Shazly, at the "10 PM" TV program, who interviewed her about his father's life and the ideas he defended, reported Prensa Latina news agency (*ACN*, 19/11/08).

November 20: The President of the Saint Lucia-Cuba Friendship Association, Rawle Harvey, presented a donation of materials sent from that country to Cuba, to help in the recovery from the damage caused by Hurricanes Gustav, Ike, and more recently by Paloma. The materials valued at 26,000 US dollars were donated by Saint Lucian non-governmental organizations, charity associations, and different companies, according to the Cuban Foreign Affairs Ministry. The donation, sent by plane, includes clothing, shoes, food, construction tools and two power generators. A second similar shipment is expected to be sent in the coming days (*ACN*, 20/11/08).

November 20: The Uruguayan government revoked the temporary work permit it had given to a Cuban ophthalmologist who walked away from a Havana-run program and expressed his desire to settle in Montevideo, authorities said. Dr. Vladimir Villamil Martinez, the former vice president of the national department of ocular plastic surgery at Cuba's Ramon Pando Ferrer Institute of Ophthalmology, had been - until last month - part of the group of Cuban eye doctors who are participating in Operation Miracle. That program, which was established with the signing of an agreement between the Cuban and Uruguayan governments, is being carried out by the Cuban doctors who in recent months have operated on hundreds of Uruguayans. The Cuban doctor stopped participating in the program and announced his desire to settle in Uruguay to practice his profession. The Public Health Ministry then resolved that Villamil's temporary license to practice medicine was to be revoked because the authorization "referred exclusively to the (specific) program." "Therefore, he will not be able to engage in private practice or (in) any other type of paid activity," the resolution stated (*EFE*, 20/11/08).

November 21: The 3rd Cuba-CARICOM Summit will take place on December 8 in Santiago de Cuba to analyze vital topics for both sides, including the agreements signed in previous meetings. Heads of state and government from the countries of the Caribbean Community will take part in this summit that was previously held in Havana, in 2002, and in Bridgetown, in 2005. It is also expected that the discussions will be attended by other CARICOM authorities and representatives from the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) (*ACN*, 21/11/08).

November 21: Venezuelan citizens and institutions have donated more than four million dollars to Cuba to help in the ongoing recovery efforts after the devastation caused by three hurricanes in recent weeks. During a meeting with Cuban journalists in Caracas, Ruben Ramos, economic counselor at the Cuban embassy in Venezuela, said that the donation, in cash and materials, is an expression of the unselfishness, solidarity and humanist spirit of the Venezuelan people. Ramos explained that the donation has allowed them to buy 100 tons of powder milk, 100 tons of rice, 77 tons of pasta, 45.2 tons of sardines and 60 tons of other foodstuffs. The Cuban official said that part of this donation is already in Cuba or on its way to Cuba and part is in Venezuelan warehouses along with 30 tons of personal hygiene products, 7,000 mattresses, 9,000 pillows, and 7,000 packages of diapers (*ACN*, 21/11/08).

November 21: The people of Cuba's Isla de la Juventud (Isle of Youth) thanked a group of power line workers from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines who have been helping in the reestablishment of the electrical system in the area, which was severely damaged by hurricane Gustav. Michael Briwstia, an expert with the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines's state electricity company, said his government decided to send the five electrical workers to Cuba as a solidarity gesture to Cuba and to honour the friendship between the two Caribbean nations. Briwstia noted that Cuba had sent construction workers to his country to help finish the international airport of Argyle, which was inaugurated last July 17; he said, "now we are here setting lamps and replacing power lines for the public lighting," he said, as quoted by Granma newspaper (*ACN*, 21/11/08).

November 22: Cuban Ambassador to Islamabad, Gustavo Machine Gomez, offered Pakistan technology of filling capsules with vaccine of Hepatitis B and Interferon which can be supplied to Pakistan in bulk. In conversation with Pakistan's Minister for Health, Mir Aijaz Hussain Jakharani, the Ambassador said Hepatitis B Vaccine can be made available if a formal request is made to the Cuban Government after the approval of the Cabinet and Joint Economic Commission of Cuba and Pakistan. He also offered other vaccines like Pentavalent Vaccine. He apprised the Minister that the Cuban Government has offered 1,000 scholarships for Pakistani students. Presently there are 956 Pakistanis studying in various medical colleges in Cuba. During the meeting both discussed matters including expansion of cooperation between the two countries in the field of Medical Education, Public Health especially Primary Health Care and the supply of Hepatitis-B Vaccine (*PPI*, 22/11/08).

November 24: The Chilean president Michelle Bachelet will travel to Cuba in February 2009, to attend the 18th International Book Fair of Havana where she is scheduled to deliver the opening remarks. The president officially confirmed her attendance two weeks ago and will be open the literary event, which will be honouring Chile (*La Tercera*, 24/11/08).

November 24: Cuba will be participating in the first Iberian American design biennial that opens in Madrid, Spain, with ten works by Cuban designers. Among the design projects proposed by the island are the campaign "Cuba vs. Blockade 2008," made by the Creative Group of the Cuban Council of State. There are also four posters by young designers, a ceramic collection named "Tropics", and a textile exhibit named after the Cuban national bird "Tocororo", among others. The most important works submitted to the biennial, 316 projects made over the last 20 years by 250 designers in total, are going to be displayed in a big exhibit featuring a wide range of design disciplines including interiors, industrial, fashion, textiles and digital (*ACN*, 24/11/08).

November 24: The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade from the Republic of Mauritius, Arvin Bollel, highlighted in that nation's capital the excellent ties existing between his country and Cuba. The Chancellor met with Cosme Torres, Cuba's ambassador to that island located in the southwest of the Indian Ocean. Bollel declared himself to be in favour of the strengthening of bilateral economic ties,

particularly in the tourism sector, the Cuban Foreign Ministry's website reports (*ACN*, 24/11/08).

November 24: The Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Lesotho, Mohlabi Kenneth Tsekoa, began an official visit to Havana at the invitation of his Cuban counterpart Felipe Perez Roque. According to Granma news daily, Kenneth Tsekoa heads the delegation from his country to the 5th Cuba-Lesotho Intergovernmental Commission for Cooperation that will take place in the Cuban capital until November 27 (*ACN*, 24/11/08).

November 24: A night of Cuban salsa was organized in Castries, Saint Lucia, to collect funds to alleviate the damage caused to Cuba by hurricanes Gustav, Ike and Paloma. The cultural activity, convened by the Saint Lucia- Cuba Friendship Association, was held at the Spinach recreational centre, and was attended by more than 200 people, members of Solidarity-with-Cuba organizations, friends and Saint Lucians who have graduated in Cuba, along with Cuban volunteer workers in that nation and Cuban residents there (*ACN*, 24/11/08).

