

FOCAL SUMMARY OF NEWS ITEMS REPORTED ON CUBA January-December 2004

This resource is a compilation of news items on Cuba listed in FOCAL's monthly Chronicle on Cuba throughout 2004

DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

CATHOLIC CHURCH AND OTHER RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS

January 13: In an interview with the Italian digital magazine Korazymque, the Archbishop of Havana, Cardinal Jaime Ortega Alamino, pointed that leaving the country has become the dream of a lifetime for many young Cubans. "With regards to emigration, there is an individual project but there is no collective plan. People from all sectors --from Catholics to the children of high government officials-- share this dream. The greatest threat to our future is posed by massive emigration," said Ortega. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 18/1/04)

February 1: Palabra Nueva Catholic monthly in its latest edition has asserted that "a good many Cuban families do not enjoy at present good spiritual, moral, and even psychological health. The article acknowledges that "different social programs implemented in the past four decades provided solutions to many family problems but created others." In that respect, it said that the universalization of education "brought relief to a considerable number of families," but the mandatory boarding program of many schools caused "the disruption of family structure, weakened parent-children relations, undermined family traditions." It explained that the boarding school is not bad in itself, but the moral and ethical patterns that structure human coexistence in such places are. Cuba needs integral people and families, more than people and families with an integral education." (*AFP*, 1/2/04)

February 4: A Church symposium on the family has already been held, and a national congress on the topic is scheduled for December, wrote the Cuban bishops' conference spokesman Orlando Márquez in the publication Palabra Nueva. Workshops will be held during the year at the parish, regional and diocesan levels. National and foreign speakers will address topics such as the role of the family in building a healthy society. "How important is it to dedicate a year to reflect, pray, think and rethink about the family in Cuba for a Church lacking influence outside its own perimeter, not listened to and disregarded by the authorities on this and other issues?" Márquez asked in his article. (*Zenit*, 4/2/04)

May 9: According to sources with the Conference of Cuban Catholic Bishops, the Cuban Catholic Church welcomes between 80- and 100 thousand mass-goers every Sunday and has implemented several social programs throughout the island. The programs, coordinated through some 600 parishes, enabled four thousand church volunteers to visit nearly 19 thousand sick nation-wide, an effort carried out by the Catholic charity organization Caritas. (*AFP*, 9/5/04)

May 15: Through the streets of Managua, in Havana, hundreds escorted a likeness of St. Isidro Salvador, the town's patron saint. The procession was part of a locally developed, 9-day Catholic Church program to commemorate Managua's anniversary. (*Cubanet*, 18/5/04)

May 15: In Havana, Cuban Cardinal Jaime Ortega opened a Cuban contemporary art exhibit entitled "Deus Verus Verus Homo", dedicated to Jesus Christ and featuring works by renowned

and budding local artists. The exhibit is sponsored by the Office of the City's Historian, as well as other institutions. (*NotiCuba Internacional* , 16/5/04)

May 17: Vitral Magazine, run by the archdiocese of Pinar del Río, revealed on-line distribution restrictions imposed by new Information and Telecommunications Ministry regulations. According to the magazine, Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba S.A. (Cuban Telecommunications Inc.), internet e-mail service provider for the Pinar del Río province will no longer allow multi-address e-mailing exceeding five recipient addresses at once, thus "preventing traditional use of address books." (*Vitral*, 17/5/04)

May 21: Over 200 Christians from 31 different Evangelical churches met for several days at the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Havana to debate the current situation in the island following the US government decision to increase sanctions against Cuba. The final Agreement by the Cuban Pastoral Forum calls all Cuban and US churches, and the Cuban population and authorities to a dialogue. (*Caminos*, 28/5/04)

May 26: Cuba's Roman Catholic bishops rejected sanctions adopted by the Bush administration against the Cuban government and said the island's future should be decided without foreign interference. The Catholic Bishops Conference said new sanctions announced by the White House only served to aggravate the hardships and burdens already suffered by Cuban families under communist rule. The bishops also criticized price increases implemented by Fidel Castro's government because they hurt Cuba's poorest families. "It is unacceptable that the future of Cuba be determined on the basis of exclusions and much less with the intervention of a foreign government," the bishops said in a statement. The Catholic leaders repeated their call for a national dialogue to solve Cuba's problems peacefully. (*Reuters*, 26/5/04)

June 3: Twelve years after Cuba's constitution was revised to prohibit religious discrimination, the Church is thriving in the communist nation of 11 million people. That's according to the Reverend Jim Cowell, former pastor of First United Methodist Church in Fort Collins, who traveled to Havana, Cuba, to attend an international evangelism summit of 120 Methodist and Wesleyan leaders. Christianity is alive and well in the Caribbean nation, he said. "When people have been oppressed, religion becomes very important (...) It provides a hope - a sense that God is concerned about them - and a sense of community," Cowell says. Since the early 1990s, churches - both Catholic and Protestant - have experienced a tremendous resurgence. In the 1990s, many Catholic parishes saw Mass attendance double or triple, and there was a 30 percent increase in the number of men studying to be Catholic priests. An even greater explosion has occurred in Cuban Protestant churches in recent years. (*Coloradoan*, 3/6/04)

June 28: The Catholic Church journal Palabra Nueva urged Fidel Castro's government to use the widespread domestic condemnation of the new measures from Washington against the island to open up to all Cubans, including political dissidents. "Why not carry out now that social project 'with all and for all' Cubans, including those who think differently and have different political views within Cuba and wish to participate?" asked in an editorial the director of the journal, Orlando Márquez. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 28/6/04)

August 4: The editor-in-chief of the Cuban magazine Vitral, Dagoberto Valdes Hernandez, said that Cuba is in need more than ever of "a climate of reconciliation, a language of reconciliation, gestures of reconciliation, attitudes of reconciliation and a future of reconciliation." In an article titled "Cese la Crispación: Venga la Reconciliación," ("No More Tensions: It's Time for Reconciliation") Valdés explained that the country's present "climate of confrontation does not help any kind of good cause" and "in the wake of vote-catching measures from abroad we need to react calmly focusing on solving our own problems from within, among ourselves." (*ACI*, 4/8/04)

August 25: The Cuban Catholic church is collecting and distributing humanitarian assistance for the thousands of victims of hurricane "Charley". The head of the Cuban Bishops Conference

(COCC), José Félix Pérez, said that after the hurricane the Church launched a relief effort to help provide food, medicine and clothing to the victims. (*EFE*, 25/8/04)

September 6: In a letter addressed to the Pope and all Cuban bishops, the "Cuba Democracia Ya!" International Platform requested that those who suffer "political exclusion" be mentioned in the Catholic hierarchs' public statements on September 8, Cuba's Patron Saint's Day. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 6/9/04)

September 8: Cuban religious devotees celebrated with processions and church activities the island's patron saint's day. One of more than 50 carried out in her honor in several dioceses throughout the island, a procession of thousands led by Cardinal Jaime Ortega in Havana paid tribute to the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre. (*Martí Noticias. Com*, 9/9/04)

October 18: Speaking in Guadalajara, Mexico, where he was participating in the International Eucharistic Congress, Auxiliary Bishop Alfredo Petit Vergel of Havana, Cuba, said Catholics in Cuba who are being persecuted for their ideas are earning heaven. "They, and all Catholics around the world, are earning heaven because there are different types of martyrdom: some suffer a little, some suffer a lot, like in Cuba," said Bishop Petit. He also lamented the limited presence of Cuban Catholics at the Congress, but he explained that it was due more to political than religious issues. "It is not very easy for a lay Catholic in Cuba to travel out of the country to a congress or to anything. It's not because of religious issues; it's because of politics. A lay Catholic in Cuba cannot travel about freely, and for us to get here we were given a 15-day permit. It's not easy to get out of the country," Bishop Petit explained. Likewise, he stated, "The situation with Catholicism in Cuba is the same as it's always been. I don't think the situation of Catholicism has changed much. (*CNA*, 18/10/04)

November 6: In its latest edition released in Havana, the catholic magazine Palabra Nueva (The New Gospel) issued an appeal to replace the culture of violence in Cuba with one based on good faith, trust and social accountability. According to the publication, Cuban society "is not a compassionate society; supportive, yes, but not compassionate. Not even at its higher levels. There is talk of peace but the actions are not peaceful or compassionate." The magazine, published by the Archdiocese of Havana, pointed that "(...) social and political intolerance is a form of violence that generates further violence and intolerance; a poison that permeates our lives, making us accept the idea that acting tough and authoritarian, and saying no and being inflexible is the only way to obtain success and respect in this world." (*AFP*, 6/11/04)

November 9: Recognized by Cuban authorities for their excellent medical quality, the Sisters of Mercy at "St. Vincent de Paul" religious order are celebrating 150 years of labor in the National Dermatology Institute. These religious women have been working since 1954 in the hospital, located in the outskirts of the town known as El Rincón -19 miles southern Havana-, sharing life, reality and sorrows with leprosy patients. The institute is carrying out a program to control leprosy with multi-drug treatments, with the objective of not prolonging this disease. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/11/04)

November 14: Following a procession through the streets of the city's historic district, religious figures and Cuban government officials laid down the first stone of what will become the island's first-ever Russian Orthodox church. The church will constitute "a monument to Cuban-Russian friendship," said Metropolitan Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church's foreign relations department. He traveled to Cuba from Moscow for the consecration. The church will also pay homage to the thousands of Russian workers, soldiers and technicians who cooperated with communist Cuba for three "glorious" decades before the fall of the Soviet Union, he said. "The past can reunite with the present, with the result being a common future," Metropolitan Kirill said. "Russia will again be a great power (...) that supports and defends its friends." (*AP*, 14/11/04)

November 15: Dagoberto Valdés Hernández, director of both the Civic and Religious Education Center and Vitral Magazine, published by the Archdiocese of Pinar del Río, has received the Jan

Karski Award for Valor and Compassion. Valdés Hernández, an agronomist, has been appointed by Pope John Paul II to the Holy See's Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. (*AFP*, 15/11/04)

November 24: Thanks to assistance provided by Aid to the Church in Need, Cuba's bishops are evangelizing the country using small comic books on the lives of Father Felix Varela and Our Lady of Charity. ACN financed the printing of 80,000 copies of the comic book, "Father Felix Varela, the Cuban Saint," which is being distributed among young people in order to introduce them to "one of the most important men from Cuba." The Secretariat of the Bishops Conference of Cuba said that the comic books are intended to spark interest in knowing more about "that person who knew how to respond, with truth and love founded upon his Christian commitment," to the challenge of the times in which the Cuban nation and the "dream of freedom" were born. Cardinal Jaime Ortega of Havana, president of the bishops' conference, said, "The Cuban Catholic is inheritor of the Christian and patriotic thought of Father Felix Varela, of his zeal for independence, of his love for Cuba, of his faithfulness to the Church." (*Catholic World News*, 24/11/04)

November 9: In Brussels, Cuban Rev. Raúl Suárez, minister of the Baptist Church of Marianao, in Havana, advocated resuming the dialogue between the European Union (EU) and Cuba on the basis of "mutual respect" and "without preconditions." "We would wish for a process based on mutual respect and an international climate conducive to dialogue; for both parties to agree on an agenda without preconditions and for an improvement in relations between Cuba and the EU," said the Baptist minister at a press conference. (*EFE*, 9/11/04)

November 21: John Paul II said the Church's social doctrine could serve as a guide for Cuba's future. The Pope made that suggestion in a message sent on the occasion of the country's 9th Catholic Social Week, held in Camaguey. John Paul II's message, sent on his behalf by Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano, appealed to "all the sons and daughters of the Church in Cuba for a renewed and profound commitment to study, assume and put into practice" the "social Gospel." In light of Cuba's four decades of Communist government, the Holy Father suggested "fostering the presentation of Christian social thought in keeping with the fundamental features of the Cuban people's identity, which can be communicated in language that is comprehensible to its fellow citizens, and thus illuminate human life and the social reality." "Without a doubt, this will foster a conversion and style of social relations based on respect, and the defense and promotion of the dignity and inherent rights of every human person," the papal message stated. (*Zenit*, 21/11/04)

December 17: Thousands of Cubans walked, crawled or literally dragged themselves to the St. Lazarus shrine in one of the most public outpourings of religious faith in Cuba. Many devout pilgrims were dressed in clothing fashioned out of burlap sacks, a sign of respect and act of penance for the humble saint who seems to have a special following among the poor. The pilgrimage is a raucous affair, blending elements of a street party with stunning displays of devotion in a communist nation that has become more tolerant of religion. Along the road to the shrine, teenagers drank rum and danced to hip-hop, rock and salsa music while couples pushed baby strollers and quietly held candles and flowers as offerings to St. Lazarus and his Afro-Cuban counterpart, Babalu Aye. (*Chicago Tribune*, 17/12/04)

December 15: During a communion held at the San Antonio parish, in Placetás, the Apostolic Nuncio to Cuba, Monsignor Luigi Bonazzi, said the Cuban crisis should be solved by way of the truth, without violence, accusations and condemnation. Bonazzi made a reference to Cuban political prisoners as "those who without having committed any crime are sent to prison because they make those in power uncomfortable", in an allusion to the biblical passage where John the Baptist is cast to prison by King Herod. (*Cubanet*, 15/12/04)

CULTURE

General

February 10: Cultural Diversity in Cuba is being debated in a Colloquium that opened in the Cuban capital. UNESCO and Cuba's Casa de las Americas cultural institution, are sponsoring the meeting which runs through Friday. The event, entitled "Cultural Diversity in the Caribbean", brings together the two institutions for the first time in defending the thesis that cultural diversity is as important to the human species as biodiversity is important to all live beings, noted UNESCO Representative in Cuba Francisco Lacayo. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 10/2/04)

