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## Research Forum on Cuba

# Chronicle on Cuba

## December 2005

### Highlights

**Domestic Affairs:** Mario Enrique Mayo, one of 75 dissidents arrested in the 2003 crackdown is released for health reasons. The Ladies in White are not allowed to travel to Strasbourg to receive the European Union's Sakharov Award. Opposition organizations and personalities warn about an increase in the repression against dissidents. Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Pérez Roque delivers a closing speech at the National Assembly about the post-Castro era.

**Economy:** Fidel Castro continues to mobilize thousands of young people to fight corruption. China grants Cuba a line of credit worth 50 million yuans. ECLAC officials express concern on the method used by Cuba to measure its economic growth. Cuba announces an 11.8 percent growth in 2005.

**Foreign Affairs:** Fidel Castro strengthens relations with the Caribbean nations at a CARICOM summit. The European Union expresses regret that the Cuban government refused to allow the Ladies in White to fly to Strasbourg. Bolivian President-elect Evo Morales and Fidel Castro sign in Havana important agreements on health and education.

**Security:** Russia's second-ranking military officer holds talks in Havana with Defence Minister Raúl Castro.

**Terrorism:** Havana is site of an exploratory meeting between Colombia's insurgent ELN and representatives of the government.

**US-Cuba Relations:** The United States denies Major League Baseball a license that would allow Cuba to play in the inaugural World Baseball Classic. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice chairs the second session of a panel to "hasten and ease a democratic transition" in Cuba. Cuba launches a blistering verbal attack on the top US diplomat in Havana and on dissidents that accused him of organizing to overthrow the government.



Chronicle on Cuba - December 2005

Domestic Affairs

**December 1:** One of 75 dissidents arrested in a spring 2003 crackdown was released for health reasons, bringing to 15 the number of those since freed on medical parole. Mario Enrique Mayo Hernández, an activist from the central-eastern province of Camaguey, walked free, his sister Marilú Mayo Hernández told the press. While in prison, the Cuban dissident, as a desperate prison protest, took a knife to his face and body carving into his forehead the letters "I," for "inocente" ("innocent"), and "L," for "libertad" ("liberty"). Mayo Hernández is the only member of the original group to be freed this year. The other 14 were freed last year, half of them in December 2004. The sister said Mayo Hernández, a 41-year-old attorney, got a one-year medical parole for his high blood pressure and emotional problems. The other 14 also were freed early for medical reasons. (*CNN, The Washington Sun, 1/12/05*)

**December 1:** Cuban pro-democracy activist, Martha Beatriz Roque, said to the press on the release of Cuban dissident Mario Enrique Mayo that the regime was probably concerned about the consequences of his dying in jail. Mr. Mayo's health was deteriorating which, according to the international free-speech organization Reporters Without Borders, included "glaucoma in the left eye, high blood pressure, pulmonary emphysema and prostate inflammation, as well as acute depression." Ms. Roque, who was rounded up during the March 2003 crackdown and is free under the same conditional release terms as Mr. Mayo, cautioned that her fellow democracy activist had not been granted total freedom. She also called for the release of other prisoners of conscience unjustly detained by Mr. Castro. "There are many, many more," Ms. Roque said, citing the 60 remaining prisoners from the March 2003 crackdown in addition to "the hundreds of political prisoners in our jails." The Ladies in White (Damas de Blanco) also expressed their satisfaction for the release of Mayo and called for the release of all the other political prisoners. "We are very happy that Mayo was released under health parole, although he and our relatives deserve an unconditional release," Miriam Leiva said. (*AFP, The Washington Sun, 1/12/05*)

**December 1:** The Documentation and Scientific-Technical Information Center of Las Villas Central University opened links to 12 world scientific databases. The new service is part of the Center's development of its computing systems. (*Prensa Latina, 1/12/05*)

**December 1:** The fight against corruption launched by Fidel Castro includes other "social evils" like illegal access to satellite television. Since the beginning of October, the Cuban government has conducted numerous operations in the provinces of Havana and the City of Havana to dismantle networks of users with unauthorised access to foreign television channels by means of parabolic antennas. Dubbed "Operation Spider", the police raid started in neighbourhoods south of Havana province and has been extended to the capital's municipalities of Old and Central Havana. (*El Nuevo Herald, 1/12/05*)

**December 1:** The president of the National Assembly of Cuba, Ricardo Alarcón, indicated that Cuba is in a phase of "deepening socialism", which entails "a struggle for democracy". According to Alarcón, Fidel Castro is the leader "fighting" this battle, together with "the young people of Cuba's student organizations". In this sense, said Alarcón, "it is about representative democracy against participatory democracy". (*EFE, 1/12/05*)

**December 1:** Transgenic rice, sweet potatoes, corn and tomatoes are under study in Cuba. These products could be ready for the market in three years and its licenses would be given for free to poor countries to fight hunger, said one of the island's top scientists. Carlos Borroto, deputy director of Cuba's Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, anticipates that "in the next three or four years our transgenic crops meet all bio-safety requirements and can be commercialized." Borroto said that all the Cuban transgenic products are in a field study phase and none has yet hit the market. (*Reuters, 1/12/05*)

**December 1:** The police detained social-democratic dissident Manuel Cuesta Morúa and two of his collaborators for several hours, after being the subject of an "act of repudiation" by supporters of the regime. The detention took place after the dissidents called the police for protection, since they were being attacked opposite to the head office of the opposition digital magazine "Consensus", in Havana. "As we arrived at the police station, suddenly we were arrested.

When they released us they had written a report against us for public disturbance and gave us a fine”, said Cuesta Morúa. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 5/12/05)

**December 2:** The relatives of political prisoner Víctor Rolando Arroyo denounced that after his long hunger strike less than two months ago Arroyo has not received any more medical attention. The relatives informed that they have sent four letters to the Council of State denouncing this situation but have not received any response. (*Cubamet*, 2/12/05)

**December 2:** In an escalation of his campaign against corruption on the island, Fidel Castro vowed to eliminate those sectors of society that do not live off their salaries. During a long speech on the 30 th anniversary of the Cuban military intervention in Angola, Castro warned that the campaign had just begun, and said that there is a large number of volunteers and students in order to stop Cubans who live off illegalities. [[Fidel Castro's speech](#)] (*Reuters*, 2/12/05)

**December 4:** Inside the decades-old Teatro Mella in the bustling Vedado neighborhood, 19 photos of jazz legend Dizzy Gillespie greeted visitors and announced that Cuba remains a jazz mecca. The exhibit's scenes of Gillespie in Cuba were a fitting backdrop for Havana's 22nd annual International Jazz Festival: The island's musicians, along with Canadian, Brazilian, Argentine and other artists, sought to emulate the legendary bandleader. They delivered an impressive series of concerts dedicated to keeping jazz alive in a country where tough living conditions make performing, recording and touring difficult. The opening gala at the Mella, featuring a big band of Cuban performers, set the festival's tone with Afro-Cuban versions of standards such as “Fly Me to the Moon”, “Thank You Very Much” and “Embraceable You”. The band's blaring horns, thundering percussion and improvisational solos made a highlight of a Spanish version of “A Night in Tunisia”, a song Gillespie popularized. (*Sun Sentinel*, 5/12/05)

**December 4:** In Santa Clara, a group of ten oppositionist women dressed in white marched along some of the city's main streets calling for the freedom of political prisoners. The women, members of the illegal Marta Abreu Feminine Movement (MFMA), gathered at the “Nuestra Señora del Buen Viaje” church, and marched to the downtown “Leoncio Vidal” park. (*Cubamet*, 7/12/05)

**December 5:** Most Cubans prefer the idea of democracy to that of dictatorship and believe that their lives and that of the nation would be better if significant political change came about in the nearly 47-year-old one-party state, according to a poll carried out clandestinely on the island by a Spanish non-governmental organization. Solidaridad Española con Cuba (Spanish Solidarity with Cuba) presented in Madrid the results of what it called "the first scientific study of public opinion" in the Caribbean nation in more than four decades. The NGO's president, Ricardo Carreras, told reporters that pollsters talked to 541 Cubans across 13 provinces between October 8 and November 3. Respondents said that Cuba's "principal problem" is the prevailing combination of high living costs, low pay and a lack of good jobs. Second on Cubans' list of worries is food, specifically the recurring shortages of dietary staples. Eighty percent of those surveyed agreed with the statement that "several or many changes could improve the current situation" on the Communist-ruled island. The "majority of Cubans," according to the poll, support the Varela Project, which contemplates a national referendum on democratization, freeing political prisoners and allowing a significant role for private enterprise. A majority of respondents supported the idea of an amnesty for Cuba's roughly 300 political prisoners, while endorsing the right of a group of prisoners' wives known as the "Women in White" to stage peaceful protests against their husbands' incarceration. Most of those polled said they preferred democracy to dictatorship, with the latter defined in the survey as a system where "all political power in is the hands of one man." (*EFE*, 5/12/05)

**December 5:** The Cuban Communist Party, the island's only political party, asked its members to engage in "more direct and responsible" participation in party activities and to change their "methods and style" during its Havana Provincial Assembly, the official daily Granma reported. The publication of the party's Central Committee said that during the conference, the organization made "encouraging improvements in the performance of the party in the province," a process in which "critical evaluation predominated." The Havana Provincial Assembly was the final and most representative meeting in a series of conferences held over the past several months by the party's provincial

organizations. "The report presented at the meeting shows objectively (a number of) weaknesses, among them the insufficient links of some leadership cadres to the base, which affects their ability to know about deficiencies, monitor, supervise and act in an agile and efficient manner," Granma wrote. The newspaper said that at the meeting the party dealt with "fundamental questions" including working methods and style, the policy governing cadres, the party's student and public organizations, the state and the government, in general, as well as "different ills associated with crime, illegalities and signs of corruption." (*EFE*, 5/12/05)

**December 6:** The 27 th New Latin American Film Festival kicked off in Havana with a gala event in the Charles Chaplin theatre and the words of event organizer Alfredo Guevara, who called the gathering a festival of friendship, art and intelligence. Welcoming participants, Guevara spoke of a new era for Latin American cinematic art, tracing the roots of this new vitality back four decades to the Viña del Mar Film Festival in Chile and the Mérida Film Festival in Venezuela. Among those present at the gala opening were Cuban Culture Minister Abel Prieto; Omar Gonzalez, president of the Cuban film institute (ICAIC); and writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who is also the president of the Latin American New Film Foundation. The festival, with 103 feature films, documentaries and animated films in competition, was officially inaugurated with the Argentine movie "Iluminados por el fuego", by director Tristan Bauer. (*Granma*, 7/12/05)

**December 6:** Elián González, the Cuban boy thrust into the centre of an international custody battle six years ago, celebrated his 12th birthday listening to a speech by Fidel Castro. Gonzalez, wearing his school uniform, sat next to Castro at the political event recalling the island's successful campaign to gain custody of the boy from the United States. The speech occurred in the coastal city of Cárdenas, where Elián lives with his father, stepmother and younger half siblings. Castro told the crowd he was proud of Elián, saying the boy had become "a leader" at his school as well as a karate devotee in the central city some 85 miles east of Havana. (*The New York Times*, 7/12/05)

**December 6:** A large crowd of passengers protested angrily before railroad and police authorities at the central station of Cuban Railroads in Havana when a scheduled train was cancelled. After the protest, past midnight, the travelers were asked to board a train, which after 15 minutes stopped in the outskirts of Havana where it sat till dawn. (*Cubanet*, 13/12/05)

**December 7:** A Cuban journalist detained without charge for nearly five months has lost 30 pounds (13.5 kilograms) in prison and is suffering from serious health problems his wife told the Committee to Protect Journalists. Oscar Mario González, a journalist with the independent news agency, Grupo de Trabajo Decoro, was arrested on July 22. His wife, Mirta Wong Sio, said she was worried about his worsening health. González, 61, suffers from osteoarthritis in his neck and back pain. He has problems sleeping and needs sleep medication, Wong said. González' lawyer hasn't been allowed to see the official documentation regarding the charges against her defendant. *CPJ News Release*, 7/12/05)

**December 8:** Those crazy about cinema wait all year for Havana's international film festival, which brings movies from around Latin America and the world to some 20 screens in the capital in December. The festival serves as a window to the rest of the globe for those living on an island where few get the opportunity to travel and television programming is run by the state. Many Cubans even save up vacations days to watch a half a dozen films per day at the festival, and make long lines in front of movie theaters. "I'm an economist, but I love the movies and took off time to be here," Jose Luis Martinez said outside the Payret Theater across the street from Havana's historic Capitol Building. "I'm going to see as many movies as I can, probably about 40." The theater seats aren't that comfortable, and there's no extra butter for the hardly fresh popcorn sold outside. But with tickets selling for just two Cuban pesos per film -- about 10 US cents -- Cubans go to the movies in droves. More than 80 feature-length films, including documentaries and animated movies, will compete in the International Festival of New Latin American Cinema. Most were produced in Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and Cuba, but European flicks and independent films from the United States also are shown. (*AP*, 8/12/05)

**December 9:** The illegal Cuban Liberal Movement issued a communiqué warning about the rise of repression against dissidents. The MLC condemned an incident in Gibara, province of Holguín, where two activists of this dissident organization “were brutally beaten by paramilitary elements” and later taken to the provincial prison. (*Cubamet*, 9/12/05)