November 24: Foreign Ministers Felipe Perez Roque, of Cuba, and Mohlabi Kenneth Tsekoa, of Lesotho, expressed their governments' willingness to further strengthen bilateral cooperation relations. During official talks at the Cuban Foreign Ministry, Felipe Perez Roque thanked the African nation for its solidarity and friendship, and its permanent and firm attitude at the United Nations in favour of the lifting of the US economic, financial and commercial blockade against Cuba. Meanwhile, Kenneth Tsekoa passed on the kind regards sent by King Letsie III to the Cubans authorities, and he also offered his condolences for the damages inflicted on the Caribbean nation by three recent hurricanes. The African top government official highlighted his government's interest in intensifying mutual collaboration, particularly in the fields of health care and sports (*ACN*, 24/11/08).

November 24: The Non Aligned Movement (NAM), which is currently chaired by Cuba, issued a call urging Israel to put an end to its occupation of Palestinian territories. According to Prensa Latina news agency, the call is included in a message from Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque that was circulated at the United Nations by Paul Badji, President of the Committee for the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. "The Non Aligned Movement deeply regrets the suffering of the Palestinian people due to the brutal and prolonged Israeli military occupation. NAM also rejects the violation of their inalienable rights and asks for the return of refugees to their homes," the message reads (*ACN*, 25/11/08).

November 25: Cuba's deputy Foreign Minister, Yiliam Jiménez, is heading the delegation that will participate in the 1st Meeting of the Cuba-East Timor Intergovernmental Commission, which will be held in East Timor. The delegation is also made up by Foreign Ministry official Héctor Herrera, and by a specialist with the Ministry for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, Beatriz Borges, the Cuban Foreign Ministry's website reported. Upon its arrival at the Nicolau Lobato airport, the

Cuban delegation was received by Health Minister Nelson Martins, officials from that ministry, from those of Education and Foreign Business, and other governmental and parliamentary representatives (*ACN*, 25/11/08).

November 25: Artists from the Corazón Adentro Cultural Mission in Venezuela have multiplied their actions these days, after offering their art to hundreds of people evacuated in Caracas due to heavy rains. Like their fellow countrymen on the archipelago after the passage of three hurricanes, Cuban actors, musicians, dancers, painters, and art instructors, now on Bolivarian land, went to evacuation centres to bring the evacuees spirituality and art. A specialist with the Cuban Culture Ministry in that South American nation, Ana María Pellón, told the press that artists are devoting themselves with love, selflessness and solidarity to this Mission. Corazón Adentro is one of the programs of the Bolivarian Alternative for The Americas (ALBA) now underway in Venezuela since April, and is aimed at bringing culture to the poor and the needy, in places where art had never been seen before (*ACN*, 25/11/08).

November 25: Cuban Vice President Esteban Lazo Hernandez met with a delegation from the German party The Left, currently visiting the Caribbean nation and headed by its co-president, Lothar Bisky. According to *Granma* news daily, the Cuban VP thanked The Left for their solidarity with Cuba in front of the permanent hostility of the US administration and their rejection of the economic blockade of the Caribbean nation. Lazo also recognized the support Cuba has received from The Left to recover from the damages caused recently by hurricanes Gustav, Ike and Paloma (*ACN*, 25/11/08).

November 25: The Supreme Court of Panama began a trial against two Panamanian former government officials for abuse of authority in releasing Luis Posada Carriles and three of his accomplices in 2004, after they were granted an anti-Constitutional pardon by former Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso. The defendants are ex Justice Minister Arnulfo Escalona and ex Police Chief Carlos Barés, who held their posts during the administration of Moscoso (1999-2004). Posada, Pedro Crispín Remón, Guillermo Novo Sampoll and Gaspar "Gasparito" Jiménez Escobedo were arrested in Panama on November 17, 2000, as they were planning to blow up the capital's university amphitheater where Fidel Castro, who was attending the Ibero-American Summit there, was supposed to speak (*ACN*, 25/11/08).

November 26: In the coming five years, Angola will benefit annually from 200 new scholarships offered by the Cuban government, under the existing co-operation agreement between the two countries, in the domain of education. Half of this number will be designed for the area of Health Sciences. This was announced in Luanda, during the first working meeting of the Cuban minister of Higher Education, Juan Vela Valdés, with officials of Angola's State Department for Higher Education. Vela Valdés, who is in Luanda for a four-day visit to Angola, said the meeting serves to assess the work done since the signing of the co-operation protocol, in 2007, that aims at reinforcing the presence of Cuban teachers in the country. The accord also aims at increasing the number of scholarships for Angolan students in the coming five years in the domains of health, pedagogy, engineering, natural sciences and cattle breeding. "We will also grant

scholarships at the level of post-graduation, Master's degree, and Doctorate", said the Vela Valdes, adding that the implementation of the project starts in 2009 (*ANGOP*, 26/11/08).

November 26: Ricardo Cabrisas, Vice President of the Council of Ministers, heads the Cuban delegation to the Summit of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas-Peoples' Free Trade Agreement (ALBA-TCP) that takes place in Caracas, Venezuela. According to Granma news daily, the Cuban delegation is comprised of Rodrigo Malmierca, Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation; Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; and Osvaldo Martinez Martinez, President of the Commission of Economic Affairs of the Cuban Parliament. The group also includes other vice ministers and government officials. Participants in the summit will analyze the current world economic crisis, its effects and possible ways to reduce its impact by ALBA member states (*ACN*, 26/11/08).

November 26: The Alba trade bloc, formed by Venezuela as an alternative to a US-backed hemispheric free trade area, is considering the creation of a single "monetary zone" to strengthen member economies amid a global slowdown. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said a common currency may help increase trade among Latin American countries, and criticized the Group of 20 industrialized and developing nations for failing to listen to poorer countries. "We're not going to wait here with our arms crossed for the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund to come and solve the problems that this great threat unleashed on the world," Chavez said at the beginning of an Alba summit in Caracas to discuss the world economy. Representatives from Alba members including Nicaragua, Cuba, Honduras, Bolivia and Dominica attended the meeting at the presidential palace in Caracas. President Rafael Correa of Ecuador, which isn't a full Alba member, also attended. The Vice President of the Cuban Council of Ministers, Ricardo Cabrisas, who headed the Cuban delegation to the summit, defended the validity of Latin American integration. Cabrisas said that regional integration is essential in these times of crisis and recalled that Fidel Castro predicted this situation a decade ago when he said that the world economy could not continue working as a casino for speculators. According to Prensa Latina, Cabrisas added that the situation is more serious now because it is associated with food and energy shortages and the worsening of social conflicts ([Intervención de Cabrisas ante la Cumbre del ALBA](#); *Reuters*, *ACN*, 27/11/08).