February 23: With fireworks exploding over an old Spanish fort on Havana Bay, Cuba's Habanos Festival opened, drawing hundreds of foreigners for the annual tribute to the island's world famous cigars. Several hundred people gathered on the grounds of La Cabaña fort, where they were invited to try a special San Cristóbal brand cigar made for the sixth annual Habanos Festival. About 500 cigar merchants and other foreigners were expected at the event, said Miguel Campoy, an executive of Habanos S.A., the Cuban-Spanish firm that is the festival organizer and that markets the island's cigars abroad. Classic Harley-Davidson motorcycles from the 1950s were on display. Unlike past years, no foreign celebrities or high-ranking government officials were seen at the opening event. (*AP*, 23/2/04)

April 11: Painstakingly recovered from under 27 layers of paint, the colonial-era murals at 12 Tacon St. are known to local art historians as the "Sistine Chapel of Old Havana." Located halfway between Old Havana's cathedral and the port, the colorful floor-to-ceiling murals offer a window into the city's past. Almost all homes, government buildings and stores in Old Havana's majestic but badly deteriorated historic quarter were once decorated with wall paintings that were obscured for a century or more under successive layers of paint. Now they are gradually being rediscovered and restored. The murals at Tacon Street are unusual in that they cover all the walls, rather than selected portions, of a small room in a former colonial residence, giving art historians a unique pictorial depiction of a bygone era. (*Sun Sentinel*, 11/4/04)

April 20: Cuban Minister of Culture Abel Prieto explained Cuba's project to bring authentic culture, from any point of view, to every Cuban family, by quoting Jose Marti "without culture there is no true freedom." The minister, in Argentina for the Buenos Aires Book Fair and to meet with Argentine government and cultural leaders, told a university audience about culture as part of the battle of ideas, pointing out, also in the words of Marti, that to be cultured is the only way to be free and to be able to withstand manipulation or exploitation. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/4/04)

May 16: "Theatre May", convened by the governmental Casa de las Américas cultural centre, has reaffirmed Cuba as an atypical forum, with the tradition and modernity of the Latin American stage, drawing a dozen theatre troupes from across the region. The organisers usually put together a programme that alternates between well-known Latin American and Caribbean figures and new talent, who find in Cuba a platform to potentially launch international careers. The fifth edition of this event was attended by groups from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica and Mexico, alongside local theatre companies, receiving prizes awarded by a panel of critics -- and maintaining a dialogue about what is going on in the Latin American theatre world. (*IPS*, 22/5/04)

May 28: Renowned Cuban pianist Chucho Valdés filled in for his exiled father, Bebo, during the first Cuban concert to promote the hit album "Lágrimas Negras" ("Black Tears"), a collaboration between the latter and young flamenco *cantaor* (singer) Diego el Cigala. A packed Karl Marx theatre gave a resounding standing ovation for Bebo Valdés, an 85-year old self-exiled Swedish resident who has not returned to the island since his departure in 1960. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 28/5/04)

June 22: The 6th International Digital Art Exhibition and Colloquium got underway in Havana. The exhibit includes many works by Cuban and foreign artists from 30 countries, including Mexico, Chile and Brazil. Sponsored by the Pablo de la Torriente Brau Cultural Center and the

Dutch Cultural Collaboration Agency Hivus, the program includes contests in different categories, debates and lectures. The aim of the exhibition, as well as the Colloquium, is to promote artistic and cultural values through new technologies. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 22/6/04)

July 10: Omni-Zona Franca represents one of the more extreme examples of Cuba's fast-growing counterculture movement. Seven men, some wearing nothing but bikini underwear, spent time rolling around on the floor, chanting, running in circles and literally banging out tunes using old Soviet typewriters as instruments. Artists, street performers, rappers, reggae singers and others are carving out precious new space in the traditionally rigid socialist society. Some openly criticize the government, complaining about 50-cent-per-day wages, racial discrimination, economic inequality and police abuse. "When you're young, you go against your parents, your teachers. You're against everything," said Ariel Fernández, editor of *Movimiento* (Movement), a state-funded magazine about Cuban hip-hop. "You want to change society. But no one's suggesting the government be overthrown," he added. (*The Dallas Morning News*, 10/7/04)

July 23: Havana's Revolution Square hosted a mammoth alfresco rendition of Orff's "Carmina Burana", played by 200 classical-trained musicians and over 150 choir singers. Cuban troubadour Silvio Rodríguez, and composer-conductor Leo Brouwer, brought together pop and classical worlds, to the delight of a highly heterogeneous audience, which included Fidel Castro, as well as by Culture Minister and writer Abel Prieto, among other officials. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/7/04)

October 19: Cuban classical pianist Gabriel Urgell Reyes played chords on an old upright piano in his native Havana. Now, the young talent will play on a brand-new Bluthner grand worth tens of thousands of dollars, in Paris. Urgell, 28, was one of six pianists and the only Latin American granted entry to this year's perfection course at France's prestigious Conservatoire National Supérieur de Danse et Musique in Paris. "He is brilliant, and could likely be someone very famous in the future," said Herve Billaut, in charge of piano pedagogy at the conservatory. Of the six pianists chosen for the course, two received unanimous votes from the jury — Urgell and a Russian woman. Of those two, Urgell received the top honor — the Bluthner piano, which he will play for two years in France then bring back with him to Cuba. (*AP*, 19/10/04)

October 19: The V Ibero American Craftsmanship Fair, Iberoarte 2004 that began in Havana, gathered the best of five-country Craftmanships. Sources of the event organizing committee confirmed to the press that 171 designers are attending the fair exhibiting shoes, textile, ceramic, metal, cloth, carving, toys, and fiber works. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/10/04)

October 20: Fidel Castro delivered the main address to more than 3,200 graduating instructors of the arts in Santa Clara. The Cuban leader noted that this was the first graduating class and recalled that four years ago, an ambitious cultural program was initiated with the establishment of 15 schools of the arts. With the goal of graduating 30,000 instructors over the first ten years, Fidel Castro said there are now a total of 16,168 students registered at the schools located across the island. Finishing four years of study, the newly graduated instructors will teach dance, music, theater, painting and sculpture. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 22/10/04)

October 28: The curtains of Havana's Gran Teatro went up as the 19th International Ballet Festival got underway in the Cuban capital as well as in other cities. The opening gala paid various tributes: from great 19th century romantic ballerina Maria Taglione, to renowned Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier, to the 100th anniversary of the premier in Cuba of the ballet *Coppelia* with its famous pas de deux, and to great choreographer George Balanchine. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 29/10/04)

November 8: Intellectuals from 20 countries are participating in an international congress in Havana to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier. The international congress, titled "The Century of Alejo Carpentier," was inaugurated at Casa de las Américas cultural institute. At the inauguration, Casa de las Américas president Roberto

Fernandez Retamar emphasized the universality of Carpentier, author of among other works "The Consecration of Spring," and his contributions to both literature and journalism. (*EFE*, 8/11/04)

November 14: Tropicana is closing the racy show that has entertained foreigners since the communist government began courting tourists in the 1990s. It will be replaced with "Tambores en Concierto" -- "Drums in Concert" -- a spectacle that, while retaining the spirit of Cuban sensuality, will drop some of the more blatant skin-baring. "It's time to make some changes," says Tomas Morales, a dancer, choreographer and director who created the show that takes the stage in April. The new show will be more theatrical, with increased emphasis on stage sets and technology, Morales said. The show will guide the audience through different music and dance acts, "taking you to the roots of Cuba," he said. (*Chicago Sun Times*, 14/11/04)

December 7: Cuban movie-goers are ready to enjoy 11 days of constant screening of some 400 films from different parts of the world in the 26th Havana International Film Festival. Cuban film "Tres veces dos" (Three times two) by Giroud, Lester Hamlet and Esteban Insausti was selected to open the festival at Karl Marx Theater. The opening ceremony included the performance of musicians of the National Symphony and Cuba's National Choir. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/12/04)

December 18: "Whisky", a film by Juan Pablo Rebella and Pablo Stoll, won the First Coral Prize for Uruguay at the 26th International Film Festival of New Latin American Cinema held in Havana, while "Punto y raya", by Elia Schneider, won the Jury's Special Prize and the Coral for Best Actor for Venezuela. Cuban films only managed to win the Third Coral Prize in the documentaries category and the Third Coral Prize for animation. (*Granma*, 18/12/04)

The Havana Book Fair

February 5: The 13th International Havana Book Fair was inaugurated in Havana with the participation of 250 publishing houses from 24 countries. The fair is being held in the old San Carlos de La Cabaña fort and is dedicated this year to German culture and the Cuban poet Carilda Oliver Labra. Cuban Culture Minister Abel Prieto, Vice President Jose R. Fernandez and Education Minister Luis Ignacio Gomez attended the initial ceremony along with other cultural affairs officials, teachers and heads of educational institutions, as well as foreign diplomats based in Havana. At the fair, 37 German publishing houses will set up in a 170-meter-wide (550 feet) pavilion. (*EFE*, 5/2/04)

February 15: The 13th International Book Fair came to an end in the Cuban capital, but opened to the rest of the island. The annual fiesta of books included workshops, lectures, roundtables and concerts. More than 450,000 people visited the fair in Havana, that will now continue on in another 33 Cuban cities. At the closing ceremony, Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón said the International Book Fair is a social event of special importance, "a space where culture and liberty merge." (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 15/2/04)

February 23: The 13th International Book Fair is moving on to 11 cities in Cuba's central region -- from Villa Clara to Camagüey -- in a further extension of one of the country's most important cultural events. (*Granma International*, 23/2/04)

March 8: About 3,500,000 people visited the most recent Cuban Book Fair in the 34 venues all over the country. Cuban Book Institute Deputy President Edel Morales announced the number during the closing ceremony of the event, which sold 3,200,000 books. Beginning in Havana, and continuing throughout Cuba, the Fair went beyond all expectations, the official stated. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/3/04)

March 15: After reaching rock bottom in 1993 at the height of the country's economic crisis, Cuban book publishing has been on a steady rise, increasing from two to ninety million volumes in 2003. By the end of the 1980's, approximately 50 million books were being published annually but the figure took a nosedive after the collapse of the Socialist Bloc and the subsequent difficulties faced by the island. Now, banking on education and culture and the nation's human resources as its greatest asset, Cuban publishing houses are busy trying to meet the large demand of a population that loves to read. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/3/04)

DISSIDENTS

Activities and statements

January 2: Cuban dissident activist Osvaldo Payá gave the foreign press a message for the year 2004. In his Message of Hope, Payá calls on "everyone to reflect on a dialogue. For we have already proclaimed: 'it is better for all to have rights and not just a few with all the power and all the privileges'." Payá also states that "the Cuban dissident movement achieved a higher social reach and it is, unquestionably, the most authentic expression of the yearnings and concerns of most Cubans even though they have yet to openly express them, they want peaceful changes for Cuba". (*Puente Informativo*, 4/1/04)

February 10: A leading dissident group unveiled a list of proposals to achieve peaceful change in Cuba, calling for free speech, private business ownership and the formation of labor unions. The 36 demands were announced by Vladimiro Roca, a former military pilot who broke with the socialist government more than a decade ago. Roca, spokesman for the opposition United For All Movement, said he plans to submit the proposals to the local district representative, the lowest level of government, in hopes they will reach the National Assembly. According to Roca, the text has already been seen by more than 30,000 people, and is not a proposal for the post-Castro transition, but rather an initiative to mobilize the population, because "until the people mobilize, no change will be possible." At the moment, he added, "there are indications that unrest could cause a social explosion, which appears to be what the government is betting on." "The government is trying to provoke a social explosion (...) with possible consequences like a mass exodus of Cubans to the United States," he said. "The intention is to mobilize people using the (government) mechanisms that they have available to them," Roca said. Roca said the proposals are a step toward the goal of achieving peaceful change on the communist island. (*AP, EFE*, 10/2/04)

February 10: Relatives of the 75 prisoners of conscience sentenced to long prison terms last April are collecting signatures in support of an amnesty for all political prisoners in the country. According to article 63 of the Cuban Constitution, 10,000 signatures are needed for any such initiative to be considered. (*Cubanet*, 10/2/04)

February 10: Presided over by Manuel Cuesta Morúa, the dissident organization Arco Progresista has released a comprehensive study of the political situation on the island. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 10/2/04)

February 13: Cuban dissident Oswaldo Paya is among the record number of nominees for this year's Nobel Peace Prize. Mr. Paya, who was also nominated for the award in 2003, heads the so-called Varela Project. The movement aims to bring democratic change to communist Cuba through a referendum on political and economic reforms. (*VOA*, 13/2/04)

March 5: Cuba's highest profile dissident, Osvaldo Payá, urged his compatriots "to take a step against fear" and begin the transition from totalitarianism, something he said must be impelled from within the island and not from Washington. "The regime is in its final stages. We're already poised for change; that's why we have a pressing need to prepare for the transition," Paya said. It

is necessary for Cubans to "take a step against fear. It's the basis for peaceful change. It doesn't mean lashing out against the oppressor, but rather saying 'no' to submission," he added. This change must be made with the help of "all Cubans, those on the island and those abroad," the dissident said. According to Paya, the US government's announcement last October regarding the creation of a Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, which is to promote a peaceful transition to a representative democracy and a free market economy, was an "error." "We have to 'de-Americanize' the vision of the solution to Cuba's problem. Changes in Cuba should be carried out by the Cubans themselves," Paya said. "The United States can offer solidarity and moral support, but to presume that the transition can be effected (from the outside) is both unrealistic and inappropriate. The transition must be carried out by Cubans themselves, who must decide what form it will take and see it through," he added. (*EFE*, 5/3/04)