**December 12:** Leading dissident Oswaldo Paya and his Christian Liberation Movement ( Movimiento Cristiano Liberación) criticized the “silence” amongst Cuban exile organizations regarding denunciations made by the MCL of human right abuses on the island. “It is amazing that even among the Cuban exile community; the echo of our voices has been almost extinguished after many of our denunciations”, Paya said in a statement distributed to the press. “This silence amongst powerful circles of the exile against our Movement and our work, especially against the Varela Project, closes more as the repression against us grows within Cuba”, the statement added. (*AFP*, 12/12/05)

**December 12:** Alida Viso Bello, wife of independent journalist Ricardo González, one of 75 dissidents imprisoned in the spring of 2003 in Cuba, made an international appeal in favour of the release from prison of her spouse given “his serious health condition”. The communiqué was addressed to the democratic governments, prominent individuals and non-governmental organizations of the world. (*AFP*, 13/12/05)

**December 13:** According to Pedro Sáez, the Cuban Communist Party’s first secretary in Havana province, Cuba will celebrate the 47th anniversary of its Revolution with dancing shows, sports competitions and performances of theatre groups in all municipalities, among other activities. There will also be activities to encourage the most prominent workers in the sphere of production and services, as well as recognitions for their effort in benefit of the whole society. January the 1 st marks one year more of the defeat of Batista’s dictatorship and the triumph of the Rebel Army lead by Fidel Castro in 1959. (*AFP, Prensa Latina*, 13/12/05)

**December 13:** The Cuban government is not allowing members of Cuba's "Ladies in White" opposition movement to travel to Strasbourg, France, to receive the European Union's top human rights prize, the women said. For two years, the women dressed in white have marched in silence every Sunday along a Havana avenue to demand the release of their husbands and sons who are political dissidents jailed by Fidel Castro's government. The Cuban women are joint winners of the 2005 Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought, which will be awarded at a ceremony in the European Parliament. “Immigration authorities have my passport and told me I would get it back on December 30 when I would know if I could leave,” said Julia Núñez, wife of pro-democracy activist Adolfo Fernandez. “We will continue denouncing abuses,” Nunez said. (*CNN*, 13/12/05)

**December 14:** Cuba hasn't exactly been tolerant of homosexuality. In the late 1960s, Cubans were sent to labor camps for being gay, with homosexuality derided as an illness of the capitalist past. Even today, Cuban transvestites are sometimes detained and threatened with prison. But a new tolerance over the past decade has led to what many believed they would never see on the island: an exhibit by Robert Mapplethorpe, the controversial American photographer known for his homoerotic images. The "Sacred and Profane" exhibit, which opened at a recently restored gallery in the heart of Old Havana, features 48 photographs spanning Mapplethorpe's career. The exhibit doesn't include Mapplethorpe's roughest images. Parliament Speaker Ricardo Alarcón, one of Cuba's highest ranking officials said Mapplethorpe "achieves the transmission of a purely artistic message and sense." "Frankly, this really doesn't strike me as a sexual exposition," he told the press. "Nudity is found in cultures dating much further back than the United States or Cuba. Classicism is full of the nude human body." Several Cuban artists have started tackling some of Mapplethorpe's themes in the last decade, including Rene Peña and Eduardo Hernández Santos. Peña is among a dozen photographers with an exhibit called "Descartes" opening in a Cuban gallery. (*The New York Times*, 14/12/05)

**December 16:** Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas, coordinator of the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL), asked bishops, priests, religious persons and non-believers, to defend the victims of the acts of repudiation against the internal

opposition, "to avoid injustices and confrontation". "We urge you (...) to defend from your pulpits the victims of these abuses, to defend the people of Cuba", said the dissident leader. (*Cubaencuentro*, 16/12/05)

**December 17:** The Cuban Higher Council of Social and Humanistic Sciences (CSCSH) announced it would reenergize the Scientific Humanities Forum to encourage research and cooperation among domestic entities. CSCSH Executive Secretary Dr. Juan Luis Martin said harmonization of research and higher education centers, schools, and groups of researchers based on a definite agenda would be one of their actions. We seek greater exchange among people researching social problems such as indiscipline and corruption, said Martin. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/12/05)

**December 17:** The group of Cuban women known as Ladies in White sent an open letter to the Cuban National Assembly. The group of women, relatives of political prisoners sentenced to long terms in jail during the crackdown on dissidents of March 2003, requested from Cuban parliamentarians to discuss the release of their loved ones as part of their agenda for the 23 rd and the 24 th of December. (*Cubanet*, 27/12/05)

**December 18:** Members of the Cuban Parliament started to assess the year's development, as well as economic and social predictions for 2006, in their respective working commissions. Top government officials have been summoned by Parliament to respond to questions on key issues of national life. A full parliamentary plenary is scheduled for December 22 when deputies will discuss the country's economic and social results of 2005. Presentation of the regulations for the Economic and Social Plan and the budget proposal for 2006 is also anticipated. The legislators will also elect 273 examining magistrates who will oversee justice in the Supreme Court for the next five years. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/12/05)

**December 18:** Eight years after Communist Cuba restored December 25 as a national holiday in a gesture to Pope John Paul II, there is not much Christmas spirit to show for it. Cubans have not taken to saying "Merry Christmas," which is not surprising since the atheist state had the holiday crossed off the calendar from 1969 to 1997. Most use "Happy Holidays" as their greeting and tend to see New Year's Eve as a bigger seasonal holiday. That's when Fidel Castro's government celebrates the anniversary of the revolution that brought him to power in 1959 and authorities put on street fairs with salsa music and cheap beer. This year, for the first time, authorities have allowed a choir of 93 singers from 28 Christian churches to sing Christmas carols in Cuba's main cities and broadcast a performance on state-run television. (*Reuters*, 18/12/05)

**December 19:** The catholic diocese of Guantánamo-Baracoa, regretted in a communiqué the detention of missionaries and youngsters who were taking part in a vocational workshop. Father Lambert Okere, (an Italian citizen) had been detained for his response to social workers that refused to sell him gasoline for his vehicle. The communiqué also denounced another case in Guantánamo, in the context of the Vocational Claretian Workshop, when several youths who were heading to the outskirts of the city to meditate were arrested by a highway patrol. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 19/12/05)

**December 20:** The Cuban catholic priest José Conrado called "shameful" and "scandalous" the acts of repudiation against "defenceless persons", in reference to the attacks against a dissident family in Palmarito de Cauto, Santiago de Cuba. Conrado considered it a "real cowardice to attack defenceless persons, who would not even raise an arm to defend themselves from the blows". "The government must take responsibility and forbid publicly this kind of activities," said the priest. (*CubaEncuentro*, 20/12/05)

**December 20:** A discussion on transexuality took place at the Parliamentary committees gathered in Havana when Mariela Castro, director of the National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX), released results of a survey on gender identity in today's Cuban society to the committees on Education, Culture, Science, Technology and the Environment, and Youth, Children and Women's Rights. Mariela Castro said that for people with a non-traditional gender identity to fully develop their potential as a member of society, it is first necessary to identify them so as to assure that they

receive adequate specialized assistance. She also noted the need in Cuban society of a profound understanding of gender and sexuality. (*Granma*, 21/12/05)

**December 21:** Cuba branded the country's best-known dissidents as US agents, using taped phone conversations, secret video footage and guilt by association during a televised broadcast to portray them as traitors. Longtime activists Oswaldo Payá, Martha Beatriz Roque and female relatives of already imprisoned government opponents, known as "The Ladies in White," bore the brunt of a 90-minute state-run television show during which official journalists used what appeared to be intelligence service materials in an attempt to discredit them. "They are a mix of parasites, habitual vagabonds, chameleons and ruffians, lacking charisma and mass support, that serve as an instrument of the empire," show moderator Randy Alonso said of the dissidents. Cuba's small opposition movement is rarely mentioned by the official and only media in the country and regularly branded by officials as in the hire of the United States. The state-run Cuban TV broadcast "The Roundtable" accused the Ladies in White of being "Pawns of the Empire," its disparaging term for the United States, and promoting activities aimed at supporting a US campaign to destabilize the Americas' only one-party communist regime. It charged that they were really "Ladies in Green" keen to snap up US greenbacks in exchange for opposing the Cuban regime. (*Reuters, AFP*, 22/12/05)

**December 21:** A Cuban court has imposed prison terms of between eight and 20 years on 10 citizens convicted of drug trafficking, the Cuban press reported. Receiving the longest sentences were Roberto Jiménez Benítez and Héctor Arias Biritan, who were handed 20 and 18 years behind bars, respectively, according to the official daily *Granma*. Two women found a 32-kilogram package of cocaine on the shore near the western town of Blanca Arena and contacted Benítez and Arias to try and resell the drug in Havana. Another defendant, Lázaro Omar Alvarez, was sentenced to 12 years in prison, and the rest of the accused received jail terms of 8-10 years. (*EFE*, 21/12/05)

**December 21:** One of the Ladies in White, a group of women who are relatives of political prisoners, was warned by a police officer not to attend mass at the church of Santa Rita. Georgina González said that a police officer called Amed went to her house to reproach her for attending mass at Santa Rita, where the group meets every Sunday, and for visiting the house of the new chief of the US Interest Section in Havana. Georgina's house has been the target of angry demonstrations by government supporters organized by Cuban authorities. (*Cubanet*, 22/12/05)

**December 22:** Known as the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, or CIGB, the institute is one of 52 government facilities dedicated to human, animal and agricultural research that have recorded a string of successes. Using more than \$1 billion in state funding, Cuban scientists have produced a hepatitis B vaccine sold in more than 30 countries and streptokinase, a potent enzyme that dissolves blood clots and improves the survival rate of heart attack victims. The country also makes recombinant interferon that strengthens the immune system of cancer patients and a meningitis B vaccine. In the pipeline are products ranging from an injection that closes ulcers and improves circulation in diabetics to vaccines against cholera and hepatitis C, according to Cuban officials. Yet the country's production of milk, beef and other foods has fallen even as its scientists embark on years-long efforts to produce genetically modified rice, corn and other crops that are disease resistant. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/12/05)

**December 23:** The National Assembly of People's Power, a rubber-stamp parliament that includes the country's national and provincial leaders, held a remarkable end-of-the-year session that for the first time was open to diplomats and foreign journalists and dealt extensively, if delicately, with the inevitable. "In the Soviet Union, errors led to popular discontent among other reasons due to the bad performance of the economy," Francisco Soberon, chairman of the central bank who has emerged as Mr Castro's closest economic adviser, told the assembly. "To the extent that we do not achieve a steady improvement in people's standard of living and sustainable development we risk that these formidable personalities [Fidel and Raul Castro] become the only pillar on which our system rests," Mr Soberon, said. But the most extraordinary moment came when Felipe Pérez Roque, the foreign minister and a Castro protégé, took the leader's place to deliver the closing speech. It was a broad-ranging discourse and optimistic review of the international and domestic situation, highlighting the need to prepare ideologically and politically for Mr Castro's passing and new

US efforts to “annex” the country. “Now we have the generation that made the revolution (...) even the enemy knows with them there will be no deals, but it is placing its hopes in the idea that it will be able to confuse, divide, buy or intimidate those who follow,” he said. Mr Roque received a standing ovation and one of Cuba’s most powerful figures, assembly president Ricardo Alarcón, urged people to study his “brilliant” remarks. [[Intervención del canciller Felipe Pérez Roque](#)] (*Financial Times, La Jornada*, 26/12/05)

**December 25:** The official Cuban radio station CMBF broadcasted a special Christmas worship in the morning and evening, sponsored by the Cuban Council of Churches. The night before all Catholic temples were packed with Cuban families attending the traditional Christmas Mass of the Rooster (Misa del Gallo). (*Monitor*, 27/12/05)

**December 25:** Sakharov prize-winning wives and mothers of jailed Cuban dissidents have demanded the release of their loved ones after a Christmas mass, and lashed back at Fidel Castro's communist government. The Ladies in White group attended Christmas Mass in Havana, decked out in white to draw attention to their cause. "We ask on this Christmas Day for freedom for our political prisoners and for the Cuban people to have a better future," said Laura Pollán on behalf of the group. "It's an extremely sad day for us, because Christmas is a family holiday," explained Pollán, wife of dissident Héctor Maseda who has been sentenced to 20 years in jail. "Since our husbands are not with us, our families cannot be complete." In reference to accusations made to the group by official journalists at the TV program The Roundtable on December 21, Pollán said that, “they should get an Oscar for best performance in a comedy.” Pollán said that state media may have done them a favor. "They identified us publicly, and so a lot of people who may not have known about the Ladies in White now do, thanks to the State media", she said. "This Christmas, we are asking for peace, and love in our hearts, so that we are able not to be bitter or hate the people who are making us suffer." (*AFP*, 26/12/05)

**December 26:** Cuban dissident María de los Ángeles Borrego Mir, vice president of the illegal organization Hijos de la Virgen de Regla (Daughters of Virgin Regla), received a four-year sentence under the accusation of “potential danger” to society. The trial was held at Regla’s municipal tribunal, in north eastern Havana, and only relatives were allowed to attend. Borrego Mir is the first woman dissident convicted in Cuba under the alleged crime of “potential dangerousness”. (*Cubamet*, 27/12/05)