November 26: Equatorial Guinea's Foreign Minister Pastor Micha Ondo Bile told his Cuban counterpart Felipe Perez Roque he was honoured to be in Cuba representing his government and people, and expressed his country's willingness to continue giving the Cuban people both material and moral support. Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque held official talks with Ondo Bile at the Cuban Foreign Ministry. My nation is committed to deepening the friendship bonds with Cuba, said Ondo Bile, and added that it will continue supporting the island through hard moments and at any world forum. Cuban President Raul Castro greeted Ondo Bile, accompanied by Vice President and Commander of the Revolution Juan Almeida Bosque. During their meeting, Raul asked the visitor to deliver his best wishes and a message of gratitude from the Cuban people to President Teodoro Obiang and to the people of his country for their solidarity

and contribution to the Cuban efforts to recover from the damages caused recently by hurricanes Gustav, Ike and Paloma (*ACN*, 27/11/08).

November 26: Cuba and the European Union agreed on up to 30 million euros for rebuilding areas damaged by hurricanes and other projects in a step to restore aid suspended five years ago in a row over human rights. The EU imposed diplomatic sanctions in 2003 after Cuba jailed 75 opponents of the Communist-led government, but in June lifted them to encourage reform after Raul Castro replaced his brother Fidel as president. "Cuba and the European Union now have a political dialogue that is going to produce results," said Stefano Manservigi, EU director general for development, after signing the agreement. "This is just the first point (...) let's organize a number of other initiatives together, including to speak freely and frankly about human rights, about freedom here and elsewhere," he told reporters in Havana. The accord calls for 25 to 30 million euros (\$32 to \$38 million) next year for rehabilitation, environment, food and cultural projects, said Ricardo Guerrero Blanco, deputy minister for foreign investment and economic cooperation. Cuba has said it will not allow EU interference in domestic affairs, but has agreed to reinstate official political dialogue that was one of the casualties of the EU sanctions. The Cuban government denies holding political prisoners and labels its opponents mercenaries working for the United States, which openly supports dissent. Around 55 of those jailed in 2003 are still behind bars (*Reuters*, 26/11/08).

November 27: About 60 Barbadians could be flying to Cuba in January for eye operations. And if all goes well, Cuba could soon be helping diabetics avoid amputations. The news for hundreds of victims of diabetes and eye diseases, several of them elderly, came from Cuba's Ambassador to Barbados, Pedro Garcia Roque. He said during a press conference at the embassy, that the first group of Barbadians to benefit from Cuba's "Operation Miracle", a free eye surgery project was expected to fly out in January. As many as 60 of about 400 people with eye problems registered at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) could be in that group, he reported. He said the plan was to treat all 400 free of cost, along with other Barbadians suffering from eye diseases. In the case of the elderly, Cuba was prepared to allow a companion on the free flight and also to treat the patient's minor health problems during the stay, the ambassador said. He also stated Cuba was looking to help Barbados and other CARICOM countries tackle the high rate of leg amputation due to complications from diabetes (*Nation.News*, 28/11/08).

November 27: About 1,000 Angolan students will be trained in Cuban in the coming five years. This was announced in central Huambo province by the secretary of State for Higher Education, Adão do Nascimento. The official was speaking at the end of a visit he paid to the province, in the company of the Cuban minister of Higher Education, Juan Vela Valdês, adding that a total of 200 students will be sent to that Latin American country every year. Of that figure, he explained, more than half will train in health sciences. According to Adão do Nascimento, the visit to Angola of the Cuban official is meant to survey the intentions of the two institutions concerning the accords signed in 2007, in Cuba, between the presidents of both countries. He said the visit is also meant to reinforce existing cooperation between the institutions and to create new courses in medicine in the provinces of Huambo, Huíla and Malanje and strengthen existing

cooperation in the provinces of Benguela and Cabinda. The reinforcement of higher education staff, the opening of new higher programmes in various areas of technology, are also part of the results expected from the visit of the Cuban officials (*Angop*, 28/11/08).

November 27: Equatorial Guinea's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Micha Ondo Bile, handed over to Cuba's Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation Minister Rodrigo Malmierca a two-million euro donation to support recovery actions in the Caribbean nation after the passage of the most recent hurricanes. In statements to reporters, the African foreign minister said the donation was made on behalf of Equatorial Guinea's President Teodoro Obiang, his government and people, who are deeply grateful to the solidarity they have received from Cuba. Ondo Bile recalled that over 200 Cuban professionals are currently offering their services in Equatorial Guinea, in the fields of health, education, energy and environment; while a similar number of youths from his country are taking different courses in Cuban education (*ACN*, 28/11/08).

November 27: Visiting Russian President Dmitry Medvedev met with Cuban President Raul Castro seeking to forge closer ties with the former Soviet Union's Cold War ally, on the last leg of a tour to boost Russia's reach in Latin America. Not long after arriving in Havana from Venezuela, Medvedev held two rounds of official talks -- one private and one between the two countries' delegations -- at the imposing Palace of the Revolution. Then the Cuban president, who maintains a low public profile, and Medvedev paid a visit to the new Russian Orthodox cathedral in colonial Old Havana, with bells tolling and security tight. Medvedev is only the second Russian president to travel to Cuba after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, which led to a decade of distant relations broken by a visit by former president Vladimir Putin in 2000. But Putin's decision to close a Russian spy base in Lourdes, south of Havana, in 2001, created a new chill in relations that lasted until 2007, when Moscow showed a new interest in Latin America. Medvedev's visit follows an accelerated process of reconciliation, including new deals on military, energy, telecommunications and transport ties. Talks with his Cuban counterpart Raul Castro focused on the extraction and processing of hydrocarbons and nickel, Vesti reported. "This is not just a fact-finding trip," Medvedev said. "This is a serious geopolitical decision. We will develop relations with countries in Latin America and the Caribbean." Medvedev said he was "satisfied" with energy talks held during his visits to Peru, Brazil and Venezuela, before coming to Cuba (*AFP, Bloomberg*, 27/11/08).

November 28: Cuban President Raul Castro Ruz described Dimitri Medvedev's working visit to Cuba as excellent. "It has been a good visit, a wonderful one, and he (Medvedev) is heading to see Fidel (Castro Ruz) now," Raul told reporters. Raul Castro accompanied the Russian president at a ceremony in honour to soldiers from the former Soviet Union who died in Cuba for different reasons while performing their duties. The mausoleum, located in the west of Havana, was built three decades ago and bears the remains of 67 Soviet soldiers. Participating in the ceremony were Cuban Vice President of the Council of Ministers, Ricardo Cabrisas; Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, and the Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration, Rodrigo Malmierca. The

Russian ambassador to Cuba Mikhail L. Kamynin also participated in the ceremony (ACN, 28/11/08).

November 28: Russian President Dmitry Medvedev met former Cuban leader Fidel Castro as Moscow rebuilt ties with its Cold War ally during a trip to expand its political and economic reach in Latin America. The talk with Castro came at the end of Medvedev's visit to the island. No photographs or television images were immediately available of Castro's meeting with Medvedev, but the two men talked for more than an hour, the Kremlin said. "I explained our patient and pacifist position while making clear our defensive capability," Fidel Castro said in an essay posted on the government website Cubadebate. "No country understands this policy better than Russia, which is constantly threatened by the same enemy of peace." Castro said China, Russia and OPEC-member Venezuela are now the three pillars of trade for Cuba. Moscow was Havana's main benefactor during the Cold War but the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union battered Cuba's economy. Ties soured further after then-President Vladimir Putin closed Russia's Lourdes intelligence base on the island in 2001 ([Dimitri A. Medvedev](#); *Reuters*, 28/11/08).