March 9: Two groups of Cuban dissidents announced that they were starting a campaign to gather petitions for a moratorium on the death penalty on the communist-ruled island. Leonardo Calvo, coordinator of the Dialogue for Rights Coalition, told a news conference that the campaign will include a "national debate" and an anonymous survey in which citizens can explain their reasons for opposing capital punishment in Cuba. Beside the Coalition, the other organization pressing the issue is the Reflection Table of the Moderate Opposition. The campaign aims to start a national debate on human rights on the island to coincide with the upcoming meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. The signed petitions will be presented to the legislature, said the coalition coordinator, who did not disclose the number of petitions the dissident group hoped to collect nor when the campaign will end. (*EFE*, 9/3/04)

March 17: Oswaldo Paya, Cuba's most internationally celebrated opposition figure, proclaimed "Cuban Spring" in a letter released to mark the anniversary of a government crackdown on dissidents. In homage to the 1968 Prague Spring, in which Czech dissidents and artists protested against communism before a brutal Soviet crackdown, Mr. Paya said the suffering of Cuban dissidents had focused the world's attention on Fidel Castro's regime. "They are in cages, without space, even though they fought for the freedom of all," he said of 75 dissidents who have been jailed since their arrest last year, most for their participation in a petition campaign demanding basic human rights. (*The Washington Times*, 17/3/04)

April 2: The illegal Cuban Independent Workers Confederation (CTDC), reorganized their National Executive Committee, informed the Press Secretary, Eduardo G. Estrada. According to Estrada, members José Alfonso González Torriente and Pedro Arrocha Arguelles were elected as president and vice president in function, respectively. Fernando A. González was promoted to National Coordinator. Victor Yunier Fernández Martínez, Bernardo Lázaro González Nodarse will be in charge of other Secretaries, while Maité Vazquez Gonzalez and Eduardo G. Estrada were voted Honorary Members, added the source. (*Puente Informativo*, 2/4/04)

April 8: After more than two years of being divided into two factions, operating under the same name, The Democratic Party November 30 "Frank País", celebrated its merger. More than 30 activists and executives of the organization participated in the political act, celebrated at the home of the National Coordinator Ada Kaly Márquez Abascal. (*Puente Informativo*, 13/4/04)

May 25: One of Cuba's best-known dissidents still at liberty, Oswaldo Paya, announced the start of a "National Dialogue" involving all his compatriots and aimed at drafting a peaceful "transition program" for the Communist-ruled island. Paya, leader of the outlawed Liberation Christian Movement, or MCL, released a statement in Havana explaining that the process is based on a working document he released several months ago. "All Cubans without exception may take part in this dialogue, whether or not they live on the island and whether or not they support or are members of the government, and regardless of political membership, religious affiliation, experience, age and social or economic status," the opposition leader said. (*EFE*, 25/5/04)

June 14: Residents –including members of the alternative press– in the island's capital and the town of Colón, in Matanzas, founded in Havana, the First Investigative Unit of the Independent

Press. Facilitated and directed by correspondents of LUX- INFO-PRESS, the group is headed by the independent reporters Orlando Carlos García Pérez, Hector Alonso Santos, Mercedes Toledo Mesa, Ines Guerra Ochoa and Caridad Roudette, after concluding a course in investigative journalism at the facility of the Cuban Independent Teachers Union. (*Puente Informativo*, 14/6/04)

July 22: A coalition of dissidents in Cuba is proposing an alternative "transition to democracy" that would be gradual, smooth, and "without the influence of foreign powers." "For us, Cuba's sovereignty and independence is as important as democratisation," Manuel Cuesta Morúa, spokesman for Arco Progresista (Progressive Arc), said in an interview. The coalition is made up of the Social Democratic Coordinator, the Democratic Socialist Current, Women of the Democratic Left, the Democratic Socialist Youth Movement, the People's Party, and the 'Diego Vicente Tejera' Centre for Studies of Democratic Socialism. Cuesta Morúa said the positions taken by the European Union (EU) and the United States towards Cuba are quite different, even if there are similarities with respect to the question of human rights. "The EU has not broken off diplomatic relations, it does not finance the opposition, and it does not have a design to overthrow the Cuban government, even though it has raised the tone of its criticism as the possibility of dialogue has collapsed," said the activist. (*IPS*, 22/7/04)

August 1: Members of the Democratic Party November 30 "Frank País", collateral with the November 30 Movement in Exile and members of the "20 th of May" Movement, created a project they named "Liberty Project", with the objective of letting the world know of their support to the measures implemented last June 30, 2004, by the President of the United States, George W. Bush. Promoters of this project in Cuba believe that the measures are extremely important for the Cuban people for they will force the regime towards a peaceful transition in the island. (*Netfor Cuba*, 1/8/04)

August 9: Magalys Suárez Martínez, a delegate from the National Independent Labour Confederation of Cuba (CONIC) in Villa Clara, informed that the Independent Teachers and Health Workers unions were recently created. Ricardo Sanfiel Bermúdez and Dr. Ibey Rodríguez Valdés were elected as their respective secretary-generals. The union leader also added that with the addition of these two the number of unions created by the CONIC in central Cuba now totals four. (*Cubanet*, 9/8/04)

August 10: Cuba's highest-profile dissenter, Oswaldo Payá, who heads the Christian Liberation Movement, called for renewed efforts to press for the release of all political prisoners. Payá's plea for the release of all Cuban political prisoners is aimed at governments and international bodies like the United Nations and the Organization of American States. The campaign had been started by the wives and relatives of the prisoners. "We think that this amnesty campaign that they had initiated should be a priority", Payá said. "The campaign for the liberation of all our brothers should go on regardless of any political position or platform", he added in a public statement given to the press in Havana. (*EFE, Sun Sentinel*, 11/8/04)

September 3: Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello, dissident leader of the Asamblea para Promover la Sociedad Civil (APSC) in Cuba, suggested that her organization will not join the National Dialogue proposed by the organizers of the Varela Project. Although Roque Cabello said that she is unaware of the document calling for a National Dialogue, she pointed out that the APSC "can not join any organization" because it is "a coalition of different organizations in itself", and because in the APSC's political platform "it is stated not to combine its purposes with those of a political party". (*Cubanet*, 3/9/04)

September 6: According to a declaration issued in Havana, the dissident coalition Mesa de Reflexión de la Oposición Moderada (MROM), created in 1998 by several organizations in the island, has been dissolved. The communiqué, signed by Fernando Sánchez López, president of the Partido Solidaridad Democrática (PSD), and Manuel Cuesta Morúa, secretary general of the Corriente Socialista Democrática Cubana (CSDC), states that both organizations decided to

dissolve the MROM due to "differences on the vision and politics these organizations have towards US-Cuba relations". (*Encuentro en la Red*, 7/9/06)

September 8: The signature campaign in support of the Varela Project is an uphill battle. Oswaldo Payá, leader of the unofficial opposition Christian Liberation Movement, is author of the first major non-governmental petition circulated since Fidel Castro ousted Batista in 1959. "We're in a competition with State Security." According to Paya, when his supporters revisit those who have already signed the petition, they discover that government agents have already been there. "They threaten them. They ask them to retract," he says. "They speak ill of me." Moreover, according to Paya, State Security agents are now showing up "wearing the American flag on their chest" and impersonating Varela Project supporters. Payá, engaged in collecting still more signatures on his petition, issued a challenge to the Cuban Government: "Why don't you acknowledge to the Cuban people that it is their constitutional right to sign the Varela Project and ask for a referendum. " The answer says Payá "is that millions of Cubans would sign, more than in Venezuela", a reference to the recent petition drive for a referendum to oust President Hugo Chavez. American observers say the Cuban Government is very concerned about the tens of thousands of Cubans who have signed the Varela Project, noting that something between a third and a half of the 75 convicted in the May 2003 arrests and trials of dissidents had links with the Varela Project. To further thwart his campaign, Payá charges that State Security "infiltrated false signatures" on the petition, making it necessary to recheck all 25,000 names. (*CBS*, 8/9/04)

September 13: As part of the National Vigil Campaign "Liberty Without Exile for All Political Prisoners", members of the Union Liberty Foundation Movement demanded in Havana the unconditional release of all the political prisoners that are presently serving unjust sentences in prisons in the island. "We are demanding from the Cuban government the unconditional release of all political prisoners confined in more than 200 prisons throughout the island. Guarded by the Cuban flag during the vigil, upon singing the national anthem, the dissidents held hands in a chain of prayers at plain view of dozens of citizens passing by who stopped and watched the event. (*Puente Informativo*, 13/9/04)

September 14: In Havana, members of the Investigative Reporting Unit trained in the island by correspondents of Lux-Info-Press, affirmed that they support The Working Document for the Transition Program, presented to the Cuban people, by the Christian Liberation Movement, in December, 2003. "For the first time, the population has the opportunity to prepare for their own transition before the falling of the regime"- pointed out Rolando S. Calvet, reporter of Lux-Info-Press. Calvet added that, "all Cubans are invited to participate without exclusions, from political prisoners who are serving unjust sentences today in Cuba, exiles, to common citizens". (*Puente Informativo*, 14/9/04)

October 16: Cuban dissident leaders condemned the arrest and deportation of one Spanish and two Dutch lawmakers. They said the incident illustrated the ruthlessness of Fidel Castro's regime. "This illustrates the intransigence of the Cuban government and shows that it will never change its position," said Marta Beatriz Roque, director of the Assembly for the Promotion of Civil Society. "This should serve as the first lesson for the Zapatero government of what the Cuban regime is capable of," said Roque, who was among 75 dissidents jailed last year in a government crackdown but was freed on health grounds. "It is infantile to think that you can provoke a change of position" through dialogue with Fidel Castro's regime, she said. Another leading Cuban dissident, Vladimiro Roca, took the same view: "How can the Rodriguez Zapatero government try to recreate a relationship with Cuba under these conditions?" (*AFP, EFE*, 16/10/04)

November 4: A proposal for a peaceful transition to democracy, "A Transition Project by Cubans, for All The Cubans and for a Free and Democratic Cuba", has been circulating amongst representatives of dissident organizations in the Isle of Youth. The project is the result of an exchange of ideas amongst the Consejo por la Libertad de Cuba (Cuban Liberty Council), Mujeres Anti Represión en Cuba MAR por Cuba (Women Against Repression MAR for Cuba), and "Plantados" por la Libertad (Plantados por la Libertad). (*Puente Informativo*, 4/11/04)

November 5: Two moderate Cuban oppositionists wrote letters to recently re-elect US President George W. Bush, requesting that, during his new term in office, his administration's policy toward Cuba be revised with a stress on exploring new dialogue options and the reassessment of sanctions against the island. Former Revolutionary Commander Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, leader of Cuban Change, and *Arco Progresista's* spokesman Manuel Cuesta Morúa expressed their support for renewed dialogue efforts and a review of political sanctions against Cuba. (*AFP*, 5/11/04)

December 7: Cuban dissidents, seeking to regain the initiative after a wave of arrests last year, announced plans to hold a national meeting of opponents of Fidel Castro's Communist government in May. Economist Martha Beatriz Roque, who was freed in July after 16 months in jail, said the umbrella organization she leads, called the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba, will meet on May 20, 2005. The coalition of 343 groups includes small political groupings, human-rights activists and independent libraries. It was unlikely the Cuban government would authorize the meeting. "This is a demonstration that the dissident movement is not fragmented, because it is not easy to bring so many people together," Ms. Roque said at a news conference at her home. "There is enormous interest in attending," she said. (*The Globe and Mail, Reuters*, 8/12/04)

December 21: Moderate dissidents launched a new magazine called "Consensus," saying it was necessary to expand the spectrum of opinions presented in Cuba's state-run media. The idea is to create a space "where people with positive projects for our country can be published," said activist Reinaldo Escobar, in charge of news for the magazine. "We think that a better Cuba is possible," he added. Escobar was joined by other opponents of Fidel Castro's government, including Manuel Cuesta Morua, and Eloy Gutierrez-Menoyo, a former exile. "Consensus" was presented in the headquarters of a state-owned construction company, which is unusual for a dissident activity. Government opponents generally don't hold public gatherings, especially not in state-controlled offices. (*AP*, 21/12/04)

December 23: Shortly after dissidents launched a new magazine, the Cuban government retaliated by confiscating various books and written documents, a political activist said. Manuel Cuesta Morua, a well-known dissident who helped present the magazine "Consensus", said authorities entered the house of his former partner that night and took all of the books, writings and computer discs he had left there. "It's a clear and direct message of intolerance," Cuesta Morua said in a statement. According to the activist, authorities presented a search warrant and said they took the belongings "to look for counterrevolutionary literature." They said they believed there were documents connected to US institutions, he said. (*AP*, 24/12/04)

Political prisoners, prison conditions, repression and protests

January 3: Elsa Morejon, wife of the Cuban civic leader, Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet Gonzalez, said that her husband is unrecognizable since she last saw him four months ago. "He is so thin, pale and ill looking", " these punishments are destroying him and if he continues where he is he will die...", Morejón added. Cuban prisoner of conscience, Dr. Oscar E. Biscet Gonzalez, who is serving a 25 year prison sentence, continues confined with a common criminal in a cell with no windows or light which he described as a "dungeon", for refusing to stand up to acknowledge the presence of prison guards and officials during the recount of prisoners. His punishment prohibits family visits, food supplies, toiletries, clothing, receiving or sending any correspondence, and going out in the sun. (*NetforCuba*, 4/1/04)