**December 27:** Cuban publishing houses are closing 2005 with an increase in the number of publications, which include local, national and world authors. In statements to the press, the vice president of the Cuban Book Institute, Edel Morales, highlighted the development achieved by national publishing houses such as Letras Cubanas and Ciencias Sociales. Morales noted the outstanding work of Arte y Literatura, which keeps pace with international contemporary literature, and Gente Nueva, which publishes works in great demand by children and youngsters. (*AIN*, 27/12/05)

**December 27:** As hundreds of same-sex couples in Britain are taking advantage of a new law that allows them to enter into civil partnerships with the same rights as heterosexual marriages, gays and lesbians in Cuba are still struggling to achieve a bare minimum of social acceptance. Nevertheless, the issue of respect for sexual diversity has become increasingly visible in this socialist Caribbean island nation since the early 1990s, as part of a process that now seems to be irreversible. "There are things in life that can only happen when the right conditions have been created, but once the path is cleared, there is no going back," remarked Nelson Simón, a leading figure in modern Cuban homoerotic poetry, in an interview with the press. With several published volumes of poetry to his name, the 40-year-old Simón is one of the few Cuban intellectuals to openly profess his homosexuality. "Although it continues to be a ‘machista’ and ‘manly’ country with a very phallogocentric culture, Cuban society accepts changes very easily, it is very mutable, very open and acts like a sponge when it comes to incorporating everything that comes along," he added. In 2005, gay and lesbian film festivals were held in a number of Cuban cities, Pinar del Río hosted the first sexual diversity cultural festival, and CENESEX (an official center for research on sexual matters) submitted a proposal for legislation on transsexual rights to the Cuban parliament. Nevertheless, the film “Strawberry and Chocolate” has never been shown on Cuban television. (*IPS*, 27/12/05)

**December 27:** Cuban authorities discovered an abandoned boat containing more than a ton of marijuana in Cuba's biggest drug seizure of the year, the official daily newspaper said. The Communist Party newspaper Granma said the Cuban coast guard found the drug cache aboard a vessel surrounded by sharks and floating off Camaguey province's northern coast, about 300 miles east of Havana. The newspaper quoted Coast Guard Lt. Colonel Guillermo Guzman as saying the find was Cuba's biggest drug haul in 2005. No crew-members were found aboard, prompting authorities to speculate that they could have been swept overboard. (AP, 27/12/05)

**December 27:** Cuba honored five artists, including singer-songwriter Pablo Milanés and performer Rosita Fornés, with its 2005 National Music Awards. The prizes were handed out at a gala in Havana's Amadeo Roldan theatre. Awards also went to pianist Frank Fernández, musicologist Maria Antonieta Henríquez and choral director Cuca Rivero. Performing at the event were guitarist Pancho Amat and his El Cabildo del Son group, opera soprano Bárbara Llanes, pianist Pura Ortiz, the Children's Choir, the National Choir of Cuba and the National Symphony Orchestra. The evening also featured honoree Milanés teaming up with singer-songwriter Carlos Varela on their respective compositions "Días de gloria" and "Habáname". (AP, *Prensa Latina*, 28/12/05)

**December 28:** Cuba's film industry is planning to make 10 feature films, seven joint productions with Latin America, and 15 documentaries next year, showing an increase in production from 2005. The figures mark a gradual recovery in the Institute of Art and Film Industry (ICAIC), an infrastructure that was severely affected by economic depression in the 90's. Prospects for 2006 include the premier of a film by Cuban filmmaker Rigoberto López about the life of Benny More, a legendary figure of Cuban music. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/12/05)

**December 30:** Cuban poet Jesús Orta Ruiz, 83, popularly known as Indio Naborí, died in Havana. Orta Ruiz, who wrote an extensive number of poems marked by strong social denunciations, had been conferred the National Literature Award. He was born on the outskirts of Havana on September 30, 1922. His parents were poor farmers who cultivated their Spanish traditions and folklore in rural areas. This marked most of his poems. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/12/05)

**December 31:** A government message broadcasted on national television and radio at midnight and published on the official press on January 1 saluted the people and outlined the reasons Cubans have for celebrating the 47th Anniversary of the January 1st, 1959's revolution led by Fidel Castro. The note highlighted the Gross Domestic Product growth of 11.8 percent, the highest since 1959, and the construction of 700 public works as part of the social program called Battle of Ideas. The government's communiqué said that in 2006 social workers will continue to play a key role in the war against waste, corruption and pilfering of state resources. The message concluded with stressing that 2006 is a decisive year to reach the military invulnerability through better defense training and preparation. (*Prensa Latina*, 1/1/06)

**December 31:** Amid a nationwide anti-corruption campaign, Fidel Castro unexpectedly showed up at a popular gas station in Havana to celebrate the New Year with a group of social workers who were doing their night shift. Castro welcomed the New Year that marks the 47th Anniversary of the Revolution, talking with a group of social workers and university students headed by Julio Martínez, first secretary of the Young Communist League. They all sang together the National Anthem when the clock struck 12 and 21 gunshots to salute the revolutionary anniversary was heard all over the city. (EFE, *Prensa Latina*, 2/1/06)

## **Economy**

**December 2:** Fidel Castro recognized the critical situation of the country's power generation network and promised that the service would improve soon with the operation of generators and the application of conservation measures. The government plans to make up for the shortfalls of power plants with the installation of hundreds of electrical generators

in the whole country. In reference to the rationing card, Castro said that there is still no date for its elimination. [[Fidel Castro's speech](#)] (*EFE*, 2/12/05)

**December 3:** Cuba wants to sign an economic complementary accord with Mercosur, Cuba's deputy foreign minister, Rafael Daussá Céspedes, said in Asunción during a news conference after signing two formal agreements with his Paraguayan counterpart Emilio Giménez Franco. Daussá explained that his country does not want to be a member of Mercosur and criticized the previous Uruguayan government (Jorge Batlle's) for creating difficulties during the negotiation of the economic complementary accord. "Those difficulties do not exist at the moment, and I think that there is a consensus of sorts about making the accord multilateral," he added. (*ABC Color*, 4/12/05)

**December 3:** Cuba's deputy foreign minister, Rafael Daussá Céspedes stressed the need to boost trade between Paraguay and Cuba, as it stands at a very low level. He said that his country could buy Paraguayan foodstuffs and that Cubans are prepared to export medical, pharmaceutical, biotechnological and other products to Paraguay. He said that he offered to send medical brigades to Paraguay and thanked Paraguay for condemning the US blockade. Fidel Castro has again invited his Paraguayan counterpart Nicanor Duarte Frutos to visit the island, Deputy Foreign Minister Daussá reported. He said that Foreign Minister Leila Rachid and Deputy Foreign Minister Giménez Franco are likely to travel to Havana in 2006. (*ABC Color*, 4/12/05)

**December 5:** A batch of 80 buses China built for Cuba is ready for shipment to the Caribbean island to be used in inter-provincial public transportation. Buses kept at the port city of Tianjin are part of a two-way deal under which China's Yutong firm will provide Cuba with 600 altogether. Also, twelve Chinese locomotives, the first the Asian country has exported to Latin America, are en route to Cuba, the official daily *Granma* said. (*Prensa Latina, Globe & Mail*, 5/12/05)

**December 6:** Fidel Castro said more than half the gasoline in the country has been stolen in recent years but young people were now taking control of the fuel distribution system. Castro began mobilizing thousands of young people in October to fight corruption, pilfering and waste in what he described as a do-or-die struggle to save his 46-year-old revolution. The cash-strapped Communist-run country imports more than half its fuel and food. Young social workers and university students first took control of Havana's gas stations, which accept dollar-pegged pesos, and as of December were manning close to 600 of them nation-wide, as well as 1,450 pumps managed by state entities, refineries and fuel trucks, Castro said. The Cuban economy is more than 90 percent state-run and the fuel distribution system completely in state hands. Castro, in a televised speech, said gas station receipts had increased by more than \$100,000 a day, more than twice the previous level, and most ministry pumps would be closed. "Diesel sales are up 20 percent, the cheapest gas 184 percent, regular gas 88 percent and special 142 percent," Castro said, at a ceremony marking six years since the successful fight began for the return of ship-wreck victim Elian Gonzalez from the United States to his father in Cuba. (*Reuters*, 6/12/05)

**December 6:** Algeria's delegation at the 13th Session of the Intergovernmental Mixed Commission in Havana will sign cooperation agreements with the Cuban Transport Ministry and the Civil Aeronautics Institute. Cuba's Foreign Trade Minister Raúl de la Nuez and Algerian Health, Population and Hospital Reform Minister Amar Tou head the event. They analyzed sectors like trade, health, sports, hydraulic resources, culture, fisheries, and sea and air transportation. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/12/05)

**December 8:** Cuba's Centresoft Corp. and Cimex Corp. have partnered with Sentai Software Corp. of Edmonton and Indcom Trading Co. of Orleans, Ontario, to create an international software consortium called CubaSoft Solutions Inc. CubaSoft is recruiting Cuban Information Technology (IT) talent to work on projects for the Canadian companies and is also developing domestic IT projects. While baby steps are a necessary part of the learning process, industry insiders are confident that Cuba has what it takes to develop a critical mass and knowledge base that will position the island as

an attractive option for IT outsourcing contracts — particularly for software development in the medical, financial, biotech and education fields. (*Globe & Mail*, 8/12/05)

**December 12:** A working group for biotechnological cooperation between China and Cuba examined the possibilities of bilateral collaboration in Beijing. Representatives of the two countries began revising the work of each party in this field, to define common interest areas and joint projects. The meeting responds to a memorandum signed between China and Cuba in November 2004, when Chinese President Hu Jintao officially visited Cuba. This taskforce was created to strengthen institutional cooperation, foster collaboration in biotechnology, and study the establishment of joint ventures and research projects, among other activities. (*Prensa Latina*, 12/12/05)

**December 14:** Cuba has scrapped the standard method used to measure economic activity and replaced it with its own formula that substantially boosts the value of its economy and performance, while making a statistical comparison with other countries practically impossible. Fidel Castro, who has announced that the economy is growing at more than 9 per cent, insists the standard method was designed for capitalist societies and Cuba's "socially sustainable GDP" formula better measures progress in his socialist land where no value is assigned to readily available social services and wages are low due to subsidized utilities and some basic products. Last year, Havana first reported growth based exclusively on its formula as 5 per cent, while the UN Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) said the GDP was up 3 per cent and estimated 5 per cent growth this year based on the traditional formula. ECLAC officials have held at least two rounds of talks with the Cuban economy ministry seeking clarification on GDP and expressing concern that the UN body will no longer be able to include Cuba in regional tables and comparative analysis. Cuban authorities have said that the island's GDP grew 11.8 percent based on exports. Meanwhile, ECLAC's executive secretary, José Luis Machinea, said that this Cuban method "is being analyzed by ECLAC". "For the moment, Cuba has not been included in the regional annual rate growth", warned the UN institution. (*Financial Times*, *EFE*, 14/12/05)

**December 16:** A syndicate of Russian state-owned banks signed a deal with Cuban airline Aviaimport to provide a \$94 million 10-year loan for the purchase of two long-range Russian Ilyushin-96-300 passenger planes. Following the signing, Roseximbank Chairman Nikolai Gavrillov called the deal a "historic event," as it was the first time Russian commercial banks have provided long-term credit for the purchase of Russian high-tech production. According to the agreement, the price of the two planes is \$110 million, 15% of which Cuba has already paid and the other 85% of which will be financed by the loan. (*Novosti*, 16/12/05)

**December 18:** The Cuban economy, despite tensions generated by insufficient material resources and financial liquidity is closing 2005 with satisfactory numbers. Speaking before the Cuban Parliament Commission for Economic Affairs, Economy and Planning Minister Jose Luis Rodríguez explained the priorities for Cuba's development, Granma daily reported. Rodríguez indicated the new path of the national economy is aimed at increasing people's quality of life and centering on strategic development issues. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/12/05)

**December 20:** China granted Cuba a line of credit worth 50 million yuans, about US\$6.2 million, as part of an agreement signed during a visit by a senior Chinese Communist Party official, Cuba's state-run press reported. The line of credit will be used to buy "general materials" from China and carry out several economic projects, the island's domestic news agency AIN reported. The official, Luo Gan, is a member of China's ruling Politburo Standing Committee and he was meeting with several top Cuban officials including Parliament Speaker Ricardo Alarcón and Vice President Carlos Lage. (*Businessweek Online*, 21/12/05)

**December 20:** Parliamentary committees brought to a close a series of meetings prior to the December 22 Sixth Ordinary Session of the National Assembly. With another annual unemployment rate below two percent, the Cuban economy this year boasts a new achievement, more than 5 million citizens received wage increases in 2005. Alfredo Morales Cartaya, the minister of Labor and Social Security, announced the figure, which corresponds to increases made across the board in salaries, retirement benefits and social assistance, and added that the public can expect more raises

in the near future. The minister, addressing the Economic Affairs Parliamentary Committee, specified that future wage increases will be made in correspondence to earnings made through productivity increases and worker discipline as well as from revenues derived from resource management initiatives. (*Granma*, 21/12/05)