November 28: In statements to reporters before leaving Cuba from the Juan Gualberto Gomez International Airport in the locality of Varadero, Medvedev said he was very pleased and happy with his visit and with the meetings he held with Cuban authorities; such talks served to outline upcoming joint work by both countries, he said. Dimitri Medvedev said that a new bilateral accord will be waiting for President Raul Castro when he visits Russia in 2009. Present at the Juan Gualberto Gomez International Airport were Cuba's First Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura; the president of the Matanzas Provincial Peoples Assembly Nilo Diaz Fundora and other local authorities (ACN, 28/11/08).

November 28: The Canadian World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) is the first animal welfare organization in history to conduct an animal welfare disaster relief operation in Cuba. The organization's extensive relief program, organized in response to Hurricanes Gustav, Ike and Fay which all hit Cuba within weeks of each other in August and September, began as yet another powerful hurricane (Paloma) hit the storm-weary island. Cuban economists estimate the effect of the hurricanes has put the country's development back eighteen years. Due to decades of hardship, Cuba has sought to remove its dependence on fossil fuels and thus huge parts of the country are powered by working animals. This heavy dependence on draft animals for plowing and transportation mean that they are crucial for the recovery of the country. Thousands of animals are suffering as a result of the hurricanes and the harder they are worked, the weaker and more prone to disease and parasites they become. The Cuban government has welcomed the WSPA mission and offered the entire nation's veterinarians to work with WSPA in launching this unprecedented large-scale operation. The team will be led by animal welfare experts from WSPA's office in Costa Rica. WSPA's work is currently focusing on the areas of Pinar Del Rio, Isla de la Juventud and Holguin, helping more than an estimated 42,000 animals. WSPA will be aiming to help 9,100 oxen, 7,000 horses, 1,350 donkeys and mules and over 24,000 cats and dogs. Without help and support for these

animals, Cuba will suffer serious food shortages and food security issues. There is a real risk that the large majority of agricultural production will be lost in the affected regions if the working animals cannot be relied upon (*Biotech Law Weekly*, 28/11/08).

November 28: Representatives from the most diverse forces making up the political scenario in Lebanon, coincided in their support for Cuba, its history of resistance, and its demand for the release of the five Cubans incarcerated in the United States. During the meeting in Beirut between a Cuban delegation and members of the National Committee for the Release of the Cuban Five, Sheik Hussein Gabriss, vice-president of the Ulemas Muslim group of Lebanon, affirmed that the unity between so many different forces was motivated by a just cause, the demand for the release of these five men, imprisoned for fighting terrorism. Political leaders, clergymen from various beliefs, heroes from the National Lebanese Resistance, journalists and lawyers, who respond with concrete and systematic actions to demonstrations convened by the Committee, met to update themselves on the development of the struggle for the release of these five Cubans. The Lebanese National Committee for the Release of The Five is headed by Hadi Bekdache, who is also the president of the NGO Lealtad por la tierra (*ACN*, 28/11/08).

November 30: Cuba said that the United Nation must urgently lead negotiations to set up a new world financial structure that represents all UN member nations on equal grounds. Cuban Finance and Prices Minister Georgina Barreiro, said in the Qatari capital Doha that her country supports the holding of a summit in the context of the UN, which represents all member nations and hears all their views, Prensa Latina news agency reported. Barreiro addressed participants at the International Conference on Financing for Development, underway in Doha, to follow up on the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus reached in Mexico in 2002. The international community "has the responsibility and the historic opportunity to re-establish the international financial system on a truly democratic basis (...) This reform can and should not be carried out by a select group of rich countries with restrictive and exclusive policies," Barreiro said. She added that the current situation demands that the UN defend and promote the peoples' rights to development, and lead the fight against inequity (*ACN*, 1/12/08).

November 30: Russia's president paid tribute to Fidel Castro after a meeting with the Cuban revolutionary icon. Dmitry Medvedev said his conversation with Castro on November 28 was "extremely interesting" and suggested the world should draw on the experience of such long-standing political figures when trying to tackle today's problems. Medvedev spoke in a video recording that was made on his plane as he returned from Cuba and posted on the Kremlin Web site. Medvedev referred to the 82-year-old former president as "Cuban leader Fidel Castro" even though his younger brother Raul is now president. Medvedev also met extensively with Raul Castro. Medvedev said earlier that he and Raul Castro, 77, had discussed economic and "military-technical co-operation" apparently arms sales "as well as security and regional cooperation" (*AP*, 30/12/08).

Security

November 3: Russia has offered to send technical experts to Cuba, to help optimize Cuban air defences. Currently, the Cuban air defenses are largely ineffective. The main anti-aircraft weapons are some SAM-6 (self-propelled system that fires 1200 pound missiles with a range of 24 kilometres), SAM-8 (self-propelled system that fires 360 pound missiles with a range of 15 kilometres) and several shorter range (4-8 kilometres) missiles, either portable or self-propelled. Most of these are inoperable, as Cuba has had little money for spare parts and maintenance since Russian aid was ended in the early 1990s. There are only about two-dozen warplanes in working condition, but these can be quickly eliminated by a smaller number of more modern aircraft. The most effective anti-aircraft weapons are thousands of heavy (14.5mm) machine-guns and automatic cannon (mostly 23mm). What the Cubans need is \$20-30 million worth of spare parts, and several hundred new missiles. The Russians are apparently not willing to be that generous. The Russian offer does include training some Cuban air-defence officers. All this appears to be what could be called a "friendly gesture," and not something really meaningful. But it's a start, and perhaps the Russians are thinking of reopening their electronic listening operation (*Strategy Page*, 3/11/08).

November 11: Russia has been trying to restore its Cold War-era alliance with Cuba by expanding trade and military ties. Its efforts are intended partly to show displeasure with the United States, accused by President Dmitry Medvedev of implementing unilateral policies that have destabilized the world. "Cooperation between Russia and Cuba in the military- technical sphere is developing normally (...) and every country has the right to define with whom it will develop such cooperation," Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said in Moscow, after talks with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. "Cuba will not ask permission from any other country and will not explain it to anyone. Cooperation between Russia and Cuba in this area will always be directed to widening the defence capabilities of Cuba," said Perez Roque, who also had talks with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. Lavrov said Russia's military cooperation with Cuba was "an important component of our close partnership" (*Reuters*, 11/11/08).

November 11: Cuba has ruled out installing on its soil elements of a planned Russian missile defence system countering a US network that Washington proposes to deploy in Central Europe. "We acknowledge the right of Russia to take response measures and to reply to the growing aggression of the United States and NATO, which are trying to encircle her," visiting Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque told a press conference in Moscow. When asked directly about the possible deployment of a Russian missile defence system in Cuba, he said: "The answer is no." The matter was not discussed during his meetings here with Russian officials, he said (*IANS*, 12/11/08).