January 12: A Cuban human rights group said that at least 10 of the island's 315 political prisoners are so ill that Fidel Castro's communist government should let them finish their sentences at home. The worst case is that of economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, who has severe cirrhosis, followed by Martha Beatriz Roque, also an economist, who suffers from chronic

diabetes, it said. Both have been moved to a military hospital due to their conditions. Many of the jailed dissidents are more than 50 years old and the frail health of some has been aggravated by hunger strikes. Some dissidents have been beaten in jail, the rights commission said in a semi-annual report. Cuba bars International Red Cross officials from visiting its jails. The Cuban Human Rights and National Reconciliation Commission also called for the release of a blind dissident, Juan Carlos Gonzalez, jailed without trial since March 2002. (*Reuters*, 12/1/04)

January 16: Néstor Rodríguez Lobaina, a political prisoner, declared prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International, was sentenced to 6 more months in prison, after a summary trial. Rodríguez Lobaina had begun a protest for the arbitrary situation he is in, after having completed more than half of an unjust sentence imposed on him back in March 2000. He began a hunger strike to obtain national and international attention to his imprisonment for promoting democratic ideas and respect for the human rights. In response, authorities tried him summarily and sentenced him to 6 more months in prison, for the supposed crime of vandalism, alleging that Rodríguez Lobaina had broken a door at the Yaya police station. (*Puente Informativo*, 27/1/04)

January 17: The life of the 50 years old political prisoner Carlos Miguel López Santos is in danger. He has been on a hunger strike since December 10, protesting that after having completed his sentence prison authorities refuse to release him from prison. López Santos has not ingested any food in the last 38 days. (*Puente Informativo*, 18/1/04)

January 20: Isabel Ramos Martínez, mother of the political prisoner Arturo Suárez Ramos, who began a fast on December 8 for the freedom of all political prisoners to demand that medical attention be given to her son in prison, shaved her head as part of her protest. (*Puente Informativo*, 20/1/04)

February 22: On the first anniversary of the last wave of repression against the Cuban internal opposition in March and April of 2003, the School of Independent Educators of Cuba announced a symbolic fast on the 18 and 19 of March in favor of the liberation of the Cuban political prisoners and those of conscience. "We cannot allow this date to pass without condemning these acts, because we would be leaving our brothers in prison without a voice ", said to Lux-Info-Press Soledad Rivas Verdecía, wife of Roberto de Miranda Hernandez, president of the School of Independent Educators of Cuba and Director of the Varela Project, unjustly serving a sentence of 20 years in prison. (*Puente Informativo*, 22/2/04)

February 23: The prisoner of conscience Julio Antonio Valdés Guevara was transported in critical health condition from the Canaleta prison, in the central province of Ciego de Avila, to the Julio Trigo hospital, in Havana. Valdés Guevara, director of the Independent Library Martyrs of the Tug Boat "March 13", was arrested last March in Manzanillo as part of last year's repressive wave and later sentenced to 20 years in jail. (*Puente Informativo*, 23/2/04)

February 23: Cuban independent economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, who is serving a 20-year prison sentence, is "gravely ill" and the doctors who are treating him "are contributing to his death", declared his mother, Clara Chepe Núñez. Espinosa Chepe's mother, who is 95 years old, sent a letter to the foreign media to report the prison conditions in which her son is being held. He is in a State Security cell in the Carlos J. Finlay Military Hospital in Havana. (*BBC*, 23/2/04)

March 1: According to relatives, dissident economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, serving out a 20-year prison sentence, was diagnosed with "cancerous tumours" at the Havana Carlos J. Finlay hospital. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 1/3/04)

March 2: The November 30 Democratic Party "Frank País" called on all relatives of political prisoners and the opposition in general to permanently fast with Gregoria Corrales Borges, 61 years old and mother of political prisoner Luis Campos Corrales. Mrs Corrales is fasting in solidarity with her son who is on hunger strike. In February, Luis Campos Corrales was transferred from the Guanajay Prison to Agüica, a maximum security prison in Matanzas

province. Luis Campos refused the food he was offered stating that he will continue a hunger strike until they tell him the reason of his transfer. He also refuses to wear the common prisoner's uniform. (*Puente Informativo*, 2/3/04)

March 3: Corriente Agramontina, an illegal opposition group made up of dissident Cuban lawyers, denounced the harassment endured by three of its members in jail, including Juan Carlos González Leyva, the world's only blind political prisoner. The document, signed by the organization's president, René Gómez Manzano, points that González Leyva, though still confined, is yet to be sentenced. (*AFP*, 3/3/04)

March 10: The mother of a dissident who has been jailed for two years without charges said her son was critically ill and called on Cuban authorities to put him on trial. "He is a skeleton of his former self and has lost a lot of weight. He was vomiting blood from an ulcer when I saw him. If he dies the government will be responsible," said Alcira Avila, mother of Leonardo Bruzon. Bruzon, a 48-year-old former restaurant worker, went on hunger strike on January 27 to demand a trial, she said. (*Reuters*, 10/3/04)

March 14: Coming up on the one-year mark since the beginning of a wave of arrests that put 75 Cuban dissidents behind bars, their relatives and the opposition are not holding their breath to see the prisoners released any time soon. The crackdown on internal dissidents that began at the middle of March 2004, led to the summary sentencing of some 75 opposition members to up to 28 years in prison on charges of conspiring against Cuban independence with the United States and undermining the Cuban Revolution's goals. The blow left the opposition more fragmented than it had been before, although some of its members claim the heavy-handed sanctions forced them to reorganize. This is the case for Christian Liberation Movement (MCL) leader Oswaldo Paya, who, in a recent interview with EFE said that the 50 members of his organization who were arrested have been replaced by new members and a "renewal" of the MCL's foundations has been effected. (*EFE*, 14/3/04)

March 17: Wives of Cuban dissidents jailed a year ago for opposing Fidel Castro said their husbands were withering away under harsh prison conditions and demanded their release. "My husband is dying slowly," said Cruz Delia Aguilar, whose husband Julio Antonio Valdes, needs a kidney transplant. "I ask for his release into the hands of the International Red Cross." To honor the imprisoned dissidents, their wives and mothers will take part in a 12-hour fast accompanied by a prayer chain, Gisela Delgado, wife of the jailed Hector Palacios, told the press. The largest gathering will be held at Delgado's home in Havana, but she said similar events were planned in other cities throughout the country. Most of the dissidents "are languishing in subhuman conditions that are a violation of the U.N.'s regulations concerning the treatment of prisoners," according to Elizardo Sanchez, who heads the outlawed Cuban Human Rights Commission. "At least a dozen are in their 60s, and some were suffering from serious illnesses when they were arrested," he said. A year later, their health "has deteriorated as a consequence of all this time suffering in solitary confinement and isolated punishment areas in some 10 high-security facilities generally hundreds of kilometers from their homes." "Nobody has access to really potable water. The food they are given is practically inedible and sanitary conditions are awful. Medical care is very poor and they are subjected to veritable plagues of insects and rats," Sánchez added. According to Sanchez's group, at least 13 of the dissidents are hospitalized and another 10 are in no condition to be in prison. (*Reuters, EFE*, 18/3/04)

March 18: The first anniversary of Cuba's crackdown on a group of dissidents was marked by prayer and sadness along with defiant calls from family members for the release of the 75 people imprisoned. "We are in mourning because it's been one year since the wave of repression," said Laura Pollán, wife of imprisoned dissident Hector Maseda. "But we are united in demanding the freedom for the 75. They are imprisoned unjustly." The family members of more than a dozen of the prisoners gathered in Pollán's cramped home to pray, provide support and speak with reporters. They dressed in white, and many wore T-shirts emblazoned with faces of the jailed dissidents. (*The Chicago Tribune*, 18/3/04)

March 19: Cuban TV reporters are interviewing wives of incarcerated Cuban dissidents, purportedly for a documentary film in the making. The initiative has focused on the wives of a score of political prisoners, currently ill or hospitalized in penitentiaries across the country. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 19/3/04)

March 18: One year after Cuba rounded up 75 activists in a crackdown on dissent, wives and relatives of the prisoners fasted for 12 hours to demand their immediate release. "We make another call for the release of the 75 innocent prisoners, just as we have made various calls in the past," said Gisela Delgado, wife of jailed opposition party leader Hector Palacios. "The government has been increasingly intransigent, but we will keep on fighting," said Delgado, who wore a white T-shirt printed with a color photograph of her husband. Palacios, who recently underwent a gall bladder operation, is one of more than a dozen of the prisoners currently hospitalized in custody for serious ailments. Sitting under a red, white and blue Cuban flag tacked to the wall of her living room, Delgado spent the day in a protest fast with other prisoners' wives. At another gathering, Yolanda Vazquez, wife of imprisoned journalist Manuel Vazquez, called the wives' protest "a triumph." "I thank all the world for their solidarity with the 75 prisoners," said Blanca Reyes, wife of jailed journalist and poet Raúl Rivero. (*AP*, 18/3/04)

March 18: The wives of 15 Cuban political prisoners jailed in last year's crackdown on dissent held a rare public march in Havana's streets demanding amnesty for their husbands. The women - dressed all in white, with many pinning their husbands' photographs to their chests - started their march at the well-known Coppelia ice cream restaurant in the city center. "Freedom for the 75 political prisoners!" the women shouted as they marched up to Department of Prisons headquarters seven blocks away. There, they submitted a letter to the department's director, General Rafael Calderín Tamayo, demanding freedom for their husbands and improved prison conditions. Authorities did not interfere with the march, which lasted about 2 1/2 hours. Several men who appeared to be plainclothes police officers were seen along the way, watching the protest from a distance. A green Peugeot sedan slowly followed the group while someone inside videotaped the procession. The wives also took a bus to the Miramar neighborhood, where they marched more than 30 blocks down the main Quinta Avenida thoroughfare to National Assembly headquarters. The women delivered a letter addressed to parliament President Ricardo Alarcon seeking amnesty for the prisoners. (*EFE, AP*, 19/3/04)

March 23: Orlando Tamayo Zapata, one of the 75 prisoners of conscience arrested on the last wave of repression that began on March 2003, began a hunger strike in solidarity with a common prisoner who is not receiving the medical attention he needs. The common prisoner, named Luis Moreira Ávila, began a hunger strike fifteen days before and is presently in critical conditions. Prison authorities ignore his plea. Moreira Tamayo Zapata's strike is indefinite. (*Puente Informativo*, 30/3/04)

March 24: Miguel Valdés Tamayo has sent his wife letters depicting the subhuman conditions at the Kilo 8 prison in Camagüey where he is serving out the 15-year jail sentence he was handed during last year's crackdown on political dissidence. According to Tamayo, "the food is still bad, stinky and the rations are meagre (...) rats, gnats, cockroaches, and insects of all kinds proliferate (...) and the quality of medical attention is abhorrent." (*Cubanet*, 24/3/04)

March 24: With respect to Cuba's prison system, Col. Rafael Guzmán, deputy head of the Ministry of the Interior's Prisons Directorate, stressed that efforts are being made to enforce human dignity in the inmates. The daily TV program Round Table (*Mesa Redonda*) depicted the increasing relevance of education, culture and sports as instruments of prison rehabilitation programs. Col. Guzmán emphasis was placed on the inmates' guaranteed access to medical and dental care, sentence reductions of up to two months per year served, conjugal visitation, and the improvement of food and clothing quality, as well as of living and working conditions. (*Granma*, 24/3/04)

March 24: In letters written from the province of Camaguey's prison Kilo 7, prisoners of conscience Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta and Léster González Pentón informed that to commemorate the first anniversary of their unjust imprisonment, and to show solidarity with their fellow men in prison, a 5-day hunger strike was conducted. At the end of the strike, Herrera Acosta cut his legs repeatedly with a blade to protest against harassment by prison authorities. (*NetforCuba.Com*, 28/3/04)

March 25: The Cuban government refuted international charges that jailed dissidents had been ill-treated, presenting medical reports and videotaped statements by wives of prisoners. Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque denied any of the 75 opponents of president Fidel Castro, arrested one year ago, were being held in solitary confinement, had been beaten or were being denied medical attention. "Cuba is complying with United Nations standards on the treatment of prisoners," he said at a news conference where he took no questions. "It is false that they have received degrading or inhumane treatment." International rights groups have criticized the conditions under which the dissidents are serving terms of up to 28 years. Cuba's record will be debated next month by the UN Human Rights Commission. (*Reuters, AP, IPS*, 26/3/04)

March 26: In telephone interviews from Havana, the wives of two of the dissidents jailed since March 2003, told the press that they felt manipulated by the Cuban television interviews. "The problem is that nobody had a chance to prepare," said Margarita Borges, whose husband, Edel José García, 58, was sentenced to 15 years. "I was so nervous that I couldn't think." The two women said the interviews lasted about 30 minutes and focused on the medical treatment that their husbands have received, they said. "I felt depressed and cried a lot after the interview when I figured out what they could do," said Dulce María Amador, whose husband Carmelo Díaz is serving a 16-year sentence. "I said the truth. I didn't lie, and if they manipulate it then that's a different story." Amador, 42, said she became suspicious when the reporter only wanted to know about her husband's health and their prison wedding, while ignoring her pleas for her husband's freedom. The Cuban TV interviewer "had specific questions and knew everything about our situation," Amador said. According to both women, the reporter also asked about their husbands' personal hygiene, eating schedule, reading materials, visitation rights, and any type of torture or mistreatment. (*The Miami Herald*, 26/3/04)