**December 20:** Based on assessments from the Ministry of Agriculture, the Productive Activity Committee of the Cuban Parliament reported that production of secondary meat products (from sheep, goat and rabbit) were down for 2005, in general due to inefficient management. Among the problems cited in this industry were a lack of training of primary producers along with shortages of veterinary products like antibiotics and others. Further deficiencies noted were repeated failures to meet contractual production levels, a delay in payments for products received and a failure to pick up animals in the agreed timeframe. Parliamentary representatives said that this industry should be targeted for growth. They noted that it could become an important source of employment and bring about a more efficient use of available farm land, while increasing the availability of meat for the public and forming a live reserve of protein for emergency situations such as in times of war. (*Granma*, 21/12/05)

**December 20:** Francisco Silva, vice-minister of Domestic Commerce (MINCIN) addressed the Service Industry Committee of the Cuban Parliament, reporting on changes made in 2005 to subsidized products and changes expected for 2006. The vice-minister reported that new subsidized food products, such as chocolate, were welcomed by the public, along with measures implemented to insure the quality of existing products such as coffee. He also released results of a study carried out looking at ways to improve egg distribution in rural communities. Silva said that additional measures are being taken to cut down on fraud in the consumer register for the coming year, noting that there have been cases recorded where families continue to register as members persons no longer living or who had emigrated. He added that, in order to collect subsidized consumer product ration books for 2006, each family would be required to present identification cards for each family member along with proof of residence. (*Granma*, 21/12/05)

**December 21:** Auckland manufacturer Atrax Group has snared the chance to overhaul Havana Airport's ancient baggage-handling system. Atrax's promotion at the 15th general assembly of the Airports Council International conference in Auckland last month sparked interest from Cuba, Romania and Poland, international sales manager Ian Walton said. Havana Airport executives were among those showing interest at the conference and are now in talks with Atrax's US agent, Walton said. (*The Independent Business Weekly*, 21/12/05)

**December 22:** Cuba announced it had turned a corner in its recovery from severe financial crisis, reporting 11.8 percent growth in 2005 using its own method for calculating gross domestic product. Addressing the communist nation's lawmakers as Fidel Castro looked on, Economics Minister José Luis Rodríguez said the Caribbean nation had fully recovered from the 1990s, when austerity measures were adopted to survive the economic crisis caused by the Soviet Union's collapse. "This could be considered the highest in revolutionary history," Rodríguez said of the growth figure, referring to the 47-year-long administration of Castro. The economics minister also projected economic growth of 10 percent for 2006. Rodríguez said the biggest income earners for Cuba this year were tourism, nickel, and the exportation of services -- especially doctors and other medical workers hired by other countries such as Venezuela to provide free care to poor people. Cuba's methodology for calculating economic growth, adopted in recent years, takes into account the country's vast social safety net and subsidized services. That differing methodology makes Cuba's growth figures difficult to compare with that of other countries, prompting the United Nation's Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) to omit the island's numbers from its report for this year. (*The New York Times*, 22/12/05)

**December 22:** Cuba's economic growth of 11.8 percent this year is based on the export of services, among other incomes. Cuba began bartering medical and other services for 90,000 bpd of Venezuelan oil this year and the South American country also began paying Cuba for additional medical and other services, for a total value estimated at close to \$3 billion by local economists. "The biggest change is that Venezuela began this year paying for 25,000 doctors working there, 8,000 sports trainers and others, and for more than 150,000 eye operations carried out in Cuba," said a

foreign banker based in Havana. "That is \$3 billion odd of new revenues over a total gross domestic product of 35 billion, or 8,5 percent of the increase," he said. (*Reuters*, 22/12/05)

**December 22:** Cuba's combined oil and natural gas production fell by 3.7% in 2005, following a similar decline in 2004, the country's Economy and Planning Minister said. Minister José Luis Rodríguez said oil production fell and gas output increased over last year's reported 22.8 million barrels of oil (62,300 b/d) and 24.9 billion cubic feet of gas, without providing further details. "While gas output increased, crude declined (...) due to problems such as drilling delays and hurricanes," Rodríguez said in a year-end speech to parliament, adding that drilling would increase in 2006 in hopes of upping production. Cuba imports at least 92,000 b/d of oil and derivatives in exchange for medical and other services from Venezuela. Canadian companies Sherritt International and Pebercan, in cooperation with Cupet, account for around 60% of domestic output. Spanish oil company Repsol YPF has signed a contract to look for lighter oil in the deep waters off Cuba's coast in partnership with ONGC of India and Norsk Hydro. ONGC also has two separate deepwater blocks and Sherritt four. Sinopec of China signed an agreement earlier this year to jointly produce heavy oil with Cupet in westernmost Pinar del Río province, with drilling expected to begin in 2006. (*The Oil Daily*, 27/12/05)

**December 24:** The Cuban parliament late at night approved a 33.3 billion peso budget for 2006, a huge 32 percent increase over this year's spending of 25.3 billion pesos and evidence that authorities are confident a 15-year crisis is over. "Our public finances are in good health despite the genocidal imperialist blockade, hurricanes and drought and higher oil prices," Finance Minister Georgina Barreiro said on introducing the budget. Barreiro said next year's budget deficit would be 3.4 percent of the gross domestic product, based on expected revenues of 31.5 billion pesos, a 35 percent increase over 2005, when the deficit came in at 4.2 percent of GDP. Barreiro said increased spending was largely earmarked for defense, social services, wages and pensions, emergency reserves and a doubling of investments to 6.4 billion pesos. Increased revenues would come with economic growth, more efficiency, higher utility rates and the sale of more appliances and food to the population, Barreiro added. (*Reuters*, 25/12/05)

**December 27:** Foreign Trade Minister Raúl de la Nuez said services account for 50 per cent of Cuba's export income. At a ceremony marking the 45th anniversary of this ministry, de la Nuez highlighted the launching of new biotechnology products, which are able to generate more than 200 million dollars. They have become alternatives in the competitive world market for staple products like nickel, rum, tobacco, sugar derivatives and iron-and-steel, the minister said. De la Nuez especially noted that 51 per cent of Cuba's exchange is centered in Latin America, namely Venezuela, plus Europe, Africa, the Pacific and Asia, China being its second commercial partner. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/12/05)

**December 28:** Cuba will complete, by mid-2006, the installation of 80 percent of new generation capacities, a modern system backed up by emergency plants in vital locations, all of them with much more fuel-saving equipment. This achievement will quadruple power generation making all provinces independent by connecting thousands of synchronized generators. This network is designed to eliminate interruptions due to generation deficit. The old power plants will be replaced by modern combined-cycle plants, which will use gas derived from oil production. Fidel Castro said that the whole project will save the country nearly \$1 billion in convertible currency, compared to current costs of production. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/12/05)

**December 28:** Cuban Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas closed a ten-day visit to China. Cabrisas said economic and commercial relations with China substantially increased in 2005 and would continue to augment in 2006, as the Asian nation is practically present in all sectors of the Cuban economy. Cabrisas was in Beijing as the head of Cuba's delegation to the 18th Inter-Government Commission for Economic and Commercial Relations. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/12/05)

## Exile Community

**December 6:** Cuba deserves “a peaceful transition”, said Cuban poet Raúl Rivero, exiled in Spain, and called on the international community “not to let the political prisoners on the island be forgotten”. Rivero was in Paris to thank the director-general of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Koichiro Matsuura, for having been awarded the Guillermo Cano prize for Freedom of the Press in 2004. During his statement, Rivero said that Cuba is supposedly the most anti-American country of the world, “but it is the one with the most fascination with the United States, where the people reject the left because they associate it with poverty and repression”. (*EFE*, 6/12/05)

**December 8:** Thousands of Cuban exiles congregated in a mass held in the church of Saint John Bosco, in solidarity with the anti-Castro activists Santiago Alvarez and Osvaldo Mitat, arrested by the federal government for possession of a small arsenal of weapons. Monsignor Emilio Vallina called Alvarez and Mitat “two victims of the injustices of many men”. Alvarez is considered to be the benefactor of Luis Posada Carriles, who is in an immigration jail in El Paso, Texas. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 9/12/05)

## Foreign Affairs

**December 1:** Fidel Castro fondly told President Martin Torrijos of Panama that he hoped they could share the same good relations their countries did during the 1968-1981 rule of Torrijos' late father, populist military strongman General Omar Torrijos. Torrijos traveled to Cuba with 74 disadvantaged Panamanians who will undergo free eye surgery courtesy of the communist-run government. "I am reminded of your father when he visited," Castro told the younger Torrijos, the online edition of the Communist Party daily *Granma* reported. Castro said father and son shared "the same spirit." "We enter a new era of cooperation and solidarity with Cuba," Torrijos told state-run news media before boarding his flight. "We leave with a suitcase full of ideas and hope." (*CNN*, 1/12/05)

**December 1:** The Spanish Defence Minister, José Bono, said he would repeat his statements made in Caracas in reference to Fidel Castro. “I said that Mr. (Hugo) Chávez” had come to power “by the polls, which is not the case neither of Pinochet nor Castro”, said Bono. He also added that his intention was not to “compare”. The Defence Minister emphasized that it’s impossible to say that Castro came to the power via the democratic route, “because it is a lie”, he said, “even if the Cuban Foreign Minister (Felipe Pérez Roque) does not like it”. (*Europa Press*, 1/12/05)

**December 1:** The president of the Cuban National Assembly of the People’s Power, Ricardo Alarcón, described as “disgusting” the statements by the Spanish Defence Minister, José Bono, who speaking to the press said that Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez was elected in the polls, “unlike Castro or Pinochet”. The president of the Cuban Parliament pointed out that “democracy cannot be measured through elections”, since Adolf Hitler “was himself elected by a large majority of votes”. (*Europa Press*, 1/12/05)

**December 1:** The 15th Congress of the World Federation of Trade Unions began in Havana to strengthen workers’ unity and seek for alternatives to face neoliberal globalization. Representatives of 300 unions will demand unconditional withdrawal of foreign troops in Iraq plus the end of Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestinian territories, said Leonel Gonzalez, Cuba's CTC (central trade union) chair for international relations. (*Prensa Latina*, 1/12/05)

**December 2:** On the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations between both countries, Vietnamese Minister of Foreign Relations Nguyen Dy Nien declared that his country will continue strengthening friendship and bilateral relations with Cuba. Nguyen Dy Nien added that the only thing both nations have left to do is take bilateral economic and commercial cooperation to the level of current political relations. (*Prensa Latina*, 2/12/05)

**December 3:** Communist Cuba deported a Polish journalist two days after police detained her for interviewing dissidents while visiting as a tourist, a Polish diplomat said. Anna Bikont, who works for *Gazeta Wyborcza*, one of Poland's most widely circulated newspapers, was put on an Air Lauda flight to Milan by immigration police, said Polish First Secretary Daniel Gromann. Her colleague and travel companion, Nelly Norton, a dual national Swiss-Italian psychologist who works as a journalist, was also expelled. Cuban police seized their notes and deleted pictures from a digital camera, Gromann said. "They were told they broke immigration laws. Technically they have been deported," he said. Cuba requires foreign reporters who enter Cuba as tourists to abstain from practicing journalism. (*The New York Times*, 3/12/05)

**December 4:** Cuba's Education Minister Luis Ignacio Gómez concluded his stay in China, where he attended the 5th High Level Group on Education (EFA), organized by UNESCO in Beijing. The three-day forum aimed at finding ways to decrease illiteracy worldwide. After the event, Luis Ignacio Gómez met with China's education Minister Zhou Ji to exchange criteria on the two countries' educational systems. Gómez and Zhou agreed to increase the number of Cubans studying Chinese language and that of Chinese people studying Spanish in cooperation with Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/12/05)

**December 5:** The main headline of the *Granma* newspaper on the Venezuelan elections was a phrase taken from statements by Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez in Caracas: "Venezuela immunized against the imperialist poison". Cuban television newscasts devoted large segments to the Venezuelan elections, emphasizing the popular support to the President and the elections. (*World Data Service*, 5/12/05)

**December 5:** The secretary for international relations of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), Trinidad Jiménez, condemned the political persecution of the social-democratic opposition in Cuba. Jiménez decried the so-called "acts of repudiation" against social democrat leader Manuel Cuesta Morúa, spokesman of the illegal Progressive Arch. (*EFE*, 5/12/05)

**December 6:** Fidel Castro charged again at Europe and warned the Spanish Socialists, without mentioning names, after a recent criticism from Trinidad Jiménez on the harassment of dissident Manuel Cuesta Morúa. Castro referred to Jiménez as "one who calls herself an official of a supposedly socialist or social-democratic party". "(...) let them know that we are keeping a watchful eye and that we have a good collection of information in the backpack", he said. (*EFE*, 6/12/05)

**December 7:** The secretary for international relations of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), Trinidad Jiménez, reaffirmed her condemnation of the aggression against Cuban dissident Manuel Cuesta Morúa. Jiménez stressed that in 25 years of political career she has never received "warning nor threats from anybody". "I follow political instructions from my secretary general, who is the President of the Government. Those, and the dictates of my own convictions, are the only ones that I attend to". "I would repeat these statements when a social-democratic leader of a country, whoever may be, in any place, is the victim of some form of aggression (...) the Spanish socialist party has the ethical and political obligation to stand up in their defence", said Jiménez. (*EFE*, 7/12/05)

**December 7:** Fidel Castro traveled to Barbados for a summit with leaders of Caribbean states, the state news agency reported. Castro was accompanied by Vice President Carlos Lage, Foreign Secretary Felipe Perez Rogue, Minister of Foreign Investment Marta Lomas, and other government officials. In the second such summit in three years, Castro was due to sign cooperation agreements on health and culture with the leaders of the Caribbean Community, CARICOM.