Terrorism

November 17: US president-elect Barack Obama, reiterated his vow to close the prison located at the Guantanamo military base in southeastern Cuba, a territory that is illegally occupied by Washington. "I have said repeatedly that I intend to close Guantanamo, and I will follow through on that," vowed Obama in CBS' "60-minute", in his first television interview after winning the presidential election on November 4. Several international

organizations, governments allied to the White House and more recently five former US secretaries of state have recommended the closure of the Guantanamo prison (ACN, 17/11/08).

US-Cuba Relations

November 3: Cuba opened its annual trade fair (FIHAV 2008), attracting more than 230 US businessmen from 40 food and foodstuff companies. Addressing the opening ceremony in Havana, Vice President of the Council of State Carlos Lage spoke highly of the presence of US businesses, including J.P. Wright Company, Florida produce, Register International and USA Rice Federation, at the FIHAV 2008. The US companies to the fair, which welcomes thousands of business leaders from 56 countries, said Washington should create opportunities for US companies to take place in Cuba's untapped market (VNA, 3/11/08).

November 3: Asked about the US presidential election, Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage said the winner, be it Democrat Barack Obama or Republican John McCain, will have to decide whether "to maintain a criminal policy against Cuba," referring to the long-standing US trade embargo against the island. "I think what the world needs is a president of the United States that is rational, that has a minimal coefficient of intelligence, that's not alcoholic and is not demented," Lage said, using words often heard from Cuban officials to describe US President George W. Bush. Bush is heavily criticized in Cuba for strengthening the US embargo and his tough talk about the communist-run government (*Reuters*, 3/11/08).

November 4: Fidel Castro praised Barack Obama as smarter and less warlike than John McCain, but stopped short of endorsing either US presidential candidate. Cuba's former president said he delayed weighing in until the US Election Day, so that "no one would have time to say I wrote something that could be utilized by the candidates in their campaigns." "Without a doubt, Obama is more intelligent, cultured and levelheaded than his Republican adversary," Castro wrote in state-controlled newspapers. "McCain is old, bellicose, uncultured, of little intelligence and not healthy." The elder Castro also expressed skepticism about both candidates. "Worries about the overwhelming problems of the world will not really occupy an important place in the mind of Obama and much less in that of a candidate who, as a fighter pilot, dropped dozens of tons of bombs on the city of Hanoi," he wrote, alluding to McCain's military service. Castro also wrote that if the Republicans win due to US racism, "the danger of war will increase and the opportunities for peoples to move forward will be reduced" ([The November 4th Elections](#); AP, 4/11/08).

November 4: Priceline.com Inc. has become at least the second online travel company to get slapped with a fine from the federal government for violating US sanctions on Cuba. Priceline, based in Norwalk, Connecticut, agreed to pay \$12,250 after an internal audit revealed one of its foreign subsidiaries provided "limited travel services to Cuban nationals," company spokesman Brian Ek said. Ek said he could not reveal where the Cubans were traveling to or from. He said the company reported the violation voluntarily.

A statement from the Treasury Department said a subsidiary of Priceline "provided travel-related services in which Cuba or Cuban nationals had an interest." The department said Priceline violated regulations on Cuba between September 2004 and November 2007 but did not say in how many instances (*AP*, 4/11/08).

November 4: A US appeals court rejected a lawsuit challenging federal regulations that heavily restrict Americans enrolling in overseas study in Cuba. The US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit found that the regulations don't violate presumed rights to academic freedom and due process as argued by a group of more than 400 academic professionals that calls itself the Emergency Coalition to Defend Educational Travel, which brought the legal action. The regulations were included in 2004 amendments to Cuba travel restrictions and, among other measures, require that programs that use the academic exemption last for a full academic term. Previously, some courses had run only a few weeks. The regulations also require Americans who are studying in Cuba to enrol only in programs offered there by their own academic institutions. The plaintiffs argued that the amendments virtually shut down all courses offered in Cuba by US universities, while the court ruled that the restrictions didn't violate any presumed right to academic freedom because they are "content-neutral and supported by an important and substantial government interest," said the opinion by Judge Laurence Silberman (*McClatchy Washington Bureau*, 4/11/08).

November 5: Cuba hails US President-elect Barack Obama's presidential election victory and would one day welcome an easing of the 46-year-old US trade embargo, Foreign Investment Minister Marta Lomas said in a statement. The Cuban Government, however, is prepared for US-Cuban relations to remain "the same," she added, alluding to Havana's struggle to have the embargo lifted. "If Obama takes some action to ease the embargo, it would be welcomed and of course it would be of help, but we're prepared for conditions to remain the same," she told reporters at a trade fair. After expressing satisfaction over Mr Obama's win over his Republican rival John McCain, Ms Lomas said Cubans should work out their problems on their own. "That's what will get us ahead" (*AFP*, 5/11/08).

November 5: Washington State National Guard Sgt. Carlos Lazo -- the Iraq veteran who gained fame when he couldn't visit his kids in Cuba -- last traveled to the island in January 2007. As things stand now, he can't go back until 2010. But with Barack Obama's White House win, Lazo is hopeful that will change -- soon. "If Obama lifts family travel restrictions on the 22nd of January, I'm sure that in February I will be in Cuba visiting my family -- and celebrating the new Cuba policies," Lazo said. Lazo, 43, became a "cause celebre" for some when the stricter family reunification travel restrictions put in place by President Bush in 2004 kept Lazo from visiting his children in Cuba. The kids eventually settled in Washington, and Lazo became an Obama campaign volunteer. "Obama will take away restrictions and establish low-level contacts with Cuba, extending a peace branch," Lazo said. "It will be a change from policies that have given the worst results for 50 years." Vicki Huddleston, a former chief of the US diplomatic mission in Havana, said Obama's moves would lead to brisk business in Miami, creating jobs in the travel industry as more flights take off for the island and businesses pop up to handle the flow of care packages. More importantly, she said, the stream of Cuban

Americans and their cash in their relatives' pockets will boost the independence of people on the island who are now heavily dependent on the Cuban government for their livelihood. The Cuban government, Huddleston said, might have preferred Senator John McCain. "They might fear Obama more. The Cuban government is not dumb," she said. "More people and more openness is a bigger threat than isolating them" (*The Miami Herald*, 5/11/08).

November 5: While domestic opposition leaders celebrated Democrat Sen. Barack Obama's electoral win in the United States, a few expressed reservations and others hope regarding the possibility of a dialogue with the Cuban government. "I think this bodes well for Cuba, because it opens up the possibility of a dialogue, although hard-line sectors in the government will surely try to derail it," said opposition activist and economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe. "In Cuba, there is great hope for a change in diplomatic relations with the United States. But the most important changes are not Obama's to implement, but the Cuban government's and the Cuban people's," declared opposition leader Oswaldo Payá. The Ladies in White, wives and relatives of political prisoners, congratulated Obama but asked that he demand respect for human rights and the release of their relatives before seeking a dialogue with the Cuban authorities (*Cubaencuentro*, 5/11/08).