March 26: Cuban dissidents have appealed to the regime to allow international inspectors into prisons holding democracy advocates and independent journalists amid continuing reports of degrading and insalubrious conditions. The conditions under which 75 dissidents imprisoned a year ago are being held have become an issue in Cuba as the UN Commission on Human Rights debates the issue in Geneva. According to Oswaldo Paya, leader of the Liberation Christian Movement, the government is trying to cover up a "very serious" situation with a view to the upcoming vote in Geneva. "Why don't they release the sick? Why don't they let the International Red Cross into the prisons? Why don't they hold new trials in Cuba?" Paya asked. Elizardo Sanchez, who heads the outlawed Human Rights Commission, said the only way to establish the truth about the situation of the "prisoners of conscience" is to allow the International Red Cross, UN inspectors and even the international press to enter the prisons. Vladimiro Roca of the "Todos Unidos" movement called the government's attitude "choreography, theater," designed to confront "a difficult situation in Geneva." According to Blanca Reyes, wife of author and journalist Raul Rivero - sentenced to 20 years in prison - the dissidents' wives were "manipulated." Reyes was one of the relatives who refused to be interviewed by Cuban reporters. (*EFE*, 26/3/04)

March 29: Relatives of jailed dissident Oscar Espinosa Chepe who is serving a 20 year sentence, urged Cuban authorities to allow the International Red Cross to visit him to verify his health. Miriam Leiva, the 63-year-old economist's wife, refuted last week's statements to the contrary by Cuban foreign minister Felipe Perez Roque, calling for her husband's release on poor health grounds. The dissident's wife has maintained Espinosa Chepe suffers from cirrhosis of the liver, prostate adenoma, as well as hypertension, and is too sick to stay in jail. Leiva called for Amnesty International, which considers Espinosa Chepe a "prisoner of conscience", and Human

Rights Watch as well as the Red Cross to personally verify her husband's state of health and his prison conditions. (*AFP*, 29/3/04)

March 30: The First Cuban Congress on Prison Medical Care began in Havana amidst national and international debate on prison conditions on the island. According to Lt. Col Terencio Batista, Cuba guarantees its prison population standards of free medical care equal to the rest of the population, as well as the possibility to upgrade their educational and cultural levels. The Cuban officer also informed a roundtable of 250 delegates that at present there is a doctor for every 200 prisoners, a dentist for every 900, and a nurse for every 100. The organizing committee member for the event also informed that all prisoners are routinely given a thorough medical and dental examination upon entry, and then receive immediate and appropriate treatment. Lt. Col. Doctor Rosa Campoalegre spoke on the success of the educational program functioning in all penal institutions on the island, providing prisoners the opportunity for culture and learning, which has not only proven itself in their increased self-esteem and better behavior, but has created a more secure climate and better functioning of the prisons themselves. This congress is part of the complete spiritual renovation of Cuban prisons, a qualitative transformation of the concept of penal regime, now in progress for prisoners in Cuba while they fulfill their debt to society. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/3/04)

March 30: Political prisoner Nelson Aguiar Ramírez, confined in the prison Combinado de Guantánamo, is presently hospitalized at the Guantánamo provincial hospital due to high blood pressure and chest pains. State Security officials have him in isolation, incommunicado. He is not allowed to receive telephone calls or any foods whatsoever. "They say he is in the hospital for a checkup but no tests results have been provided to him or his family", said Ada Kaly Márquez Abascal, coordinator in functions of the Democratic Party November 30 "Frank País". (*Puente Informativo*, 30/3/04)

March 31: At the closing session of the first Cuban National Penitentiary Medicine Congress taking place in Havana, it was emphasized that without regard to ideology or social conduct, all prisoners have equal access to all health services of the country. According to this principle, the island's emphasis on preventive health extends to its prisons, Assistant Health Minister Gonzalo Estevez averred. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/3/04)

March 31: Cuba opened the doors of two penitentiaries to international journalists, hoping to rebut criticism about prison conditions in the weeks before the UN human rights body votes on the island's rights record. The visit by international media, limited to the hospital wards of Havana's Combinado del Este for men and the Manto Negro Western Women's Prison, was the first such group media visit to Cuban prisons in more than 15 years, authorities said. Military doctors and nurses led reporters, photographers and cameramen through operating rooms, an intensive care ward, and recovery rooms linked by hallways reeking of disinfectant and fresh paint. Journalists were invited to join the tour, originally organized for a national congress on prison medicine. In recent days, relatives of imprisoned opposition activists said Roberto de Miranda and Orlando Fundora - two of the peaceful dissidents convicted last April in Havana's worst crackdown in years - had been admitted to that hospital, along with Leonardo Bruzon, who was jailed in December 2002 and has been on a hunger strike demanding a trial. However, the press did not see any of these men at the hospital. Hospital chief Avelino Gonzalez said De Miranda and Bruzon had been transferred, although he did not specify where or when, while Fundora, he said, left the hospital on a conjugal visit. Reporters did not have access to any jailed dissidents or to inmates outside the medical centers. (*Sun Sentinel*, *AP*, *BBC*, *Canadian Press*, *EFE*, 1/4/04)

April 1: The Cuban Catholic Church urged the communist government of Fidel Castro to pardon or reduce the sentences of the 75 dissidents sentenced to up to 28 years in prison in April 2003. "Such a move would be very positive for Cuba," Catholic Church spokesman Orlando Márquez wrote in a local magazine. "Pardoning the prisoners of conscience or reducing their sentences would be a sign not of weakness but of moral strength." The latest edition of the same magazine

called on the government to perform a meaningful act of clemency as urged also by Pope John Paul II. (ANSA, 1/4/04)

April 1: In a letter, Gisela Delgado, wife of dissident in jail since last year's crackdown Héctor Palacios, urged the Cuban government to broadcast in full the interview she gave to journalists from the official Cuban TV. Delgado sent a letter to Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, signed on March 31 st that was distributed to the foreign press based in Havana. (*Notimex*, 1/4/04)

April 1: Maritza Calderín Columbié, wife of Juan Carlos González Leiva, blind Cuban lawyer imprisoned for more than two years by Cuban State Security without a trial, denounced the unfortunate case of her husband. In a letter addressed to the Sixtieth Session of the United Nations' Commission for Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland, Calderín Columbié says that her husband remains in prison since March 4, 2002 in the State Security Department of Pedernales in Holguin, Cuba, many kilometers away from his home. She reiterates that "he is kept behind bars, deprived of sunlight and fresh air for months in a cell as filthy as a pigpen; denied a trial, and the opportunity to seek release under bail". "In addition, he is physically, mentally, and emotionally tortured systematically by intentionally exposing him to toxic substance with penetrating odors, which are also thrown on his body and inside his cell", she adds. (*Cubanet*, 1/4/04)

April 3: Cuban dissident Pedro Pablo Alvarez, jailed for 25 years, was allowed to assist at the Havana burial of his mother. State authorities let the president of the illegal Unitarian Council of Cuban Workers leave prison and remain for two and a half hours at the funeral home where friends and family kept vigil over the remains of his mother, Raquel Ramos Soto. Later he attended the burial ceremony in Havana's Cristobal Colon Cemetery, watched by plainclothes agents. (*EFE*, 3/4/04)

April 4: José Enrique Santana Carreira, National Coordinator of the Democratic Party November 30 "Frank País" began an indefinite hunger strike at the Prison 1580. "Our brother is in a hunger strike demanding that his condition of political prisoner be respected and also, because on March 15, prison authorities endorsed common prisoners to force José Enrique to comply with the so called "prison regulations", according to Yamile Casas Sánchez, member of the National Executive Board of the illegal political party. (*Puente Informativo*, 4/4/04)

April 5: Cuban parliament speaker Ricardo Alarcon defended last year's crackdown on 75 activists, telling a group of American newspaper editors that internal security outweighs international image. "I think you should take into account the problem of image," Alarcon told the board of directors for The Associated Press Managing Editors. But, he added, "No nation can base its conduct relating to fundamental national security based on how the media might reflect what you do." Alarcon's comments came during a two-hour meeting with the APME board of directors, which represents 1,700 newspapers in the United States and Canada. The board arrived in Havana for a two-day stay after visiting Mexico, where they met with President Vicente Fox. (*AP*, 5/4/04)

April 6: About 30 opponents of Fidel Castro launched a 24-hour fast seeking the release of more than 300 Cuban political prisoners, including 75 who were rounded up and jailed in a crackdown a year ago. In a cramped flat in the El Vedado neighborhood, seated under a huge red, white and blue Cuban flag bearing the names of 75 dissidents sentenced to lengthy jail terms last year family and friends demanded freedom for loved ones they say are held in dismal conditions. (*AFP*, 6/4/04)

April 7: A Cuban human rights activist, jailed for hatching plans to honor the late Brothers to the Rescue fliers, has lapsed into a coma after a prolonged hunger strike, according to sources monitoring his health. Sources described as "delicate" the condition of Leonardo Miguel Bruzón Avila, imprisoned without trial since February 23, 2002. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 9/4/04)

April 7: Cuban dissident Vladimiro Roca, rejected statements by Ricardo Alarcón, president of the Cuban National Assembly. Alarcón stated that the 75 dissidents, imprisoned since last year, were sent to jail for "national security reasons". "That is a way to justify a major political mistake that they do not want to rectify", Roca said. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 8/4/04)

April 11: Dissident Leonardo Bruzón Avila was transferred from Salvador Allende Hospital to the military hospital "Carlos J. Finlay", in Havana, after having been lapsed into coma. After two years in jail, Bruzón initiated a hunger strike claiming for the celebration of his trial. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 11/4/04) (*El Nuevo Herald*, 11/4/04)

April 13: Roger Curbelo Tamayo, member of the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL) and Coordinator of the Civic Committee of the Varela Project in Las Tunas province, has been arrested for over two weeks without due process. Since the beginning of his confinement in El Típico prison, Holguín, Curbelo Tamayo initiated a hunger strike in protest for his unjust incarceration. Osvaldo Payá Sardiñas, national coordinator of the MCL gave this information to the foreign press in Havana. (*Puente Informativo*, 13/4/04)

April 15: Cuban dissident Julio Antonio Valdes Guevara, one of 75 dissidents jailed a year ago, has been temporarily released to receive a kidney transplant, he said. "I'm happy to be free, despite the fact that my health is very bad," Valdes told a group of foreign journalists before being admitted to the Nephrology Institute of Havana. Valdes, 52, was sentenced to 20 years behind bars during a series of summary trials which sent 75 dissidents to prison in the spring of 2003, but due to the gravity of his condition, he was granted a temporary release to attend to his health problems. (*EFE*, 15/4/04)

April 16: Ten members of the Cuban Foundation for Human Rights (Fundación Cubana de Derechos Humanos), FCDH, imprisoned since 2002 will go to trial. The information was provided to Martiza Calderín, wife of Juan Carlos González president of FCDH, imprisoned without trial since 2002, by a police investigator from the Pedernales Prison, Holguín. The FCDH members waiting for trial are Juan Carlos González Leiva, Lázaro Iglesias Estrada, Léxter Téllez Castro, Carlos Brizuela Yera, Enrique García Morejón, Antonio Marcelino García Morejón, Delio Laureano Requejo Rodríguez, Virgilio Mantilla Arango, Odalmis Hernández Márquez y Ana Peláez García, these last two released on bail. (*Cubanet*, 16/4/04)

April 17: On the first anniversary of the wave of arrests and summary trials that took place last year, eleven political prisoners initiated a hunger strike in protest for these events. The prisoners are confined in the Cerámica Roja prison, Camaguey. Francisco Pacheco Espinosa, Lázaro Iglesias Estrada, Jorge Luis Suárez Varona, the brothers Enrique and Antonio García Morejón, Delio Laureano Resquejo Rodríguez, Egberto Ángel Moral Escobedo, Jorge Liriano Linares, Elizardo Calvo Hernández, José Aguamonte Leyva, and Yosbel González Plaza, have been on hunger strike for 48 hours. (*Puente Informativo* 17/4/04)

April 18: Reina Luisa Tamayo requested from Cuban authorities that her son be released from prison. Orlando Zapata Tamayo has being held without due process since his arrest in March 2003. Cuban State Security has accused him of the alleged crime of public disorder. During this time, the State Attorney has set his case for trial in 4 occasions, but prison authorities have refused to take him to the Tribunal, she added. "If they refuse to take him to trial then they should set him free", she said. (*Puente Informativo*, 18/4/04)

April 20: Cuban mass organizations are telling their members to beat any person who might be talking about human rights and the Varela Project. According to a member of the dissident organization 24 de Febrero, these instructions began to be transmitted in meetings in Santiago de las Vegas, City of Havana, and have been extended to the municipalities of Centro Habana, Habana Vieja and Playa. (*Lux Info Press*, 20/4/04)

April 19: At the 43th anniversary of the triumph of Cuba's army and militia at Bay of Pigs, Fidel Castro said that Cuba is ready to face any attack coming from abroad. During the official TV program Round Table, Castro also stated that the internal opposition in the island is "a 0.03 percent" of the Cuban population. (*World Data Service, Notimex, 20/4/04*)

April 20: Cuban opposition leaders expressed concern over the health of Marta Beatriz Roque, the only woman among the 75 dissidents sentenced a year ago to prison terms of up to 28 years. Roque, sentenced to 20 years in jail, has for months been confined to a prisoners' ward of the Carlos J. Finlay Military Hospital in Havana because of her health. A communique issued in Havana and signed by Vladimiro Roca of the outlawed Todos Unidos movement, among others, complained that relatives have been banned from visiting Roque at the hospital for the past two weeks. (*EFE, 20/4/04*)