The Cuban leader was also scheduled to attend a dedication ceremony for a monument erected to commemorate the bombing of a Cuban airliner in October 1976 over the coast of Barbados. (*AFP*, 7/12/05)

**December 7:** The first 136 Ecuadorian patients that will benefit from the Cuba-Venezuela sight-restoring program known as "Mission Miracle" arrived in Caracas. "The Mission is part of a strategy of the governments of Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro of a Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA). (*EFE*, 7/12/05)

**December 8:** Leaders of Caribbean nations were holding a summit to discuss health care cooperation and cultural exchanges, but a major focus was on Cuba and its thorny relationship with the United States. A draft declaration prepared for the one-day summit calls for an end to Washington's "unjust and cruel" 44-year-old trade embargo against Cuba. "It is an embargo that is not only inhumane but also blatantly inconsistent with international trade laws," said St. Lucia Prime Minister Kenny Anthony at the opening of the second Caribbean Community-Cuba summit. Castro chided wealthy nations for using a disproportionate share of the world's energy resources, saying they were growing richer at the expense of poorer countries, and endangering the environment. Bahamian Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell said Castro "looks good." And Jamaican Prime Minister P.J. Patterson said his "intellectual acuity is as sharp as ever." The Cuban delegation played a 13-minute video about Cuba's assistance to the Caribbean, which includes 1,142 doctors working in CARICOM nations. Castro also boasted that 14 Caribbean nations have sent more than 3,000 students to study at Cuban schools. "As of yesterday, thanks to Operation Miracle, 10,502 citizens from 11 nations have been operated on in Cuba in just four months and 14 days," Castro said. "That is to say, a pace of 30,000 patients a year." Leaders of every CARICOM nation except Haiti attended the summit, designed to encourage cultural exchanges and health care cooperation between the 15-nation bloc and Cuba. (*The New York Times*, *The Miami Herald*, 8/12/05)

**December 8:** Fidel Castro laid flowers at a memorial to 73 people killed in the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner -- a plot allegedly masterminded by Luis Posada Carriles, a Cuban militant being held in the United States. The tribute came as Caribbean leaders condemned Washington's 44-year-old trade embargo against Cuba during a regional summit held in Barbados. Castro and the son of a crew member killed in the crash, Carlos Alberto Cremata, placed a bouquet of flowers at the base of the polished, gray granite pyramid, which is inscribed with the names of the bombing victims. The delegates observed two minutes of silence in honor of those killed. "That was a very touching experience," Castro said at an evening news conference broadcast live on Barbados' CBC radio station website. "This has been such an incredible day." (*The New York Times*, *The Miami Herald*, 9/12/05)

**December 10:** In almost two months members of the Cuban Henry Reeve Medical Brigade attended more than 442,000 patients affected by Hurricane Stan in Guatemala. Dr. Daniel Posada, second head of that International Contingent reported that the Cuban doctors saved 1,360 lives, after the arrival in Havana of the last two groups of doctors working in that country. (*Granma*, 11/12/05)

**December 10:** East Timor Prime Minister Mari Bim Amude Alkatiri kicked off an official visit to Cuba, on an invitation by Fidel Castro. The prime minister is accompanied by a delegation made up of Health Minister Rui Maria de Araujo and other top government officials. (*Prensa Latina*, 10/12/05)

**December 11:** On his return to Argentina after meeting with Fidel Castro, Santa Fe Governor Jorge Obeid expressed satisfaction with his visit to Cuba and said it was a successful mission. "To be precise, we acquired vaccines to prevent meningitis, while Cuban teachers have been working in the northern region of the province for six months in an adult literacy program called "Yo Sí Puedo" (Yes, I can), he said to the press. The governor reported that this program has been so successful that the first 500 diplomas will be granted to people that have already learned how to read and write, and now they will join the formal adult education system. (*Prensa Latina*, 12/12/05)

**December 12:** The virtual president-elect of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya, does not foresee to appoint an ambassador to Cuba in the first year of his administration, but in 2007, said Milton Jiménez, whom the president has announced as Foreign Minister. (*EFE*, 12/12/05)

**December 12:** The Spanish Foreign Ministry, through its embassy in Cuba, expressed its "discomfort" to Cuban authorities on the expulsion from Cuba on October 8 of Spanish citizens Pablo Echánove and Juan Ignacio Peña, members of the Spanish Association Cuba in Transition (AECT). The source said that Cuban authorities did not notify the Spanish diplomatic mission when Echánove and Peña were detained and interrogated and authorities seized audio-visual and graphic material collected during the trip. (*EFE*, 12/12/05)

**December 12:** Both the conservatives and the socialists who make up the bulk of the European Parliament blasted the Cuban Communist regime's refusal to allow several women rights activists to fly to France to receive a prestigious award. Cuba's Ladies in White, an organization of female relatives of political prisoners, shares this year's Sakharov Prize with Nigerian human rights lawyer Hauwa Ibrahim and Paris-based Reporters Without Borders, a press-freedom watchdog. The award is given by the European Parliament annually, and this year's presentation ceremony is set for December 14. "I call on the Cuban authorities to let them depart. If they do not, we will be obliged to again harshly criticize (one of) the last Communist dictatorships on the planet," said Germany's Hans-Gert Poettering, the head of the center-right European Popular Party. "We reject the Cuban stance and are going to protest," said the head of the Socialist bloc, Martin Schulz, who also is German. (*EFE*, 13/12/05)

**December 12:** European Parliament president Josep Borrell said he was to meet the Cuban foreign minister in regards with Cuba's refusal to allow The Ladies in White to travel to Europe to receive the Sakharov Prize granted to them by the European Parliament. But he added "I can't promise that the diplomatic pressure we are making will secure the permission for Cuban activists to arrive at Strasbourg. If the Ladies in White fail to get the green light, they will be represented in Strasbourg by their Europe-based associate, Blanca Reyes, who will take the floor on their behalf in plenary. However, she will not get the award herself. One member, Miriam Leiva, said that if she and her comrades are prevented from attending the ceremony in the European Parliament, "there will be a person who will explain the position of the Women in White but will not accept the prize." Instead, the activists have asked a delegation from the European Parliament to bring it to them to Cuba. (*EUObserver*, *EFE*, 12/12/05)

**December 13:** The Jamaican government is seeking to deepen ties with Cuba, particularly in the areas of water and housing development. Minister of Water and Housing, Donald Buchanan recently led a delegation to Cuba, where meetings were held with the Cuban Minister of Water, Jorge Aspiolea Roig and the President of the National Housing Institute of Cuba, Victor Ramirez Ruiz. Speaking on his return to the island, Minister Buchanan observed that "the challenges in Cuba and the challenges in Jamaica are quite similar," and so it is important and prudent to enhance cooperation between both countries. Meanwhile, on the housing side, discussions with the President of the National Housing Institute were very fruitful, and focused, among other things on establishing cooperation to deal with slum upgrading and the regularisation and improvement of squatter settlements. Minister Buchanan informed the press that in furtherance of cooperation efforts, Jamaica would exchange experiences with the Cubans to develop practical solutions. (*JIS News*, 1/12/05)

**December 13:** East Timor Prime Minister Mari Bim Amude Alkatiri is winding up his Cuba visit after talks with Fidel Castro. The two heads of State presided over the bilateral talks between high level delegations from the two countries. Vice President Carlos Lage, Public Health Minister José Ramón Balaguer, Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque and Basic Industry Minister Yadira García, among other officials, also attended the talks for Cuba. Health Minister Rui Maria de Araujo, Ricardo da Costa, the Prime Minister advisor for National Security, Cabinet Chief Jose Manuel Gomes and Protocol Director Leonor Cardoso represented East Timor at the meeting. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/12/05)

**December 13:** Mexican police at the international airport in Cancun seized a shipment of 22 pounds (10 kilograms) of cocaine found in a suitcase that arrived aboard a flight from Cuba, authorities reported. The drugs were packed into a suitcase that was being shipped from the Cuban resort of Varadero, and was apparently destined for Brussels, Belgium, the Public Safety Department said in a statement. Police sniffer dogs detected the drugs during a routine inspection of incoming luggage. No arrests were immediately reported in the case. (*AP*, 13/12/05)

**December 14:** Fidel Castro said that Cuba is willing to send up to 300 physicians to the Democratic Republic of East Timor, to broaden assistance on this field. The Cuban leader made the offer to East Timor Prime Minister Mari Bim Amude Alkatiri during a meeting with 200 medicine students in Havana. Presently, there are 65 Cuban doctors working in East Timor. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/12/05)

**December 14:** The European Union expressed regret that Havana has barred members of Cuba's "Ladies in White" opposition movement from traveling to France to receive the EU's top human rights prize. In a statement issued on behalf of the 25-nation bloc, EU chair Britain also said that the decision highlighted Cuba's disregard for human rights. "The Presidency of the European Union regrets the fact that the Cuban authorities have prevented the "Damas de Blanco" from traveling to Strasbourg to collect their prize," it said, referring to the Spanish name for the women's group. "Such cases (...) demonstrate the Cuban authorities' disregard of the right to freedom of movement for its own citizens," the presidency said in a statement. The Cuban women are joint winners of the 2005 Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought, which was awarded at a ceremony in the European Parliament. (*Reuters*, 14/12/05)

**December 14:** China, Cuba, Eritrea and Ethiopia jail more journalists than any other country. The top four countries accounted for two-thirds of the 125 imprisoned editors, writers and photojournalists as of December 1, according to the report by the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists. China topped the list for the seventh year in the row, with 32 imprisoned, of which 15 were Internet journalists. Cuba is holding 24 reporters, most of them jailed after a March 2003 crackdown on dissidents and independent media, the CPJ said. (*Reuters*, 14/12/05)

**December 14:** The Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) joined an international appeal for the release from prison of independent Cuban journalist Ricardo González Alfonso, serving a 20-year sentence and whose health has deteriorated. González Alfonso was arrested in March 2003 during "the crackdown against independent journalists and political dissidents by Cuban authorities", said the IAPA. (*EFE*, 14/12/05)

**December 14:** During a meeting with Gambian Foreign Minister Lamin Karba Bajo, host Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque reiterated the Cuban government's willingness to enhance bilateral relations with that nation. Pérez Roque told Karba Bajo that Cuba is grateful for Gambia's support to the Cuban people's struggle against the US blockade. The visitor thanked the Cuban people and government for giving him a warm welcome, and praised the work of a Cuban medical team assisting his country. "We may not have much to offer, but you will have our support in all international forums and against the blockade," the visitor declared. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/12/05)

**December 14:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez will receive an award from the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for his efforts to unify Latin America, UNESCO said. The so-called José Martí Prize was founded in 1994 at the initiative of Cuba to promote efforts in protecting the cultural identity and historic values of Latin America and the Caribbean. Its earlier winners include Mexico's sociologist Pablo González Casanova and Dominican historian Celsa Albert Bautista. The 5,000-dollar prize will be presented in January in Cuba, said UNESCO. (*Xinhua*, 14/12/05)

**December 15:** Cuba called for a drastic reform of the World Trade Organization (WTO) so that it can respond with new and effective policies to the interests of the majority of its member states. The statement was made by Ricardo Cabrisas, Cuba's Minister of Government, who led an official delegation to the 6th WTO Ministerial Conference. Cabrisas indicated that such policies should target primarily the social development of the peoples, and should not be

based on neo-liberal doctrines or exclusively on trade to solve the pressing problems of the Third World. (*Europa Press*, 15/12/05)

**December 16:** Six illegal Cuban migrants who had arrived in Mexico on a raft, escaped from a detention centre after sawing a bar of the cell where they were being held while awaiting deportation, said the government of the state of Quintana Roo. The rafters had been detained on December 14 in Cancún after five days in high seas. (*AFP*, 19/12/05)

**December 18:** Luo Gan, member of the Political Bureau Standing Committee of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), arrived in Havana for a goodwill visit as guest of the Communist Party of Cuba. In a written statement delivered at the airport upon arrival, Luo said Cuba was the first Latin American country that established diplomatic relations with China. Cuba is the last leg of Luo's tour of three Latin American countries. He visited Argentina and Uruguay before. (*BBC*, 19/12/05)

**December 19:** Gisela Delgado, wife of Cuban dissident Héctor Palacio, in prison since March 2003, delivered to the Embassy of the United Kingdom in Havana a letter asking the international community to intercede for the release of her husband. In the letter, Delgado says that her 64-year-old husband has been hospitalized for 22 months due to cardiovascular problems and chronic hypertension. The United Kingdom currently holds the presidency of the European Union. The letter is also addressed to Pope Benedict XVI, the UN Secretary General, and to the Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation. (*Cubanet*, 19/12/05)

**December 19:** Bolivian President-elect socialist Evo Morales thanked Communist-run Cuba for providing an example for Latin America and vowed to "liberate" Bolivia and the region. "Thank you very much Cuba for showing Latin America and the world how to live with dignity and sovereignty," Morales said in a phone interview for a Cuban television show on his victory at the polls. Randy Alonso, moderator of the state-run television show, which reflects the views of the government, hailed Morales' victory as an important contribution to Latin American integration and a defeat for Washington. "Evo's election represents a severe blow to neoliberalism and its backers and a defeat for Washington's aggressive neoconservative policies in the region," Alonso said. Cuba's Prensa Latina news agency quoted Morales as declaring that "the Third Millennium belongs to peoples, not to the Empire," a reference to the US. (*Reuters, Crosswalk.Com*, 19/12/05)