November 5: Coast Guard officials said they have repatriated 24 Cuban migrants. Coast Guard crews interdicted a rustic vessel with seven Cuban migrants aboard on October 25, and another crew interdicted a go-fast vessel 22 miles east of Miami on October 29. That boat was carrying 17 migrants. The migrants were repatriated to Bahia de Cabañas, Cuba (*AP*, 5/11/08).

November 5: Representatives of Cuba's internal opposition expressed optimism that Barack Obama's election would lead to an easing of some aspects of the 46-year-old US economic embargo against the communist-ruled island. The dissidents said they are counting on the Democrat to keep his campaign promise to end the Bush administration's draconian limits on the ability of Cuban Americans to visit the island and send money to their relatives in Cuba. "The issue of Cuba has been more theoretical than real in the face of the priorities of the United States; it has been a matter of confrontation and now it will be a matter of conversation," former political prisoner Hector Palacios, leader of the Liberal Unity party, told reporters in Havana. "It's very good that he meet with (Cuban President) Raul Castro," the dissident said, referring to Obama's stated willingness to talk to all governments. Another former political detainee, economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, said that the election of a black man as US president would likewise make it hard for the Cuban government to go on accusing the United States of racism. "Obama has promised he will lift the restrictions on Cuban Americans' visits, on the sending of packages and money, and that has a very big human connotation, it opens the possibility that the families make contact," Espinosa said. "From the political point of view, that will be a democratic injection for the island," he added. Manuel Cuesta Morua, of the social-democratic Arco Progresista group, said that with Obama in the White House, "it would require a lot of imagination from the Cuban authorities - which I don't believe they have - to maintain the confrontation with the United States."

Miriam Leiva, founder of the Ladies in White group comprising relatives of political prisoners, said that scrapping the Bush administrations "absurd" restrictions on visits and remittances "would help Cuban families a lot" (*EFE*, 6/11/08).

November 5: Progressive Arch announced the appointment of a "Permanent Political Representation, which will seek recognition by the US State Department and Congress," and of a "Cuba - US Committee," intended to "encourage bilateral exchange as well as plural and open relations" between the two countries. In a press release, the coalition of domestic Social-Democrat opposition groups pointed out that the election of Barack Obama as US president removes the confrontational elements that have so far defined relations between Cuba and the United States. "Cuba has a duty, now more than ever, to enter the new age that is dawning just 90 miles away," said Progressive Arch's statement and added that the United States must help the Cubans find "their own way towards democracy," by taking the "necessary steps" so that the animosity between both countries "no longer serves as an excuse for the lengthy lack" of freedoms in the island (*Cubaencuentro*, 6/11/08).

November 5: Michael Mauricio, president of the Florida Produce Company from the US, participating in Havana's International Trade Fair (FIHAV 2008), said he was in favour of an improvement of trade relations between Cuba and his country. "I want the American embargo against Cuba to be lifted," said Mauricio, who is the grandson of a Cuban and one of the 200 businesspeople from the United States showcasing their products in the Cuban international fair. In statements to the press at the Expocuba showground, Mauricio said he is very satisfied with this year's Fair. "I have already signed three deals to supply grapes, pears and raisins to Cuba," he said (*ACN*, 6/11/08).

November 6: With help from Democrats in Congress, President-elect Barack Obama will have the clout next year to deliver campaign promises to Florida voters who helped send him to the White House. Obama has pledged to loosen the US embargo of Cuba by allowing Cuban-Americans to make unlimited visits to the island and to send money to their families. This can be done by executive order, without action in Congress. "I expect he will do that fairly quickly," said William LeoGrande, an expert on US-Cuba relations at American University in Washington. Congress may go further by lifting the travel ban for American tourists. And Congress likely will make it easier for Cuba to finance food purchases from American farmers. "Senator Obama also has said the policy of isolating Cuba and not talking to Cuba has failed," LeoGrande said. "You can expect much greater diplomatic interaction between the US and Cuba than we've seen over the last eight years" (*Sun Sentinel*, 6/11/08).

November 6: Alicia Jrapko, Free the Five International Committee coordinator, pointed out that the international forum to open on November 7 in eastern Holguin province will outline the new strategies in favour of the five Cubans imprisoned in the United States. On her way through central Camaguey city to Holguin province, the American activist said that the 4th International Colloquium for the Freedom of the Five, to run until November 9, will provide those attending a chance to discuss what has been done and what needs to be done in the near future. Jrapko highlighted that there has been progress

in the worldwide solidarity towards the case of René Gonzalez, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino, Gerardo Hernandez and Fernando Gonzalez. "There is a larger number of activities and more creativity, but there is a lot to do still, especially in the United States" she added. Several delegations from Cuba and abroad will attend the Colloquium, among them African American writer and activist Angela Davis (ACN, 6/11/08).

November 9: Operation USA, a Los Angeles-based international disaster relief group, announced it will send emergency assistance to Cuba in response of the devastation wrought by hurricanes. "As a result of the Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, nearly 440,000 homes were damaged and almost two million people were displaced into temporary shelters," said Richard Walden, president of Operation USA. "We're rushing aid to Cuba, including water purification materials and medical supplies." Operation USA, which has been licensed by the US government to provide private humanitarian aid to Cuba since 1994, provides aid to the country's main pediatric hospitals. In preparation of hurricane Paloma, an evacuation has been ordered for more than a half million people in Cuba from the coast and other vulnerable areas. "The residents of this already vulnerable region are at great risk from this new hurricane, the third to hit Cuba in just 60 days," Walden said. Operation USA will also stage a benefit concert November 29 at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium near Los Angeles to raise funds for relief efforts in Cuba, Haiti and the US, said Christine Oppenheim, a spokesperson for Operation USA (*Xinhua*, 10/11/08).

November 12: Alfredo Guevara, president of the 30th Havana International Cinema Festival, invited American moviemakers to attend the festival and get together with their Cuban peers. Guevara exhorted the intellectual forces that make up the movie industry and the audiovisual artists to unite, before the banal commercialism spreads even further, underscores the call published in the Festival's website. He also advocated for the festival, named "Puentes y más puentes" (Bridges and more bridges), to become an unprejudiced rapprochement to understand each other, to talk, to enrich the creative experience and productions without the predominance of pressures or ideology. Guevara stressed that this is about learning to value and measure difficulties, but also about not giving up hoping, and above all, to contribute to make hope a possibility and a reality without any more delays. The XXX New Latin American Cinema Festival will run on December 2-12 (ACN, 13/11/08).