April 21: A group of Cuban government opponents gathered at a home in Havana to pray for the release of imprisoned dissidents on the island. The prayer chain, which brought together nearly 30 people, was organized by Yolanda Triana Estopiñan, whose husband Orlando Fundora Alvarez is one of the 75 non-violent democracy activists and independent journalists sentenced last year to prison terms averaging 20 years. Relatives of other jailed dissidents, members of outlawed opposition groups and a Greek Catholic priest co-sponsored the chain and shouted slogans in favor of human rights and the release of the prisoners. (*EFE, 21/4/04*)

April 26: A blind lawyer and nine other opposition activists were put on trial in Cuba in the first prosecution of government opponents since last year's jailing of 75 dissidents. Blind human rights lawyer Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leyva and the other nine opponents of Fidel Castro were charged with disrespect for authority and public disorder, according to the Cuban Human Rights Commission. Only relatives were allowed into the courtroom for the trial, which took place in the central town of Ciego de Avila. "They face sentences of up to six years," said veteran rights activist, Elizardo Sanchez, head of the commission. All ten were arrested March 4, 2002, when they tried to visit an independent journalist, who had allegedly been beaten by police at a Ciego de Avila hospital. They have been jailed without charges since then. (*CNN, 26/4/04*)

April 26: Blind Cuban dissident Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva was found guilty of disrespecting Fidel Castro and other offenses and sentenced to four years in prison, dissident sources said. Eight other dissidents received shorter prison sentences in the one-day trial in the central Cuban town of Ciego de Avila where only relatives were allowed in the courtroom. A tenth man facing trial revealed himself to be a government agent who had infiltrated the dissident group in Ciego de Avila, commission president and veteran human rights activist Elizardo Sanchez said. (*Reuters. BBC, EFE, 26/4/04*)

April 26: During the trial followed to blind dissident Juan Carlos González Leiva and other activists, it was known that the group included Lester Tellez Castro, an independent journalist who revealed in court he had been working as a state security infiltrator called agent "Ignacio." During the trial, he publicly renounced his work for the Cuban police. After his statement in court, Trelles was immediately sent back to jail, where he expressed his repentant for having defended what he called "an unfair and worthless cause". The court sentenced him to 3-1/2 years in prison. (*Cubanet, Reuters, 27/4/04*)

April 27: A Cuban court granted a blind human rights lawyer and another opposition activist conditional liberty, while eight other dissidents received prison sentences of three to seven years, a prominent member of the opposition told the press. Elizardo Sánchez, the president of the illegal but relatively tolerated Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, said the blind activist, Juan Carlos González, was given a four-year sentence that was commuted to conditional liberty or parole. (*IPS, 27/4/04*)

May 5: Three members of a small, illegal Cuban dissident party have been sentenced to prison for four to five years for taking part in a demonstration, according to relatives and a local human

rights group. Rafael Corrales Alonso, Ricardo Ramos Pereira and Jose Enrique Santana Carreira took part in a Jan. 28, 2002, protest outside a Havana church, where they chanted for freedom for political prisoners, according to Ramos' mother, Carmen Pereira. They were arrested a month later. A Havana court sentenced Corrales to five years and Ramos and Santana to four years, according to a relative. (AP, 6/5/04)

May 6: René Montes de Oca, leader of the Cuban Party for Human Rights, denounced the mental and physical condition of two inmates at Canaleta prison, Ciego de Ávila province, who require immediate medical care for their self-inflicted injuries. One of the inmates severed his remaining arm, while the other injected himself intravenously with petroleum, to protest the inhumane treatment he suffered. The latter was then put in solitary confinement, following which both his arms had to be amputated. (*Grupo Decoro*, 7/5/04)

May 9: Félix Gerardo Vega Ruiz, a political prisoner serving a seven year sentence at a prison in Guanajay, Pinar del Río province, was stabbed by common prisoners. Vega Ruiz was stabbed while he was making a telephone call, because prison authorities had canceled his family visit. Xiomara Ruiz, mother of the political prisoner sent an urgent appeal to the international community in support of the physical integrity of her son and of all political prisoners. Vega Ruiz is a member of the Cuban Pro Human Rights Party, affiliated to the Andrei Sajarov Foundation. (*Puente Informativo*, 9/5/04)

May 9: Thirty-three female relatives of imprisoned Cuban dissidents marched for half an hour, on Mother's Day, and then rallied in an upscale area of Havana to demand release of their loved ones. The mothers, wives and sisters, all dressed in white and holding pink gladiolas, filed out of a church in the district of Miramar after mass then marched 14 blocks down posh 5th avenue, before returning and rallying in a nearby park. The women read aloud the names of 336 people they said were political prisoners, including 75 jailed last year for terms averaging 19 years. They shouted "libertad," or freedom, after each name. (*Reuters*, 9/5/04)

May 10: The Cuban poet and political prisoner Manuel Vázquez Portal declared himself in a hunger strike after he learned about the limitations the Boniatuco penitentiary authorities put to the amount of food and other goods he could receive. Vázquez Portal has been in solitary confinement since February in a dark, filthy, rat-infested cell, according to his wife, Yolanda Huerga Cedeño. Vazquez Portal was one of the 75 Cuban dissidents incarcerated and condemned to a long term in prison for expressing ideas different to the Cuban government. (*NetforCuba*, 10/5/04)

May 11: A prominent Cuban human rights activist said that the island's prison system has grown dramatically since Fidel Castro's government came to power in 1959. Elizardo Sanchez of the independent Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation presented what he said was the first fairly detailed study of the evolution of the prison system under communism. Sanchez displayed side-by-side maps of the prison system in 1959 and today: the first a scattering of 14 dots on the map of Cuba, the second a constellation of what he said were 200 prisons and detention camps that he said constitute "a tropical gulag." Sanchez said Cuba had about 4,000 prisoners in 1956 and about 100,000 today -- a figure similar to that used by some international human rights groups. He acknowledged that the figures were not precise, but said the government "has exact information about the total number of people now imprisoned in our country" and he urged officials to make it public. (AP, 11/5/04)

May 18: Three Cuban dissidents who participated in a meeting to discuss human rights were sentenced to three years each in prison, a local human rights group said. Orlando Zapata Tamayo, Raul Arencibia Fajardo and Virgilio Marante Guelmes were arrested December 6 of 2002 while meeting in a private home in Havana to study the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They were convicted in a one-day trial of contempt for authority, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest, said Elizardo Sanchez, the head of the independent Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation. (CNN, 18/5/04)

May 19: Cuban political prisoners Diosdado González Marrero, José Daniel Ferrer García and Leonel Grave de Peralta have initiated a hunger strike in Kilo 5 prison, Pinar del Río province. The political prisoners began the strike in solidarity with imprisoned dissident Normando Hernández González, who was beaten and sent back to jail together with common prisoners. According to Directorio Democrático Cubano, an organization based in Miami, Hernández González, an independent journalist sentenced to 25 years in jail, went on hunger strike in protest for abuses perpetrated by the prison's authorities. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 19/5/04)

May 21: Two peaceful activists from the Democracy Movement in Santo Domingo, Villa Clara province, were arrested in the city of Santa Clara. Police authorities occupied the documents that Diolxis Orestes Rodríguez Hurtado and David Díaz-Oliver Delgado, were carrying after attending a meeting of their dissident organization. (*Cubanet*, 25/5/04)

May 22: A member of the "Damas de Blanco" (Ladies in White) illegal opposition group, which demands the release of dissidents jailed by the Fidel Castro government, was arrested in Havana. According to a Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN) press release, María Alpizar Ariosa was taken to a police station in Havana, where she was informed that she would be immediately escorted back to her hometown, Placetás, 250 km east of the capital. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 23/5/04)

June 2: The wife of Cuban dissident Diosdado Gonzalez Marrero - sentenced to 20 years in prison after a summary trial last year during Havana's harshest opposition crackdown in years - said she fears for the life of her hunger-striking husband. Earlier in Miami, an exile group said that one of the 75 dissidents sentenced to long prison terms in Cuba last year has sewed his mouth shut to protest the conditions of his imprisonment. Alejandrina Garcia de la Riva, a resident of Matanzas province, said she spoke by phone with her husband, when he told her he was about to join the hunger strike initiated by fellow political prisoner Normando Hernandez. "He told me he was going to go on strike that very moment and that Leonel Grave de Peralta and Jose Daniel Ferrer were joining them," said Garcia. Gonzalez, 41, is being held at Kilo Cinco y Medio prison in the western province of Pinar del Rio, along with the three others on hunger strike, all among the 75 pro-democracy activists, independent journalists and human rights advocates sentenced in April 2003 to up to 28 years behind bars. (*EFE*, 2/6/04)

June 7: Oswaldo Payá, general coordinator of the dissident organization Movimiento Cristiano Liberación, issued an official note denouncing the raids performed by Cuban State Security agents against four Varela Project activists. The houses of Luis Enrique Junquera, Yamil Sánchez, Juan Carlos Alpízar y Juan Luis Rodríguez were searched, documents related to the Varela Project confiscated, and the four activists arrested. Two of them were released and the other two have been held incommunicado. (*NetforCuba*, 10/6/04)

June 8: Leonardo Bruzon Avila, a Cuban dissident who spent 27 months in jail without trial, was freed and vowed to keep fighting human rights abuses under communist rule. "I want to continue fighting for the defense of human rights in Cuba," the 49-year-old former librarian told the press at his home in Havana. Bruzon was arrested on February 22, 2002 for inciting public disorder after trying to organize a memorial ceremony to honor four Cuban exile fliers killed when Cuban fighters shot down their two small planes flying near the island in 1996. Bruzon's health deteriorated in jail where he went on four hunger strikes to demand a trial. In April he was transferred to a hospital weighing 85 pounds (39 kilos), he said, adding that he was suffering from a bone disease. He walked with difficulty when he was released. Carlos Alberto Domínguez, an independent journalist who was kept in prison without a trial for two years, was also released. (*Reuters, NotiCuba*, 8/6/04)

June 9: Four Cuban dissidents held in prison without trial for more than two years have been released. They include Leonardo Bruzon Avila, 49, a human rights group leader whose cause has been championed across the world. The other three men released were Carlos Alberto

Dominguez, a journalist, and Emilio Leyva Perez and Lazaro Rodriguez Capote, members of the small Pro Human Rights Party. The four were among 88 dissidents in Cuba granted the status of "prisoners of conscience" by Amnesty International. They were arrested on 22 February 2002 for trying to organise memorial ceremonies for four Cuban exiles whose aircrafts, were shot down near the island in 1996 by the Cuban authorities. (*BBC*, 10/6/04)

June 9: The Cuban government released a fifth imprisoned dissident due to health reasons. Miguel Valdes Tamayo, the 47-year-old head of the outlawed Fraternal Brothers for Dignity dissident group, was sentenced to 15 years in prison last April along with 74 other dissidents and human rights activists. He told the press that he is suffering from hypertensive cardiomyopathy which, if it gets worse, might require a heart transplant. Valdes Tamayo said that he had no plans to leave Cuba, but rather continue working in the human rights movement as much as his health would allow. He said he was not tortured in prison, but he was threatened with beatings and he was struck many times by the guards. (*EFE*, 9/6/04)

June 11: A group of wives of jailed Cuban dissidents approached a son of Fidel Castro to plead for their relatives during a reception hosted by the Portuguese Embassy in Havana. Dressed in white—as they do in their protests—, the women spoke to Antonio Castro for about 10 minutes. “ We asked him to be true to his Hippocratic oath,” said Laura Pollán, married to Héctor Maseda, who is serving a 20-year sentence. Castro is a physician with Cuba’s national baseball team. (*AP*, 12/6/04)

June 14: Oswaldo Paya, one of Cuba's best-known government opponents, accused authorities of harassing activists involved in a new project aimed at sparking discussion about possible changes on the island. Paya, lead organizer of the Varela Project democracy drive, said in a statement to international news media that activists in the new National Dialogue project have been visited at their homes by state security agents trying to persuade them not to take part. In a written statement faxed to news organizations in Havana, Paya maintained the project was "persecuted because of the well-founded fear that the people will support it." (*AP*, 14/6/04)

June 18: Cuban authorities freed two more imprisoned dissidents for health reasons, and both men called for the release of their fellow prisoners of conscience. Released from prison were Carmelo Diaz Fernandez and Orlando Fundora Alvarez. Both belonged to the "Group of 75" dissidents - independent journalists and human rights activists. Diaz has liver disease and high blood pressure and was admitted to the prison hospital at Combinado del Este four months ago. His friend Fundora, who underwent two operations in prison for intestinal problems, has a bleeding ulcer, angina pectoris and a replacement valve in his heart. He went on a hunger strike in April after being hospitalized in August 2003. The two releases raise the number of freed political prisoners to eight so far this year. (*EFE*, 18/6/04)

June 20: On Father's Day, a group of women related to the 75 Cuban dissidents jailed a year ago once again demanded their release and, encouraged by the recent release of six of them, some said that they are beginning to see “a ray of hope.” After attending mass, as they’ve been doing for several months now, nearly twenty wives and mothers, dressed in white and some wearing T-shirts printed with photos of their husbands, re-enacted a mile-long protest walk along 5 th Avenue's median strip . (*El Nuevo Herald*, 21/6/04)

June 21: In an open letter released to the media, Blanca Reyes Castañón, wife of dissident poet Raúl Rivero, currently serving 20 years in prison, accused Fidel Castro of using recent US sanctions as an excuse “to hold political prisoners hostage” and decried a cut in the number of family visits her husband is allowed. She denounced that, while they had been allowed almost on a monthly basis prior to the sessions of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva, the next scheduled visit will not take place until August. (*Europa Press*, 21/6/04)