**December 20:** Fidel Castro wants Pope Benedict to make a visit to his country, an Italian cardinal has said. Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone of Genoa, who recently visited Cuba and met Castro, told the Italian Catholic business magazine "Il Consulente Re" that Castro told him he was impressed by Benedict, who was elected last April. "I would like to invite him to Cuba," Bertone quoted Castro as telling him. Cuban Minister of Culture Abel Prieto said that, cultural relations between the Vatican and Cuban institutions will develop further in 2006. Abel Acosta, president of the Cuban Institute for the Music, said that Cuban artists will participate in five cultural events organized at the Holy See in 2006. This year, Acosta participated in a Cuban concert titled "Cuban Mass for the Virgen del Cobre", held at the Vatican on the occasion of the 70 th anniversary of relations between the Vatican and Cuba. (*Reuters, AFP*, 20/12/05)

**December 20:** Fidel Castro held talks with Luo Gan, member of the Political Bureau Standing Committee of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), at the Palace of the Revolution in Havana. The two leaders analyzed the excellent relations between China and Cuba. (*Granma*, 21/12/05)

**December 21:** Cuba's veteran head of state Fidel Castro may attend an EU-Latin America-Caribbean summit in Vienna next May, said the Austrian newspaper Kurier. It quoted Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel's foreign policy spokeswoman, Verena Nowotny, as saying: "Whether Castro will come may only be decided right at the end - among other things for security reasons." Cuban Ambassador to Austria, Norma Goicochea Estenez would not confirm in an interview with the Austria Press Agency whether the 79-year-old leader planned to attend the summit during Austria's EU presidency. "That will be decided at the last moment. We don't have any information about it." In any case, she

said, "we will take part in the summit with a high-level delegation", and added that, "who will lead it is not clear yet." The ambassador said Cuba gave great importance to the summit, and was actively taking part in preparations. (APA, 21/12/05)

**December 21:** Yves Bur, vice-president of the French National Assembly, condemned the attacks "orchestrated by Cuban authorities" against relatives of the Cuban political prisoners José Daniel and Luis Enrique Ferrer García. The prisoners' wives, children and sister were attacked "while exercising one of their few opportunities to visit Luis Enrique Ferrer García", said Bur, an MP from the ruling conservative party UMP. Bur said he was "outraged about these violent acts of intimidation against the families of dissidents" and, in particular, the harassment "children are subjected to". (EFE, 21/12/05)

**December 21:** The new Cuban ambassador to the UN, Rodrigo Malmierca, presented his diplomatic credentials to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan at the UN mission in New York. Malmierca, former Cuban ambassador to Brussels, replaces Cuban ambassador to the UN, Orlando Requeijo. (EFE, 21/12/05)

**December 22:** Fidel Castro and hundreds of Cuban parliament members sent a message of solidarity and congratulations to Bolivia's president-elect, Evo Morales, a longtime Cuba ally. "We received the results of these historic elections with profound joy," said a message read at a year-end National Assembly meeting, during which more than 500 lawmakers gathered to present annual economic reports. The message was the Cuban government's first formal reaction to Morales' stunning election victory, when the Aymara Indian leader received more support than any president since Bolivian democracy was restored two decades ago. "With your victory, a new history is born," the Cuban message said. "It's the hour of true discovery in the Americas." (Prensa Latina, AP, 22/12/05)

**December 22:** Castro said Europe should condemn the United States for plans to build a wall on its border with Mexico, where hundreds of immigrants die trying to cross every year. The US House of Representatives authorized building 700 miles of fence along the 2,000-mile US-Mexico border. Castro also said he is also waiting for a "real protest" from Europe against the illegal US CIA controlled detentions centres in its territory. In his remarks at the Cuban Parliament, Castro accused the European countries of having "a double standard" because, he said, they vote against Cuba in the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva, while avoiding criticism against the US. "There has never been cases of torture in our prisons", Castro said emphatically. "I demand from everybody to prove that one single prisoner has been tortured in any of our prisons along 46 years of revolutionary power". (EFE, 22/12/05)

**December 23:** Alcides Lorenzo Rodríguez, chief of the National Group for Family Medical Services in Cuba has been under arrest in a migratory centre at Chetumal, Mexico. Guadalupe Lorenzo, a doctor's aunt who lives in the US, said that the Cuban doctor left the island to Peru where he was to teach a course, but decided not to go back to the island due to disagreements with Fidel Castro's regime. The Mexican National Institute for Migration (INM) said that the Cuban has been at the Chetumal detention centre since December 10. (El Universal, 23/12/05)

**December 23:** A Mexican naval vessel rescued 17 exhausted Cuban emigrants in a leaky wooden boat near Isla Mujeres off the Yucatan peninsula, authorities said. The navy said the 14 men and three women had been at sea a week since departing southwestern Cuba, presumably hoping to reach the United States, the destination of almost all Cubans seeking to leave the Communist-ruled island. The navy communique said those rescued showed signs of exhaustion, and one needed treatment for infected cuts on his leg, so they were transferred to Cancun for medical attention at the naval base there. They were then handed over to immigration authorities. More than 400 Cuban "rafters" have reached Mexican shores this year, an increase of 25 percent over 2004. (EFE, 23/12/05)

**December 27:** Cuban diplomats in Mexico City said that Cuba's "Yo sí puedo" (I can do it) literacy program has taught more than 266,000 Mexicans from ten federal states to read and write. Sponsored by Cuban specialists, the method, also called Alfa-TV, is taught by 10,500 volunteers, mostly junior high school graduates who teach illiterate

adults to read and write in seven-week courses. The project has been carried out in the states of Michoacán, Oaxaca, Tabasco, Puebla, Guerrero, State of Mexico, Veracruz, San Luis Potosí, Nayarit and the Federal District. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/12/05)

**December 28:** Thirty-five years after he was exiled to Cuba for his part in the kidnapping of British diplomat James Cross, Jacques Lanctôt, a former member of the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ), returned to the island. *La Presse* reported that the 60-year-old former terrorist was married in Havana, and plans to move to Cuba permanently. The Montreal newspaper said he met his fourth wife, Yarilis, at a recent book fair in Havana. Lanctôt, who returned to Quebec in 1979 and served two years in prison, told *La Presse* he was grateful to the late former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau for enabling him to get to know Cuba by exiling him there. Last summer, he severely criticized Governor General Michaëlle Jean for a documentary the former CBC journalist had done on Cuba. "It doesn't matter to me that she became governor general," he said. "What wounded me was the reporting she did in Cuba." (*The Star*, 29/12/05)

**December 30:** Fidel Castro ordered full state honors for the visit of Bolivian President-elect Evo Morales, who chose the Communist-ruled as the destination of his first trip abroad. Morales traveled to Havana with a delegation of some 60 people to meet with Castro, who was waiting for him at the bottom of the stairs of the Cuban airliner that the Cuban leader sent to collect Mr. Morales and his supporters. In brief statements to the press, the leftist who will become Bolivia's first Indian president when he is sworn in on January 22 said his visit translates into "a joy, an emotion, a friendship with the Cuban people." "It appears the map is changing, but one has to be reflective," Castro told reporters at the airport. Morales, who made the trip on Castro's invitation, had visited the island several times in the past, most recently in April, when he was operated on for a knee he injured playing soccer. The Bolivian president-elect's "friendly visit" was confirmed in an official communique the Cuban government released. *Granma* newspaper referred to Mr. Morales as "comrade Evo Morales". (*BBC, EFE, Reuters, Prensa Latina*, 30/12/05)

**December 30:** Fidel Castro and Latin America's latest leftist leader, Bolivian President-elect Evo Morales, announced plans to increase cooperation between the two countries after a day of talks in Havana. The two leaders signed a joint communique in which Cuba pledged to train 5,000 Bolivian doctors and provide eye treatment to 50,000 Bolivians each year. The agreement, which also included promises to develop cooperation in many other areas such as education and energy, was signed in the presence of 250 Bolivian medical students already enrolled in Cuba. "This is a meeting between two generations of fighters for dignity and independence," Morales, 46, said with Castro, 79, looking on. (*Reuters*, 30/12/05)

**December 31:** Fidel Castro said good-bye to Bolivian President-elect Evo Morales, who returned to his country after a brief, though intense, visit to the island. Castro saw off Morales and his entourage at José Martí International Airport along with Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage, president of Parliament Ricardo Alarcón, Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, member of State Council Carlos Valenciaga and other Cuban officials. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/12/05)

## **Terrorism**

**December 6:** Havana will be the site of a "formal exploratory meeting" between Colombia's second-biggest leftist insurgency and representatives of the government on the possibility of starting a peace process, Colombian authorities said. "The Colombian government and the ELN (National Liberation Army) thank the Cuban government and people for their hospitality in providing their territory to make possible this effort for peace," President Alvaro Uribe's office said in a brief statement. The communique was signed by Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo and by Gerardo Bermúdez, an ELN chief known as Francisco Galán who was released from prison in September to explore possibilities of beginning negotiations. A few hours before issuing the official communiqué, the Venezuelan government offered to

“facilitate” the peace talk negotiations. Venezuelan Ambassador to Bogotá, Carlos Rodolfo Santiago, reiterated Hugo Chavez’ offer to initiate a process that could lead to a reconciliation agreement between the Colombian government and the ELN. (*EFE*, 6/12/05)

**December 7:** A group of 25 American Catholic peace activists, defying a US travel ban to Cuba, set out from the Communist island on a 50-mile (80.5-km) trek to the US Guantanamo Naval Base aiming to protest conditions for terrorism suspects. The priests, nuns and academics belonging to the organization “Witness Against Torture” apparently arrived in Cuba as tourists from a third country, breaking US restrictions on travel to the Caribbean island. The group plans to leave from eastern Santiago de Cuba and arrive at the base on December 10, International Human Rights Day, and demand to see prisoners on a hunger strike. The Cuban military rarely if ever allows any civilians near the enclave it claims as its own and which has been held by the United States for over a century. Cuba has mined its side of the enclave. Cuban authorities had no comment on the planned protest. But at least one official indicated the group had not asked for permission to enter the country and march on the base. (*The New York Times*, 6/12/05)

**December 11:** American Catholic peace activists arrived at the perimeter of the US Naval Base in Guantanamo, Cuba, to begin a three-day vigil and fast protesting conditions for terrorism suspects held there. “We want permission to see the prisoners and justice for them,” said spokesman Mike McGuire by telephone from the United States, from where he was tracking the activists’ progress. The group of 25 Roman Catholic activists, including a nun and a priest, defied US travel restrictions to Cuba. The protesters, from the “Witness Against Torture” organization, carried banners reading “torture no” and “close the US naval base” as they marched some 50 miles (80 km) over four days to reach the small town of Glorieta, some four miles from the Guantanamo prison. “The Cubans were at first apprehensive about us, but after days of talking and marching they have decided to accept us and will escort us to the base entrance if we get permission to see the prisoners,” McGuire said. (*Reuters*, 11/12/05)

**December 12:** American activists camping out at a Cuban military checkpoint outside the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay started their first day of a water-only fast to protest the treatment of suspected terrorists detained at the base. Members of the largely Christian group Witness Against Torture are demanding access to the prisoner camp to meet with inmates. The activists arrived at the checkpoint, which is about five miles from the US base, after a five-day march from the eastern Cuban city of Santiago. “We can see the windmills of the US base, we can see some lights off in the distance,” Frida Berrigan, 31, said on her cell phone. “We’re not right next door, but we are closer to these prisoners than their family members have been since they were arrested.” During their 66-mile march from Santiago, the activists slept in Cubans’ backyards and at farms. Response from local citizens has been positive so far, Berrigan said. (*The New York Times*, 13/12/05)

**December 13:** Members of Colombia’s second-largest rebel group have arrived in the Cuban capital to hold preliminary peace talks with the Colombian government. A spokesman for the left-wing ELN said the meeting in Havana represented a big step in the search for peace. The aim of the talks is to pave the way for a fully-fledged process to end the long-running conflict in Colombia. A similar attempt in Cuba two years ago collapsed after a failure to agree on a framework for negotiations. Rebel representatives from the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Colombian authorities will hold several preparatory meetings throughout the week, ahead of the opening of formal exploratory talks on December 16. Diplomats from Spain, Norway and Sweden are expected to attend. (*BBC*, 13/12/05)

**December 14:** The military commander of Colombia’s second largest rebel group said he was optimistic that efforts to reach peace with the Colombian government will be more fruitful than failed attempts in the past. Antonio Garcia of the National Liberation Army acknowledged there were many obstacles, but that he was hopeful solutions would be found. “The road is filled with multiple paths,” Garcia told reporters at a hotel on the outskirts of the Cuban capital. He said those involved in conflicts “must know how to choose the right paths at the right time, without mistakes.” “We always look for the right way, but we don’t always find it. This time, I hope we do,” he added. Cuban officials said they were just providing a meeting place for the talks and would not take part. “We want to help once again so that

hopefully peace can be reached in Colombia," National Assembly Speaker Ricardo Alarcón said. (*AP, Reuters*, 14/12/05)