November 13: "Che," the movie about Argentine Ernesto "Che" Guevara who fought alongside Fidel Castro in the Cuban revolution, will be shown in December, in Cuba, the director of Havana's New Latin American Film Festival said. Ivan Giroud told reporters the movie, made by US director Stephen Soderbergh, would be a special presentation not eligible for any of the festival awards. Festival president Alfredo Guevara said in July that "Che" would not be shown if it included any "attacks" against Castro. Puerto Rican-born actor Benicio Del Toro played the role of Che, who was captured and executed October 9, 1967, while trying to lead a leftist insurgency in Bolivia. Del Toro won the best-actor prize at the Cannes Film Festival in May, where the film premiered. The film was shot in Spain and Bolivia because, according to Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, the US government, which has a 46-year-old trade embargo against Cuba, would

not allow Soderbergh to make the movie on the Communist-led island. Giroud said the film's principals would have to get US permission to attend the showing (*Reuters*, 13/11/08).

November 14: In just six years, trade between Cuba and Virginia farmers has grown from less than \$1 million to more than \$32 million. And Virginia Agriculture Commissioner Todd P. Haymore is hoping for even more growth. He recently returned from the Havana International Trade Fair in Cuba, where he and others pushed Virginia's apples, soybeans, poultry, wood and other products. Virginia is among the top five states exporting to Cuba (*AP*, 14/11/08).

November 14: Without naming US President-elect Barack Obama, former Cuban leader Fidel Castro cast doubt on the possibility that a new president would bring much change in US policy. In an obtusely worded column published on the official web site Cubadebate, Castro said "many dream that with the simple change of command in the leadership of the empire, it will be more tolerant and less bellicose." "The most intimate thoughts of the citizen who will take the helm are not yet known," he wrote. But, he went on, "It would highly nave to believe that the good intentions of one intelligent person could change what centuries of interests and selfishness have created. Human history shows another thing." Obama, who was elected November 4 and takes office on January 20 as the first black to lead the United States, has raised hopes of better US-Cuba relations by saying he would hold talks with the Cuban government and ease the 46-year-old US trade embargo against the Communist-led island ([The Washington Meeting](#); *Reuters*, 14/11/08).

November 17: Cuba's former President Fidel Castro said the Group of 20 developed and emerging nations' recent summit was dominated by US President George W. Bush and didn't focus on the problems that plague poorer countries. The so-called G-20 met in Washington on November 14-15 to discuss economic stimulus measures and tighter regulation of financial markets amid a credit crunch and global recession. The statement published at the end of the two-day summit didn't address any of the ``abuses" caused by the US economic system that led to the current crisis, Castro said in a ``reflection" published in official media. ``It's boring, filled with platitudes," the communist leader said in the statement. ``It says absolutely nothing. It was approved by Bush, a champion of neo-liberalism, who is responsible for killings and genocidal war." Castro also criticized the statement for failing to address the US policy for ``converting food into fuel," unequal trade terms for poorer countries and the global arms build-up ([The Birth of the Mount](#); *Bloomberg*, 17/11/08).

November 20: Five journalists and an attorney who has long battled for press freedom were cited for risking their lives and liberty to report the news, often under the pressure of authoritarian regimes. The six, who work in Iraq, Afghanistan, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Cuba, are recipients of this year's International Press Freedom Award presented by the Committee to Protect Journalists. Hector Maseda Gutierrez, a leader in Cuba's independent press movement, who is now serving a 20-year prison sentence in Cuba was honoured with the award. "These journalists and media activists (...) have risked their

lives and liberty to bring us the news," said Joel Simon, executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists. Simon said the group would campaign for the release of Hector Maseda Gutierrez, 65, saying that the journalist was imprisoned "for doing what everyone here today is doing -- his job as a reporter" (AP, 20/11/08).

November 22: Lincoln and Mario Diaz-Balart will return to the Capitol in January victorious after their first significant re-election challenges -- but also facing a new reality as members of a Republican party more marginalized than before. And the Miami pair who had the ear of President Bush for eight years on US-Cuba policy are at odds with President-elect Barack Obama, who has made it clear he'd like to lift some of the hardline sanctions the brothers backed. In interviews in their congressional offices, however, both Republicans maintained that they still see opportunities to pursue their agendas -- and help their party. "It's happened before and we've survived," said Mario Diaz-Balart, whose challenger, former Miami-Dade Democratic party chief Joe Garcia, came within 6 points of defeating him. "You've got to be able to work with both sides and the reality is that a lot of this stuff doesn't have to be a partisan fight." Advocates for relaxing travel and remittance restrictions to Cuba, though, are optimistic that the new Obama administration will move quickly to lift the restrictions that Bush imposed in 2004, partly at the behest of the Diaz-Balarts (*The Miami Herald*, 22/11/08).

November 23: Fidel Castro suggested that the US government has promoted Americans' fears about al-Qaida and other terrorist groups to justify its plans for world domination. In an essay titled "Stella Calloni", and published on a government Web site, the 82-year-old former Cuban president wrote that al-Qaida "was born from the empire's own entrails," using "the empire" to refer to the United States, but failing to elaborate. He said the terrorist group was "a typical example of an enemy that the hegemonic power dangles in a place of its choosing where it needs to justify its actions, as it has done throughout its history, fabricating enemies and attacks destined to strengthen its plans of domination." The US has used al-Qaida as a pretext to carry out plans "outlined long before the attacks that brought down the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001," Castro wrote. Castro has previously accused the US government of misleading the public about the September 11 attacks, and his close friend and ally Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez says it is plausible that Washington was somehow involved in planning the attacks ([Stella Calloni](#); AP, 23/11/08).

November 24: The US program that spends millions of dollars each year promoting democracy and human rights in communist Cuba is improving controls on grants, but still faces a risk that money could be misused, according to a federal audit. The US Agency for International Development has made strides in the Cuba Program since a highly critical 2006 audit, but the Government Accountability Office found its "ability to ensure the appropriate use of grant funds remains in question." Between 1996 and 2008, the Cuba Program has awarded about \$83 million in grants to organizations and universities working to bring democracy to Cuba. The money goes for things such as humanitarian aid, uncensored books, human rights training and advocacy for human and worker rights. Another \$20 million has been requested in 2009 for the Cuba Program to be split between USAID and the State Department (AP, 24/11/08).

November 24: The US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit recently upheld a lower court's ruling against a group of academics that had challenged restrictions affecting academic travel to Cuba. The approximately 200 study abroad programs in Cuba before the restrictions were put in place have since decreased to only a handful. University of California Davis' own Quarter Abroad program to Cuba, which takes from 20 to 25 students each spring to the capital city of Havana, is unaffected by the travel restrictions, said Quarter Abroad coordinator Robin Ducatillon in an e-mail. Since the Cuba program began - one year after the 2004 restrictions - the current requirements for groups traveling to Cuba do not limit UC Davis abroad programs, she added. "I can say that for the eight programs not run through Quarter Abroad, Cuba is the only country for which a license through the US Department of Treasury is required," Ducatillo said. "Because the campus project is more than 10 weeks and we have a special license with the Department of the Treasury we have the go ahead," said Professor Beatriz Pesquera, who is co-leading the trip. "Education abroad programs are extremely important," Pesquera said. "Students are really enriched by their experiences abroad" (*The California Aggie*, 24/11/08).