June 22: The wife of jailed Cuban dissident Oscar Espinosa said agents from State Security refused to give him a letter from Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero. Miriam

Leiva told the press she planned to show Espinosa the letter during her visit on June 20 to the military hospital where her husband is being held when the agents took the letter from her. The Spanish premier responded to a letter Leiva sent him where she explained her husband's situation and commended the Socialist leader for his victory in Spain's March general elections, she explained. (*EFE*, 22/6/04)

June 23: Cuban dissident Roberto de Miranda Hernandez, one of 75 mostly rights activists and independent journalists sentenced last year to lengthy jail terms on the island, was released for health reasons. De Miranda, a 59-year-old professor and head of an unofficial teachers' organization, told the press he was released due to a heart ailment, high blood pressure and cysts on a kidney. He said he was deeply moved to be reunited his family and friends, adding that more than 50 people stopped by his home. De Miranda's release brings to nine the number of dissidents freed from jail so far this year. Five of them are from the so-called "Group of 75," who were convicted of subversion and sentenced to prison terms of up to 28 years in March and April of last year. (*EFE*, 23/6/04)

June 23: Cuban dissident writer, Manuel Vázquez Portal, who was condemned to 18 years in jail during March-April 2003 crackdown on dissidents in the island, was released for health reasons. Vázquez Portal's release brings to ten the number of dissidents freed from jail in the last weeks, and is the sixth of the group of 75 condemned to long term sentences last year. (*AFP*, 6,04)

June 23: A letter released in Havana, by Elsa Morejon Hernandez, wife of prisoner of conscience, Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet, denounced the critical situation this Cuban physician is facing at Prison Kilo 8, in the province of Pinar del Rio, 162 km. away from his home where he is serving a 25 year sentence after being sanctioned for committing crimes "against the sovereignty and the integrity of the Cuban territory." (*NetforCuba*, 30/6/04)

June 25: Cuban dissident Leonardo Bruzón Ávila denounced that he has been the victim of political harassment even after having been released from prison. Bruzón Avila told the independent press in Cuba that only three days after his release, a member of the Cuban State Security named Yan Santiago visited his house and told him not to keep talking about Cuban politics. The day after, Avila was taken to a "security house" where he was submitted to interrogation by this agent and another named Aramis. A third "interview" took place two weeks later. (*Cuba Verdad*, 25/6/04)

June 27: The 35 year old political prisoner Migdalia Hernandez Enamorado, is requesting solidarity on behalf of her three daughters who desperately need both of her parents. Hernandez Enamorado and her husband Rafael Benitez Chui were arrested on March 19, 2003 soon after they arrived at a police Unit in Guantánamo to protest the arrest of two of their peers. Migdalia wants the entire world to know that every Sunday, since her arrest, her daughters Lissi, 12, and Migdalia, 10, go to El Combinado de Guantánamo and they stand in front of the prison until they are allowed to see their mother at a distance even though they are allowed to see her only for five minutes. (*Puente Informativo*, 27/6/04)

June 28: Cuba launched a new campaign to characterize the country's dissidents as Washington's puppets at a time when the United States was preparing to increase financial support for the island's opposition. "All of these people are puppets manipulated by the State Department of the United States," parliament Deputy Lazaro Barredo told a news conference called by the Foreign Ministry's International Press Center. Cuban authorities showed clips from a secret government videotape taken five years ago of veteran rights activist Elizardo Sanchez telling state agents that several other opposition members "were manipulated." The news conference also seemed aimed at further discrediting Sanchez, who has grown more active recently. "This is more of the same," Sanchez said of the videotape. "They are trying to distract the public with a fake scandal." His Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation has long been an important source of information for international rights groups. (*AP*, 28/6/04)

July 1: For Carmelo Díaz Fernández and five other peaceful dissidents who have been released conditionally from prison because of their deteriorated health, the joy of being home with their families is marred by fear and uncertainty. In some cases state security officers have warned the men that they could be arrested again if they rekindle their opposition activities. Some suggested the men leave Cuba permanently. Caught between exile and the possibility of serving out the rest of his 15-year prison sentence, Diaz Fernandez said he, like some others, will seek asylum abroad. Manuel Vazquez Portal, who served one year, three months and four days of his 18-year sentence, said he is deliberating with his family whether to leave Cuba. When Vazquez Portal told a prison authority he would go back to being a journalist, he recalled the captain responded, "If I were you and they freed me I would go into exile." De Miranda, a former teacher, who was released on the same day as Vazquez Portal, said he may seek asylum abroad because he was fired from his job teaching math and geology several years ago and is unable to make a living. De Miranda and others reject the Cuban government's assertion that dissidents are "mercenaries." "If I were a mercenary I would be a masochist to have my house in these conditions," he said pointing to his bare Central Havana living room, where slats are missing from the windows and ceiling tiles are coming loose. (*Sun Sentinel*, 1/7/04)

July 1: Visually impaired attorney Juan Carlos González Leyva denounced review judge Juan Enrique Balar Claro's refusal to let him make a trip to Havana. González Leyva, a Ciego de Ávila resident and leader of the Cuban Human Rights Foundation, is currently serving a 4-year probationary sentence and needed the review board's approval to travel. (*Cubanet*, 1/7/04)

July 1: Speaking on behalf of her husband, dissident poet and journalist Raúl Rivero, Blanca Reyes denounced the systematic harassment her spouse is subjected to at the hands of a prison guard named Alexei. According to Rivero, political prisoners share overcrowded cells with ordinary inmates, who are "encouraged" to ignore them, risking punishment if they don't. (*AFP*, 1/7/04)

July 7: Imprisoned dissident Jorge Luis Garcia Pérez "Antunez" was hardly beaten by prison authorities in front of his relatives, a Cuban American organization based in Miami denounced. In a statement made public to the press, Directorio Democrático Cubano says that several guards from the Ariza provincial prison, Camagüey, attacked Antúnez after he requested from the prison guards that letters of support from different countries were given to his sister. "He was brutally beaten on the floor". "They put him handcuffs on each hand and was dragged from opposite sides, so he began bleeding and having difficulties breathing", Antunez' sister, Bertha, told members of the Directorio. According to Bertha Antúnez, her brother had requested the letters that the State Security has been keeping without having delivered them. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 7/7/04)

July 8: Over a month ago, members of the illegal dissident organization Movimiento Liberal Cubano were arrested and sent to Villa Marista, the political police headquarters in Havana, without any notice to their relatives about the charges against them. José Lorenzo Pérez Fidalgo and Alexis Triana Montesinos, both residents of El Diezmero, Havana, were detained by National Police forces and the State Security Department agents. Their relatives have denounced that they still do not know about the charges against their loved ones, nor about their situation. (*Cubanet*, 8/7/04)

July 9: Prisoner of conscience Normando Hernandez Gonzalez continues to be held in a punishment cell after having already spent 54 days in it. His wife, Yarai Reyes Marin, spoke via telephone with the prison's chief of internal order, who refused to give his name. He told Yarai that her husband, as well as Diosdado Gonzalez Marrero, Leonel Grave de Peralta and Jose Daniel Ferrer Garcia, will continue in their punishment cells in Kilo 5 1/2 prison in the province of Pinar del Rio for 21 more days, for refusing to be transferred to a cell with common prisoners, where their lives are in danger. (*Marpocuba*, 9/7/04)

July 18: Political prisoner Santiago Cutín Aguilera, who is serving a nine-year sentence in the prison Combinado de Guantánamo for an alleged crime of trying to leave the country using illegal means, was brutally beaten by prison guards. Cutín Aguilera protested the poor dietary condition, as well as the abuses perpetrated against the political prisoners at the Guantánamo prison, where three guards brutally punched him on his jaw and his mouth, removing all of his teeth in the brutal beating. (*Puente Informativo*, 26/7/04)

July 19: Relatives of imprisoned dissident Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello have denounced her poor health situation. Roque Cabello has been kept hospitalized at Havana's military hospital "Carlos J. Finlay", but her situation has become worse. Roque Cabello suffers from a severe condition of the parotid glands. After paying a visit to her aunt, her niece, María de los Ángeles Falcón Cabello, complained about the bad medical treatment Roque Cabello is receiving at this Havana hospital. (*Cubanet*, 19/7/04)

July 21: Dolia Leal Francisco, wife of Cuban political prisoner Nelson Aguiar Ramirez, denounced the Cuban government's attempts to keep her and other wives and mothers of political prisoners, called "Ladies in White", away from campaigning for the liberation of their loved ones. "After 16 months without any telephone communication, the military command at the Provincial Prison of Guantanamo decided that the call with my husband would be every Sunday at 10 a.m., but every Sunday at that time I go to the Church of St. Rita. It is my obligation and my duty to go and to walk down Fifth Avenue with the wives dressed in white and call for the liberation of all political prisoners, because they are innocent," said Leal. Laura Pollan, wife of political prisoner Hector Maseda Gutierrez, also said that she was called from the prison La Pendiente in Villa Clara, where her husband is being kept, about changing their phonecalls to Sunday mornings. (*Netfor Cuba*, 22/7/04)

July 21: According to information provided by political prisoner Randy Cabrera Mayor, from the prison Combinado de Guantánamo, there are over 200 prisoners in isolation suffering from tuberculosis. Cabrera Mayor said that these prisoners are not receiving proper food or medical attention to combat this disease. (*Puente Informativo*, 22/7/04)

July 21: Political prisoner Fabio Prieto Llorente, incarcerated in Kilo 8 prison, in Camagüey province, joined a hunger strike initiated by criminal prisoners. The prison population at Kilo 8 was demanding full respect of their rights and the fulfillment of benefits under the prison's internal regulations. (*Cubanet*, 21/7/04)

July 22: Osvaldo Payá, dissident leader of Movimiento Cristiano Liberación (MCL) and promoter of the Varela Project, denounced that Daniel Pereira García, MCL's delegate in Palma Soriano, Oriente, was arrested, after being a victim of a home invasion that lasted three hours. At the time of his arrest, Pereira García was actively participating in a non-stop campaign of recollection of signatures in support of the Varela Project. (*Puente Informativo*, 22/7/04)

July 22: Cuba freed dissident economist Martha Beatriz Roque, the only woman among 75 people arrested 16 months ago in a crackdown on dissent. Roque, the most prominent dissident to be released this year by Fidel Castro's government, was surprised. "I didn't expect to be let out. I will continue my opposition work. They can't change my ideas," she told reporters at the home of a relative in central Havana. The 58-year-old dissident said she had spent the last year in a military hospital suffering from diabetes, hypertension and heart problems and was released on health grounds. "The government must free all the political prisoners," she said. "This is the government's way of saying it will be more flexible. But until all 75 are in the street we cannot call it a gesture," said Roque, who thanked international efforts to press Cuba to free its dissidents. (*Reuters*, 22/7/04)

July 23: A former political prisoner whose case was highlighted by President Bush urged Cuba's government to hold a referendum on whether to change the communist island's political system. In a 10-page report called "The Cuba We Want," Leonardo Bruzón Avila and fellow dissident

Carlos Rios Otero called for the referendum and laid out a plan for Cuba's transition to a multiparty, democratic system and free-market economy. The report was delivered to the offices of Cuban Justice Minister Roberto Diaz Sotolongo. There was no public reaction by Fidel Castro's government to the recommendations. (AP, 23/7/04)

July 25: Esther Germán Valdéz, wife of Cuban dissident René Montes de Oca Martija, leader of the Cuban Pro Human Rights Party, affiliated to the Andrei Sajarov Foundation, stated that her husband was arrested in their home. After Montes de Oca's was released from prison back in October of 2003, where he served a three-year sentence for public activities against the Castro regime, he wrote a public letter to Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas, promoter of the Varela Project, where he publicly recognized the popularity the project had achieved amongst the general population, and openly announced collaboration with the Varela Project and with any other effort geared towards the democratization of the island. (Lux Info Press, 25/7/04)

July 26: Political prisoner, Jorge Luis García Pérez 'Antúnez', initiated a hunger strike after prison authorities took away from him all his belongings, including his clothes. He has been kept in an isolation cell, in the Ariza prison, since last September. Last July, the prisoner was harshly beaten in front of his relatives by prison guards during a family visit. (EFE, 26/7/04)

July 28: Cuban dissident Diosdado Gonzalez Marrero, one of the 75 Fidel Castro opponents sentenced to lengthy prison terms a year ago, has spent more than two months in a confinement cell for demanding his "prisoner of conscience" status be respected, his wife said. Alejandrina Garcia de la Riva told the press that her husband, sentenced to 20 years, "has been punished for 64 days in a confined cell, without proper access to food, sun or water fit to drink." Garcia said that prison authorities in Pinar del Rio, west of Havana, told her that her husband will remain in the confinement cell if he refuses to get along with other prisoners. According to Garcia, Cuban penitentiary regulations stipulate that a prisoner can only be confined to these special cells for a maximum of 21 days and "my husband has served that three times over." "He does not wish to be with other prisoners, but rather treated as a prisoner of conscience," Garcia told the press in a telephone interview from her home in Matanzas, east of Havana. (EFE, 28/7/04)

August 4: Imprisoned journalist Normando Hernández González has been kept in a punishment cell for over 90 days, after he declared himself "plantado" (a protest for not receiving the treatment political prisoners should). Hernández' relatives have denounced that they haven't been allowed to visit him in prison since last May, the organization Madres y Mujeres Anti-Represión por Cuba (MAR por Cuba) said. The independent journalist began his "plantado" strike after he was "brutally beaten and dragged" by the guards at Kilo 5 1/2 prison, in Pinar del Río, where he was sent for a 25 years sentence in April 2003. (Netfor Cuba, 4/8/04)