**December 14:** US activists camping at a Cuban military checkpoint outside the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay were rebuffed in their bid to gain access to terror suspects held at the facility. A Connecticut woman and other members of the Christian-oriented Witness Against Torture began a hunger strike at the checkpoint after a five-day march from the eastern Cuban city of Santiago. They said they have not received a reply to their formal request to gain access to the base. One of the activists, Gary Ashbeck, called the base on a cell phone, only to have communication cut off after a brief exchange with an operator. "We demand that prisoners at Guantanamo be treated with dignity," the group said in a statement read to reporters. (*AP*, 14/12/05)

**December 15:** Colombia's best-known writer, 1982 Nobel laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez, hosted at his home in Cuba the military chief of a leftist guerrilla army beginning "exploratory" peace talks with the Colombian government, local media reported. The Bogota daily *El Tiempo* said on its Web page that the novelist, a longtime friend of Fidel Castro who has a home in Cuba and is on the island for a film festival, talked at his residence in Havana's Laguito neighborhood with Antonio Garcia, the top military commander of the Colombian National Liberation Army (ELN). In a dispatch from the Cuban capital, the paper's correspondent said the interview was seen as an effort by the author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* to contribute to eventual success of the talks. (*EFE, AP*, 15/12/05)

**December 16:** American anti-torture activists who protest the detention of terror suspects at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay ended a vigil they initiated five miles away the US base and went back home. Cuba's Communist government did not allow the 25 members of the Catholic Worker movement to march to the gates of the US military enclave and demand access to the prisoners. Instead of jumping at the chance to embarrass its foe, Cuba preferred to avoid an incident in the no-man's land of barbed wire and mines surrounding the 45-square-mile (117-sq-km) base. "It's a very sensitive zone where two enemy armies have faced each other for four decades," a Cuban official said. On the ground, the Cuban and American military cooperate through daily telephone contacts in securing the perimeter of the base. "The Cuban military is just loath to have any kind of incidents on that trench line that could result in a heated event," said Brian Latell, a former CIA analyst for Latin America. "They do not want to challenge the United States military." "Where Fidel's instincts would be to confront and antagonize the United States, Raúl's instinct [Raúl Castro, minister of Armed Forces] is to reduce tensions," Latell said in a telephone interview. "We don't hear Raúl and the generals talking about a concentration camp in Guantanamo." (*Reuters, AFP*, 16,18/12/05)

**December 21:** Colombia and the country's second largest Marxist rebel group moved a step closer to negotiating the end to a brutal 41-year insurgency by agreeing to work on an agenda for peace talks in January. Leaders of the 5,000-strong National Liberation Army, or ELN, and negotiators from President Alvaro Uribe's government ended five days of what they termed "frank and cordial" exploratory talks in an optimistic mood. They will meet again in Havana at the end of January to start thrashing out a peace agenda, they said in a joint statement issued in Havana, which is hosting the talks. (*CNN*, 21/12/05)

**December 29:** The number of Guantanamo Bay prisoners taking part in a hunger strike that began nearly five months ago has surged to 84 since Christmas Day, the US military said. Forty-six detainees at the prison for foreign terrorism suspects at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, joined the protest on the Christian holiday, said Army Lt. Col. Jeremy Martin, a military spokesman. The prisoner population, which the Pentagon says numbers about 500, is believed to be uniformly Muslim. Only nine have been charged with any crime. (*The New York Times*, 30/12/05)

## Security

**December 2:** Fidel Castro paid homage to the hundreds of thousands of Cubans who fought alongside Africans in their past battles against colonialism as the island's Revolutionary Armed Forces marked its 49th anniversary. The 79-year-old Castro said the men and women who fought battles and provided medical and other assistance in countries including Ethiopia, Angola, Namibia and South Africa through the 1970s and 1980s wrote "a glorious page in history" that should be copied by future generations of Cubans. Stretching over more than three hours, Castro's speech celebrated military successes at home and abroad during the Cold War before the military refocused on homeland defense, bolstering the island's post-Soviet economy. [[Fidel Castro's speech](#)] (AP, 2/12/05)

**December 11:** Hundreds of thousands of Cubans took part in training drills under the island's "The War of All the People" defense strategy to face a possible military aggression by the United States. The Defense Councils were activated at the local and national levels to discuss plans to carry out in the case of an invasion. The training exercises included evacuation drills and maintaining the internal order, in which Civil Defense and Ministry of Interior authorities played the lead role. The training exercises were supervised by Pedro Saez Montejo member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party and President of the Provincial Defense Council; Alvaro López Miera, a three star general and deputy defense minister and chief of staff of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces; and other high ranking military officers. (*Granma*, 12/12/05)

**December 26:** A high-ranking Russian military delegation arrived in Havana, headed by the chief of staff of the Russian armed forces, Army General Yury Baluyevsky. The Army General said that the principal aim of his visit to Cuba is the strengthening of ties with the island in the military sphere. "We expect to impart a new quality to our relations", Baluyevsky said. "I feel that we are duty-bound to maintain friendly relations with Cuba and not to abandon it at a difficult time for this country," Baluyevsky told the press. "Contacts in the military field will be given new meaning." General Alvaro López Miera, chief of staff of Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces, welcomed the delegation. This is the first visit of a high-ranking military delegation from Russia since 1998. (*Itar-Tass*, 27/12/05)

**December 28:** Cuban Defense Minister Raúl Castro met in Havana with Russia's second-ranking military officer, official media said, in a throwback to the Cold War when Cuba was armed and financed by the Soviet Union. The entire front page of the Communist party daily, *Granma*, was taken up with a photo of the meeting and commentary describing the encounter as one between old friends. "The conversation between the two military leaders was cordial and friendly, with both recognizing the historic ties between their two countries," *Granma* said. Baluyevsky is touring military units and installations equipped with vintage Soviet hardware, and was expected to vacation on the island as well. Diplomats said Russia had been supplying some spare parts, and little else, to the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces, but that could change if Cuba re-entered the arms market in earnest. Russia recently sold 100,000 AK-47 automatic rifles and other equipment to Venezuela, Cuba's closest ally. (*Itar-Tass*, *The New York Times*, 28/12/05)

## US-Cuba Relations

**December 2:** Cuba seems to be preparing to participate in next year's inaugural World Baseball Classic -- the first international tournament to include Major League players -- Fidel Castro said on several occasions in Havana. "We will participate and demonstrate that we know what to do in baseball," Castro told Panamanian reporters visiting Havana. In the spare comments, published in *La Prensa*, a Panamanian newspaper, Castro added that the tournament should be "very interesting." But Major League Baseball officials, aware of those comments, said that paperwork involving MLB, Cuba, the International Baseball Federation (IBAF) and the US State Department is incomplete and the committee overseeing the 16-team tournament is not yet prepared to make an official announcement. (*MLB.Com*, 2/12/05)

**December 4:** Nine of the 10 Cubans rescued in the Florida Straits on November 27 by the Celebrity Cruises ocean liner *Zenith* were returned to Cuba, the US Coast Guard reported. Coast Guard spokeswoman Petty Officer Gretchen Eddy

would not disclose why the 10th migrant was not returned with the others, or when a decision would be made about the individual's fate. Also, 18 Cubans who apparently reached the US Virgin Island of St. Croix by boat were turned over to US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents by local police, and will be flown to Miami to be reunited with relatives, according to the press. (AP, 4/12/05)

**December 5:** With blaring horns and pounding African drums, Grammy-winning pianist Chucho Valdés and other Cuban performers wrapped up an international music festival with an Afro-Cuban tribute to Hurricane Katrina-ravaged New Orleans, birthplace of American jazz. The tribute concert ended Cuba's annual international jazz festival, Jazz Plaza 2005, and featured a new Valdés composition called "Canto a Dios," which Valdés dedicated to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. (CNN, 5/12/05)

**December 5:** In a harangue about how a suspected anti-Cuba terrorist entered the United States, Fidel Castro singled out Governor Jeb Bush. Castro called the governor "the fat little brother in Florida" and wondered if Bush had helped Luis Posada Carriles into the country, according to a transcript released by the Cuban press of the November 17 address to University of Havana students. The Cuban leader didn't stop there. 'Forgive me for using the term `fat little brother' " Castro said. ``It is not a criticism, rather a suggestion that he do some exercises and go on a diet, don't you think? I'm doing this for the gentleman's health." The governor's office wouldn't "dignify this with a response," a spokesman said. Bush declined to discuss Castro's comments, saying questions about it were the product of a ``slow news day." [[Fidel Castro's speech](#)] (*The Miami Herald*, 6/12/05)

**December 6:** Jeb Bush said that he was "honored" Fidel Castro had referred to him as President Bush's "fat little brother in Florida." Castro made the comment while wondering if the governor had helped a suspected anti-Cuba terrorist enter the United States in a November 17 speech at the University of Havana. Students responded with laughter. "I'm flattered and honored," Bush said with a smile, but then turned serious. "I will take any criticism from Fidel Castro, of all people, as an honor given the fact that, you know, eight million people, I believe, live on the island, eight million people are repressed and they've been that way for 40 or 50 years. "To be criticized by a man like that who has repressed people for such an extended period of time is a high honor," Bush added. "He can call me whatever he wants." (*The Miami Herald*, 7/12/05)

**December 8:** US Representative Robert Menéndez will become the second Cuban-American in the US Senate, with New Jersey governor-elect Jon Corzine expected to name the Democrat to fill his remaining term in office. The selection of the former mayor of Union City, New Jersey -- the second-largest Cuban stronghold in the United States -- carries major significance for Cuban-Americans in Miami. Menéndez is a frequent visitor to South Florida, raising money, campaigning for Democrats -- and proving a stalwart voice in efforts to oust Fidel Castro. (*The Miami Herald*, 8/12/05)

**December 10:** America's top diplomat in Havana saluted Cuban activists pushing for change on the communist-run island, highlighting what he called their bravery and perseverance in a Human Rights Day event. Michael Parmly, the chief of the US Interests Section, at the same time chided the Cuban government, accusing it of repressing its citizens' rights in order to cling to power. "Sadly, Cuba has been left behind in the global march toward democracy and greater respect for human rights," Parmly told a crowd of about 100 gathered at his residence. "The Cuban regime does not represent the people, nor does it have any interest in bettering their lives. Rather, the regime is obsessed with self-preservation." Government opponents at the gathering included pro-democracy activist Oswaldo Paya, former political prisoner Martha Beatriz Roque, and the "Ladies in White," a group of Cuban women who have been holding a weekly silent march for two years to protest the government's jailing of their activist husbands. Parmly praised them all for their leadership and vision. (AP, 11/12/05)

**December 11:** Maine Governor John Baldacci, the third US governor to travel to Cuba this year in search of trade, won a deal to sell \$20 million in farm goods to the country's state-run food import agency. "We appreciate our trade with

Cuba. It is good for our farmers and good for our state," Baldacci said, after signing a series of documents with Cuba's Alimport. The governor of Nebraska visited Cuba in November and the governor of Louisiana in March, each walking away with similar agreements and meeting with Fidel Castro. Baldacci, a Democrat, is in Cuba with a delegation of businessmen, farmers and state officials. (*Reuters*, 11/12/05)

**December 11:** The president of Cuba's Olympic Committee, José Ramón Fernández, confirmed the island's participation in an international tournament sponsored by the Major League Baseball. The Cuban official denied making any other comments to the press. (*AFP*, 11/12/05)

**December 12:** Baseball is in Congress's crosshairs again due to Communist Cuba's participation in an upcoming international tournament sponsored by Major League Baseball that is under fire from Capitol Hill. Cuban-American leaders in Congress are urging the league's commissioner, Allan "Bud" Selig, to rescind an invitation to the Castro government to field a team for the league's inaugural World Baseball Classic. The members of Congress want instead to allow free Cubans to represent the island nation. The Bush administration, too, is being pressed to deny the league's application for a license that would permit Cuba - a State Department-identified state sponsor of terrorism, subject to a Treasury embargo - to participate in the tournament. The first World Baseball Classic is an 18-day, four-round international tournament established and sponsored by Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players Association. According to the league, the tournament, to be held in March, will feature 16 teams from North America, Asia, Europe, Australia, Africa, and Latin America, and will be played in Tokyo, San Juan, Florida, Arizona, and California. (*The New York Sun*, 12/12/05)

**December 13:** In the three months that Michael Parmly has been the top US diplomat in Cuba, he has talked to many "awfully smart people" he thinks have the pulse of the island: the leading dissidents and opposition figures. Based on those conversations, Parmly is convinced that Cubans yearn for a transition from the island's communist system to a new democratic government. "I don't know when a change is happening," said Parmly, the chief of the US Interests Section. "I just know that a change is happening." Parmly, a career diplomat who replaced Interests Section chief James Cason in September, said the United States would offer help to a new government only if Cubans on the island asked. He also said that if Cubans here were to transform their communist country into a democracy, Cubans from South Florida and other nations would help in a transition. "Every country that's changed starts with the diaspora," Parmly said in an interview with the South Florida Sun-Sentinel. "So long as it's the Cuban people who have the lead -- those with an intimate stake in what the future will look like -- they're going to reach out to Miami. They're going to reach out to Florida." (*Sun Sentinel*, 13/12/05)