November 24: With the election of Barack Obama, the United States has a fresh chance to reinvigorate its relations with Latin America, according to a new report that recommends Washington overhaul its drug policies at home and pursue a rapprochement with Cuba. The report, compiled by prominent former policy-makers from the United States and Latin America and scheduled for release by the Brookings Institution, called on the new administration to put Latin America at the centre of its foreign policy radar screen. Among the most striking recommendations is a near-total reversal in policy toward Cuba. The report advocates lifting all restrictions on travel by Americans, promoting more contacts with Cuban diplomats and taking Cuba off the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism. "This may make the over-40 generation of Cuban-Americans in Miami jump-up-and-down mad, but there is a whole generation of Cuban-Americans who want to change this relationship," said Thomas R. Pickering, a longtime diplomat and former under secretary of state. Mr. Pickering, who once served as American ambassador to El Salvador, is co-chairman of a commission that produced the report, along with the former president of Mexico Ernesto Zedillo (*The New York Times*, 24/11/08).

November 25: Connections among major US-based humanitarian groups and humanitarian groups in Havana are helping to get relief assistance to Cubans who have endured a long and devastating 2008 hurricane season. Baltimore-based Catholic Relief Services (CRS), one of the groups licensed by the United States to send humanitarian aid to Cuba, has been providing hygiene kits, medical supplies, food and home repair materials to partner Caritas Cubana, which distributes the aid to the thousands of Cubans displaced from their homes by a series of hurricanes and tropical storms. Caritas Cubana draws on a countrywide network of 12,000 volunteers to help with distribution. CRS and Caritas have been partners in sending aid to Cubans in need since 1993. CRS receives donations collected by Catholic churches and volunteer groups in the United States, such as the Daughters of Charity in Miami. Soon after hurricanes Gustav and Ike hit in

succession in August and September, causing an estimated \$5 billion in damage, Daughters of Charity volunteers worked around the clock to fill boxes with donated goods that CRS then shipped from Miami, according to CRS (*Americas.Gov*, 25/11/08).

November 25: A former aide to President Bush has been charged with theft from a government-funded centre that promotes democracy in Cuba. The single count of theft of \$5,000 or more from a federally aided program was filed in US District Court in Washington against Felipe E. Sixto, who resigned on March 28 from his job as special assistant to President George W. Bush for intergovernmental affairs. The charge was filed as a criminal information, which means Sixto waived his right to have a grand jury decide if the government has enough evidence to charge him and usually also means the defendant intends to plead guilty as part of an agreement with prosecutors. No date has been set for Sixto to appear before US District Judge Reggie Walton. Sixto's attorney, Kathleen E. Voelker, did not immediately return messages seeking comment on the case. When Sixto resigned from the White House staff last spring, White House spokesman Scott Stanzel said Sixto had stepped forward March 20 to reveal his alleged wrongdoing and resign. Stanzel said Sixto took that step after learning that his former employer, the Centre for a Free Cuba, was prepared to begin legal action against him (*AP*, 25/11/08).

November 25: Kansas Representative Jerry Moran sent a letter to President-elect Barack Obama asking him to make it a priority in his new Administration to reform US trade policies with Cuba. In his request, Moran asked President-elect Obama to reverse regulations put in place in 2005 by the Bush Administration that have hindered agriculture and food exports under the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000 (TSRA). TSRA enacted the first substantial change in trade policy with Cuba since imposition of the Cuban trade embargo in 1962. It allowed the export of food, agricultural commodities and medical supplies from the US to Cuba. Moran was the original sponsor of this legislation in July of 2000, which eventually became law in 2001. "Since coming to Congress I have consistently supported and voted for legislation that opens Cuban markets to American goods," Moran said. "In 2000, I was proud to lead the effort to help pass the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act that changed the trade policies of US agriculture products to Cuba for the first time in nearly 40 years. The Bush Administration's regulations changed the meaning of TSRA policies and weakened the original intent to promote agriculture trade between the U.S. and Cuba. I encourage President-elect Obama to restore the original intent of TSRA" (*US News Service*, 25/11/08).

November 26: Raul Castro is open to meeting US President-elect Barack Obama on neutral ground to try to resolve the island's four-decade-old feud with Washington, according to an interview with a US magazine. The interview for *The Nation* was conducted by US actor Sean Penn, who traveled to Havana after meeting Cuban ally Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and before Obama won the US presidential election on November 4. "You asked if I would accept to meet with (Obama) in Washington. I would have to think about it. I would discuss it with all my comrades in the leadership," Castro told Penn in the interview for a December 15 issue published on its website. "Personally, I think it would not be fair that I be the first to visit, because it is always the

Latin American presidents who go to the United States first. But it would also be unfair to expect the president of the United States to come to Cuba. We should meet in a neutral place." "Perhaps we could meet at Guantanamo," Castro said, referring to the bay where the US maintains a naval base, which Cuba considers a violation of its sovereignty. "We must meet and begin to solve our problems, and at the end of the meeting, we could give the president a gift (..) we could send him home with the American flag that waves over Guantanamo Bay" (*The Miami Herald*, 26/11/08).

November 27: Authorities say 17 Cuban migrants have landed ashore in Boca Grande in southwest Florida. The Lee County Sheriff's Office received a call shortly before 2 a.m. from a security guard who spotted the nine men and eight women. Authorities say the migrants were cold, wet and dirty from their journey. A Boca Grande Fire Department spokesman said firefighters "took care of them" until immigration agents came to pick them up, giving the migrants food and coffee and warming their clothes. Under US policy, Cubans found on shore are generally allowed to stay in the United States. Those found at sea are usually returned to the island (*AP*, 27/11/08).

November 30: The US and Cuba traded barbs over the decades-old TV and Radio Marti broadcasting saga in late filings for the ITU Radio Regulations Board meeting. Cuba wants a letter from the US saying TV transmissions from a tethered balloon antenna won't resume, it said, citing a case involving 497 MHz. Cuba also wants US action on broadcasts adversely affecting TV stations operating at 509 MHz. Cuba wants to keep the case on 497 MHz open and to add a further alleged violation of the radio regulations to its list of complaints, namely operation of a broadcasting station by an aircraft stationed over the sea, outside national territories. But nothing new warrants reopening the case, the US said in a letter signed by David Gross, the US coordinator for international communications and information policy. Cuba's complaints are with broadcasts that took place within US airspace, the US said. The US interprets the radio regulations to mean international waters outside of national territories, according to the response. Cuba also doubts whether the US administration answered the ITU Radiocommunication Bureau request for technical characteristics of transmissions at 530 kHz, as indicated in the last RRB summary of decisions. Cuba has no recorded assignments in the Master International Frequency Register, so it can't claim harmful interference, the US said (*Communications Daily*, 1/12/08).