**December 13:** A prominent Cuban-American linked to a militant accused of blowing up a Cuban airliner in 1976 pleaded not guilty to weapons charges in federal court in Miami. Santiago Alvarez, a close ally and benefactor of Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles, could face 20 years or more in prison if convicted of possessing automatic rifles, a grenade launcher and other weapons. "His spirits are very high and he is confident that justice will prevail," said Vivian Alvarez, the defendant's wife. The outcome of the case also may have a strong bearing on the future of Posada, who is being held in federal detention in El Paso, Texas. (*Chicago Tribune*, 14/12/05)

**December 13:** A trade mission resulting in a commitment from Cuba to purchase \$20 million of products from Maine companies underscores the growing importance of foreign trade for the state's economy, Governor John Baldacci said. Baldacci signed a trade agreement with Cuban officials calling for the purchase of items such as potatoes, dairy cows and apples. The trip led to more sales commitments than three previous trade missions to France, the United Kingdom and Ireland, and Germany and Italy combined. (*AP*, 13/12/05)

**December 14:** Washington's new top diplomat in Havana sees mounting frustration and anger in Cuba and is preparing for rapid change on the communist-run island, but he cannot predict when -- or how -- that will happen. US Interests Section chief Michael Parmly believes Cubans have had their fill of Fidel Castro's rule and will not wait for his demise

to see change. From his experience as a US diplomat in Romania, where communist leader Nicolae Ceausescu was ousted in street protests, Parmly envisions revolt possibly spreading like wildfire in the streets and a dictator's authority crumbling when he is shouted at in the main square. "You cannot predict these things, but you do try to prepare for them when you are pretty sure they are coming and I am pretty sure it is coming," Parmly said in an interview. "I wouldn't try to mark a date on the calendar, but I see an awful lot of signs of frustration, even anger. When the rubber band snaps it is up to the Cuban people," he said. (*Reuters*, 15/12/05)

**December 18:** At least 100 members of Congress have weighed in on the controversial US decision to deny Cuba a license to play in the upcoming World Baseball Classic. Most of them want Cuba to play ball. Eighty members of Congress signed letters to Major League Baseball commissioner Bud Selig, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Treasury Secretary John Snow urging them "not to take international politics to the ball field." Major League Baseball and the Players Association organized an international baseball tournament to be played by 16 teams this March. But Treasury denied Cuba a necessary license because making money in a baseball tournament would violate the US embargo against Cuba. "Let's just enjoy the game and put sportsmanship over politics," wrote the members in favor of a Cuba team. (*The Miami Herald*, 18/12/05)

**December 19:** In a letter to US energy company executives, Fidel Rivero Prieto, President of Cuba Petroleo, told his counterparts from the US energy sector that Cuba "would be very pleased to do business together", and invited them to meet with him and his Cuban colleagues at the US-Cuba Energy Summit scheduled for February 2-4, 2006, in Mexico City. Citing the need for "investments by additional foreign companies," Rivero wrote that the meeting in Mexico "will permit us to provide the information that is most useful to your company (...) and we will have the opportunity to learn about your products and services. In this way," Rivero wrote, "both of us will be prepared to discuss real business opportunities as soon as that is possible." This historic US-Cuba Energy Summit is being organized by Alamar Associates, which has organized five previous Cancun Business Summits that have brought more than 500 US executives together with their Cuban counterparts. [[The Energy Summit](#)] (*PRNewswire*, 19/12/05)

**December 19:** Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice chaired the second session of a panel to "hasten and ease a democratic transition" in Cuba and spoke of change partly by denying the Castro government money and supplying the Cuban people with information. In a move that puts Cuba back in the sights of the Bush administration, Rice said that she is reconvening the cabinet-level commission that last revised the overall US policy on the island. The reconvened commission will present President Bush with a new report by May 2006, "with both updated recommendations to hasten democracy and an inter-agency strategic plan to assist a Cuban-led transition," Rice said. "The work we do now will ensure that our government is fully prepared, if asked, to assist a genuine Cuban transition government committed to democracy and which will lead to Cuba's reintegration into the inter-American system," she added in a statement. The Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba issued its recommendations in May 2004 after deliberating for 18 months. Its list of ways that Washington could assist a transition toward democracy was controversial because it tightened several sanctions, including a cut in the number of trips that Cuban Americans could make to visit their relatives. [[US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba](#)] (*The Miami Herald, AP*, 20/12/05)

**December 20:** The chairman of the US Olympic Committee, Peter Ueberroth, requested from US president George Bush to revert the decision of banning the Cuban baseball team from participating in the Baseball World Classic in 2006. Ueberroth, who was the president of the organizing committee of Los Angeles Olympic Games, said that the Treasury Department decision will damage US aspirations to host the Olympic Games in the future. (*AP*, 20/12/05)

**December 20:** Cuba launched a blistering verbal attack on the top US diplomat in Havana and on dissidents it accused him of organizing to overthrow the government. Washington's top diplomat in Havana met with dissidents and charged that some communist supporters acted like Nazi "brown shirts" or Ku Klux Klan members. Former communist youth leader Randy Alonso, moderator of state television's nightly "Round Table" program, said the December 10 gathering at

the residence of new US Interests Section chief Michael Parmly was "a new provocation against our people." "To compare Cuba to the worst fascism, and the worst racism of the United States (...) it is very hurtful," Alonso said. Cuba regularly uses the government program to express views on everything from world events to people it doesn't like. "Up to December 10, Parmly wore the suit of a diplomat, but a change came during that speech," pro-government journalist Arleen Rodriguez said on the program. Parmly, attending a Christmas party with his adult children in Havana, declined to respond to the attack. (*The New York Times, Reuters, 21/12/05*)

**December 20:** The US government continues to ignore reiterated requests by the International Telecommunications Union to stop interfering with Cuban Television broadcasts, Cuban experts said. Experts from the Cuban Information Technology and Telecommunication Ministry told the press that the 2004 and 2005 congresses on Information Technology warned that US military aircraft beaming the so-called TV Marti, blocks Cuban TV signals. In view of the violation, specialists maintain that the island has the right to jam subversive broadcasts that go against State security, since they call for violence and openly promote the practice of terrorism. (*Prensa Latina, Radio Habana Cuba, 20/12/05*)

**December 21:** A group of Cuban major leaguers will meet with Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart to discuss forming a team to play in the inaugural World Baseball Classic in March. Diaz-Balart, Florida Republican and a native of Cuba, declined to identify the players but said they have enough for every position, plus a manager. "Cuban players have rights, too," Diaz-Balart said. "They are organizing and want to play together as a team." The issue of Cuban players in the tournament -- a World Cup-style competition that is being heavily promoted by Major League Baseball and the players union as a historic event -- has become a point of contention. A group of congressmen from South Florida, including Diaz-Balart, successfully lobbied the Bush administration to deny Cuba a permit that would have allowed its national team to play in the United States during the tournament, which will be held March 3-20 in the United States, Puerto Rico and Japan. (*The Washington Times, 21/12/05*)

**December 21:** Cuba's TV show "The Round Table" was particularly virulent against the US representative in Havana and the local dissident movement. It followed a broadcast on December 20 that accused US mission chief Michael Parmly of using the dissidents to carry out the Bush administration's declared goal of ousting Fidel Castro from power. "He's like a pig that puts on clothes but is still a pig. And in this case, the pig is the American policy against Cuba, a policy that attempts to strangle us one way or another", Cuban official journalist Arleen Rodríguez said. (*The New York Times, CNN, 22/12/05*)

**December 22:** Cuba said it would donate its revenues from a world baseball tournament to Hurricane Katrina victims if the Bush administration reverses a controversial decision to bar Cuba's participation. "The Cuban baseball federation, in an effort to find options, would be ready for the money corresponding to its participation in the classic to go to the victims of Hurricane Katrina left homeless in New Orleans," the federation said in a letter to US Major League Baseball. Cuba labeled the Bush administration's position as "shameful" and "absurd" and "having nothing to do with sports." (*The New York Times, 23/12/05*)

**December 22:** Fidel Castro has called the head of the US diplomatic mission in Havana, Michael Parmly a "little gangster" for slamming the regime's human rights record. Parmly, head of the US interests section in Havana, criticized the Castro regime at a speech marking International Human Rights Day earlier this month. Castro said during a rambling speech to the rubber-stamp National Assembly that he did not know who was worse -- "that little gangster," referring to Parmly or "the previous gangster" -- meaning Parmly's hard-charging predecessor, James Cason, who Castro earlier had described as a "bully." (*The Sun Sentinel, 23/12/05*)

**December 23:** Fidel Castro said that any US invasion to his country would fail and called US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice "mad" after Washington announced plans for a "democratic transition" in the Caribbean island. Castro said before the National Assembly: "I am going to tell you what I think about this famous commission, for the

democratic transition in Cuba: they are a group of shit-eaters who do not deserve the world's respect". "In this context, it does not matter if it was the mad woman who talks of transition - it is a circus, they are completely depraved, they should be pitied," added the 79-year-old Cuban leader. While US imperialism was in its decline, Castro said, his revolution is "uncontainable and unstoppable". "We are in transition: to socialism, to communism," Castro insisted. (EFE, *Pravda*, 23/12/05)

**December 25:** In an interview published in The Miami Herald, the chief of the US Interest Section in Havana, Michel Parmly, answered why he never mentions the name of Fidel Castro: "I never met the man. When I see the senior leadership performing on TV, I scratch my head, because it's surreal (...) The logic is very hard to follow. The logic is from another place. The logic is very harsh and cruel (...) My interest is the future, and the Cuban people." A career diplomat, Parmly has served in a number of countries emerging from conflicts, such as Afghanistan and Bosnia-Herzegovina. "We need to play for today while being concerned for tomorrow. That's what I think about every morning when I wake up: What can I do for people today? We stand ready to help them", Parmly said. (*The Miami Herald*, 25/12/05)

**December 28:** The criminal trial against Santiago Alvarez Fernandez-Magrinat and Osvaldo Mitat has been set for May 8, 2006 to take place at the Fort Lauderdale Federal Court. Lawyers for the defense continue to try to get the case moved to Miami. The office of judge James I. Cohn officially announced the date when six charges of illegal arms possession will be heard against the accused. During a December 13 court hearing, both defendants entered a plea of innocent. Fernandez-Magrinat was a main supporter of Luis Posada Carriles, a Cuban born anti Castro militant now under arrest in a US migration detention centre. (*Granma, El Nuevo Herald*, 26/12/05)

**December 28:** Venezuela offered to host part of next year's World Baseball Classic in place of Puerto Rico and suggested moving the final to Canada, proposals aimed at keeping Cuba in the 16-team tournament. Such an arrangement would open the way for communist-led Cuba to participate in the first World Cup-style baseball tournament. Cuba is banned from playing on US soil, and Puerto Rico is a US commonwealth. "We hope that the United States' government changes its position," Edwin Zerpa, president of the government-run Venezuelan Baseball Federation, said. "But if not, we are proposing that group C play in Caracas. We don't approve of Cuba's exclusion." Only teams in group C -- Olympic champion Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Netherlands and Panama -- would be invited to play in Venezuela, with the final in Canada, Zerpa told the press. (*AP*, 28/12/05)

**December 28:** The US Coast Guard returned 159 illegal Haitian and Cuban migrants to their homelands, officials said. The 51 Cuban migrants were returned to Bahía de Cabañas, Cuba, said Coast Guard Lt. Petty Officer James Judge in Miami. Coast Guard crews intercepted three separate Cuban vessels between December 15 and 26. The number of captured migrants spiked to 2,834 in 2005 from 1,499 the previous year. It is the highest number since a mass exodus from Cuba in 1994 when 37,191 migrants were intercepted, said Judge. (*AP*, 28/12/05)

**December 30:** Eighty-seven Cuban migrants reached Florida's coast, including a group of 28 who waded ashore in a Miami Beach waterfront park. Federal officials said most of the migrants appeared to have been brought to the United States by smugglers who carry Cubans in fast boats across the 100 miles of open water that separates the communist-ruled island from Florida. Fifty-six Cubans landed in the Florida Keys and three came ashore in Key Biscayne, a wealthy island town near Miami. The 12 men, seven women and nine children who landed at Miami Beach told police they left Cuba on December 28 in a makeshift boat, which began to sink somewhere between Cuba and Florida. They said they were picked up by a yacht and dropped off in waist-deep water just off South Pointe Park in Miami Beach. But Steve McDonald, an assistant chief with the US Border Patrol, said the Miami Beach incident and some of the other landings bore the hallmarks of smuggling operations. The U.S. Coast Guard has picked up 2,866 Cubans at sea in 2005, nearly twice as many as last year and the highest number since 1994, when more than 37,000 were intercepted in a major exodus from the island. Only Dominicans have taken to sea in greater numbers in the Caribbean region. Fewer Haitians have attempted the journey this year. (*Reuters*, 30/12/05)

**December 30:** Fidel Castro and Bolivian President-elect Evo Morales said cooperation between their countries will bloom despite US worries about more nations allying with communist Cuba. During Morales' visit to the island, the two men announced a 30-month plan to erase illiteracy in the South American nation as Cuba moves to increase hemispheric cooperation without US influence. Castro anticipated that Washington would not welcome him gaining another close ally in South America, where he already boasts a strong friendship with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. "Could it be that the government of the United States feels hurt that Cuba cooperates with a brother nation?" Castro asked. "Does that offend the US government (...) is it anti-democratic, is it a crime?" (*CNN*, 1/1/06)