August 4: One of 75 political dissidents arrested in a government crackdown last year was in the hospital after suffering a heart attack behind bars. Margarito Broche, who was sentenced to 25 years in prison for allegedly working with US diplomats to undermine Cuba's communist government, was transferred to Salvador Allende Hospital, said his wife, Maria de la Caridad Noa. Noa and other relatives waited outside the hospital in hopes of seeing the 47-year-old Broche. There was no official word on his condition. (AP, 5/8/04)

August 9: Political prisoner Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta, who was sentenced to 20 years in prison, is on hunger strike. In a statement, the dissident organization Directorio Democrático Cubano denounced that Herrera began the strike in protest for ill treatments received in jail. (Cubanoticias, 9/8/04)

August 9: In the absence of any official data, which is constantly denied by Cuban authorities, Cuban dissidents have prepared a report indicating that the number of high security prisons on the island has gone from 1 to 45; women's prisons from 1 to 12; and detention centres for minors have increased from 1 to 8. In the course of four and a half decades, there has been a disproportionate increase of prisons and inmates, according to the Cuban Commission of Human

Rights (CCDH), a banned but tolerated organization headed by activist Elizardo Sánchez. According to the CCDH, in 1958 there were 5.5 million people in Cuba and 14 penitentiaries, which housed 4000 inmates. Today, with a population of 11.2 million, the number of inmates is estimated to reach 100 thousand, held in around 200 prisons. (*Reforma*, 9/8/04)

August 11: Three Cuban dissidents, installed in a house of one of Havana's neighborhoods, are in their 11th day of hunger strike demanding freedom for political prisoners in the island. Carlos Miguel Lopez, 50, Francisco Moure, 44 and Yusimin Gil, 27, began the strike on August 1st in a house of La Lira, in the municipality of Arroyo Naranjo, where they have had only water, with their mouths covered with plaster, sitting under a Cuban flag next to a wall full of signs that demand unconditional freedom for all political prisoners. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 11/8/04)

August 11: Vladimiro Roca, leader of the dissident coalition Todos Unidos, said that La Lira strikers are members of ground organizations not known by the Cuban population. But, Roca acknowledged that their attitude has generated solidarity and concern among residents of the neighborhood where the strikers have installed themselves. "Total control by the [Cuban] regime does not allow that the population know what is going on", he said. "Although the government will not attend to their demands, the strike will have its impact in international public opinion, that is well informed of what is happening in Cuba," he added. Members of the National Commission for Reconciliation and Human Rights have visited the strikers, who will finish their protest on August 13, Fidel Castro's birthday. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 11/8/04)

August 11: Cuban political prisoner Cándido Terry Carbonell was released from prison after a two-year sentence. Carbonell Terry was sent to jail after walking along the streets with a 1.60 meter poster that said "Down with the dictatorship". (*AdCuba.Org*, 17/8/04)

August 11: Clara Lourdes Prieto, sister of independent journalist and political prisoner Fabio Prieto Llorente, reported that her brother began a hunger strike in Kilo 8 prison, Camagüey. The prisoner is demanding to be moved to a prison closer to his home, in Isla de la Juventud. (*Europa Press*, 19/8/04)

August 12: Political prisoner Léster González Pentón informed his relatives that he has been transferred from the Kilo 7 Prison in Camagüey to another one in Santa Clara, closer to his home. González Pentón has been serving a 20-year sentence since March 2003. He is the fourth member of the group of 75 to be transferred in recent hours. (*Cubanet*, 13/8/04)

August 23: Political prisoner Cándido Terry Carbonell was released from jail, after a two-year sentence for shouting "Down with Fidel" in front of tourists and passers by in Revolution Square, Havana. (*Cubanet*, 23/8/04)

August 23: Berta Antunez, sister of political prisoner, Jorge Luis García Perez, "Antunez", declared herself on a hunger strike for an indefinite period of time. The decision, as Ms. Antunez said is due to the situation that her brother is going through in the provincial prison in Ariza, Cienfuegos. "My family suffered an act of aggression during our visit last July 5 th, when the guards beat my brother in front of my own eyes," Berta Antúnez confirmed. The Antunez family had been told that within a month, the authorities would answer her letter, which is yet to happen, Berta Antunez has declared herself on a hunger strike to demand a definitive answer to all the arbitrary situations that her brother suffers in prison. (*Netfor Cuba*, 24/8/04)

August 23: Nivaldo Díaz Castellón, a Varela Project activist and member of Movimiento Cristiano Liberación (MCL) in Pinar del Río, was forced by State Security agents to get inside a police car where he was victim of harassment for two hours. After confiscating MCL papers from him -- including a letter to the municipal delegation of the National Assembly denouncing arbitrary procedures by local police, and receiving threats by the agents, Díaz Castellón was released. (*Grupo Decoro*, 23/8/04)

August 26: A score of dissidents and wives of jailed government opponents gathered in a Havana apartment for a day of fasting to demand a pardon for all political prisoners. Most of those observing the day of fasting were the wives of the 75 dissidents sentenced in 2003 to up to 28 years in prison for allegedly conspiring with the United States, undermining the principles of the revolution and infringing on the freedom of the state. The protest was headed by Dolia Leal Francisco, whose husband, dissident Nelson Aguiar Ramirez, chairman of the outlawed Cuban Orthodox Party, is serving a 13-year prison sentence in the eastern province of Guantanamo. "We're asking for the immediate release of all Cuban political prisoners, which number more than 300, not only the 'Group of 75,' and we're also denouncing the conditions in which they are being held," Leal said. (*EFE*, 26/8/04)

August 26: In the town of Placetás, in the province of Villa Clara, 335 kilometers (208 miles) east of Havana, dissident Bertha Antúnez has been on hunger strike since August 23 to demand that authorities transfer her brother, Jorge Luis García Pérez, to a jail in his native province, one of her relatives told the press. García Pérez was sentenced to 15 years in prison in 1993 after being found guilty of "enemy propaganda, attempted sabotage and possession of illegal arms and explosives," his brother-in-law, Alejandro García, said. Several dissident groups have gone on hunger strike in the past weeks to demand that the communist regime headed by Fidel Castro release the island's political prisoners. (*EFE*, 26/8/04)

August 26: Blanca Reyes, wife of Cuban dissident and poet Raul Rivero, criticized the "harassment" of her husband in prison where he is completing a 20-year sentence. Reyes informed the press that her husband called her and explained that on August 20 he had a "verbally violent incident" involving prison security personnel. "They threatened to put him in solitary confinement for five days, but then decided to revoke his marital visiting privileges," stated Reyes. "They are tormenting Raul, even though he is smart and tries to take it very calmly, but they are trying to humiliate Raul, they are trying to break him," she said. Rivero is being held in the Ciego de Avila prison some 450 km from Havana. According to his wife, Rivero is entitled to one visit by his spouse every five months, and the visit authorized for next September 11 has been cancelled. (*EFE*, 26/8/04)

August 31: Bertha Antúnez -- the sister of political prisoner Jorge Luis Antúnez-- was taken to a hospital in Placetás, Las Villas province, after losing consciousness. Over 20 persons, among relatives and human rights activists, have joined a hunger strike that Bertha initiated on August 27, in demand of better treatment and better conditions for her brother in jail. Among the people who have joined the hunger strike are Antúnez' relatives, Alejandro García Sardiñas and Damaris García -- Bertha's husband and daughter --, Mirta Asela Pernet Reyes -- her mother --, Damaysi Jiménez Pernet, Iris Pérez Aguilera and Mario Pérez Aguilera -- her cousins. Also joining the hunger strike were human rights activists, Taimara Agramonte Grau, José Antonio Pérez González, Francisco Becerra Vázquez, Blas Fortún Martínez, Pedro Regalado Cárdenas Silverio, Amado Ruiz Moreno, Xiomara Martín Jiménez, María Elvira Ruiz García, Guillermo Pérez Yera, Marta Beatriz Roque, Marilín Díaz Fernández and Lázaro González Arana. The Directorio Democrático Cubano, based in Miami, made a call to Cuban authorities to listen to Bertha Antúnez requests for better treatment for her brother in jail. Dissident Martha Beatriz Roque who was recently released from jail, after having been sentenced in April 2003, joined the hunger strike. (*Europa Press*, 31/8/04)

August 31: The wives of Cuban political prisoners Hector Palacios and Oscar Espinosa, hospitalized several months ago due to ill health, expressed that they are worried because of their husbands' health. Gisela Delgado made a plea in favor of her husband, 63-year old Hector Palacios, in a letter addressed to the International Red Cross and international human rights organizations. Delgado reported that Palacios, sentenced to 25 years in prison as part of the group of 75 dissidents sentenced in the spring of 2003, "is in poor health and in the coming days his situation may worsen." Miriam Leiva shared a communique in which she warns that the health of her husband, Oscar Espinosa Chepe, sentenced to 20 years in jail, "continues to decline." She also expressed her "worry" for his "progressive deterioration." Espinosa Chepe, who also belongs

to the "group of 75," is in the hospital at the "Combinado del Este" jail in La Habana. (*EFE*, 31/9/04)

September 2: Dozens have joined a fast supporting the hunger strike that dissident Berta Antúnez has maintained since August 23. Antúnez told the press that Cuban authorities have given her no other option than the hunger strike. She is demanding that her brother, political prisoner, Jorge Luis Pérez, "Antúnez" be transferred to a prison in his home province. (*Radio Martí*, 2/9/04)

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September 3: After a mass at the Catholic temple in Santiago de las Vegas, Havana, 44 peaceful dissidents, members of the Opposition Movement for the New Republic, presided by José Díaz Silva and the Cuban Pro Human Rights Party (affiliated to the Andrei Sajarov Foundation led by René Montes de Oca Martija), they all marched through the streets of Santiago de las Vegas in a peaceful demonstration until they arrived at the José Martí Park. Once in the park, they sang the National Anthem and Montes de Oca called for national reconciliation, peace and love amongst all Cubans, asking also for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners. The State Security watched the peaceful demonstration. (*Puente Informativo*, 3/9/04)

September 4: A group of dissident organizations and individuals who had been supporting Bertha Antúnez in her hunger strike have stopped fasting. Antúnez, the sister of political prisoner, Jorge Luis García Pérez "Antúnez", also stopped a hunger strike she had begun last month waiting for Cuban authorities to respond to the petitions she had made of transferring her brother to a prison in their home province. Officials from the Ariza prison in Camagüey, are planning to transfer Bertha's brother to a prison in Villaclara, the province where the Antúnez live. (*Cubanet*, 9/9/04)

September 7: Wives and family of the 75 Cuban dissidents incarcerated in the spring of 2003, also known as the "ladies in white," held a candlelight vigil to pray to the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, Cuba's patron saint, for the release of their relatives. At the Centro Habana home of Raúl Rivero, some twenty women in white attire lit candles and prayed to the Saint on her designated feast day. (*AFP*, 8/9/04)

September 7: Independent journalist and prisoner of conscience Víctor Rolando Arroyo Carmona, sentenced to 26 years in prison, has been on a hunger strike since September 1, according to his mother, Martha Carmona. Ms. Carmona, 76, fears for the health of her son, whom she has not been able to see since his arrest on March 18, 2003. (*Cubanet*, 7/9/04)

September 8: Cuban political prisoner Nelson Aguiar Ramírez remains on a hunger strike, demanding a transfer to another prison, his wife Dolia Leal told the press. According to Leal, her husband began his hunger strike when he was released from solitary confinement into a cellblock reserved for dangerous inmates. Aguiar is serving out a 13-year prison sentence. (*Martí Noticias.Com*, 9/9/04)

September 18: Over 20 "Ladies in White," as a group of wives and relatives of the 75 dissidents incarcerated in Cuba in 2003 is referred to, held a fast in Havana to mark the 18th month of their loved ones' imprisonment. Coinciding with the "Oppositionist's Day," the event took place at the home of Laura Pollán, wife of Héctor Maseda, independent journalist and leader of the Cuban Liberal Democratic Party, who is currently serving out a 20-year prison sentence. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 19/9/04)

September 24: The "Ladies in White" prayed to the *Virgen de las Mercedes* (Our Lady of Mercy) for the release of their incarcerated husbands. The overnight vigil was held at the home of Gisela Delgado, wife of Héctor Palacio, who has so far served 18 months of the 25-year prison sentence he received in 2003. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 25/9/04)

September 27: Luis Enrique Ferrer García, a political prisoner who was sentenced to 28 years in jail, initiated a hunger strike. According to Oswaldo Payá, leader of the Movimiento Cristiano Liberación (MCL), Ferrer García stated that he will "continue the strike until the end", after having received a "sadistic treatment" and having been beaten by prison authorities at the Prisión Juvenil of Santa Clara. Ferrer García, 30, who is the youngest of the 75 dissidents sent to prison last year, is determined to go on with the hunger strike, Payá said in Havana. The prisoner was the coordinator of the MCL at the time he was sent to jail in April 2003. (*AFP*, 28/9/04)

September 29: Cuban dissident René Montes de Oca Martija, was sentenced to 8 months in jail. Montes de Oca, secretary general of the dissident Partido Pro Derechos Humanos de Cuba, affiliated to the Andrei Sajarov Foundation, was charged with minor contempt of authorities, a minor crime that usually doesn't result in a prison sentence. (*Puente Informativo*, 29/9/04)

October 4: In Havana, Julia Cecilia Delgado, acting president of the Liberal Democratic Party of Cuba (PLDC), criticized the harassment against political prisoner and president of the PLDC Héctor Maseda by prison authorities at "La Pendiente" prison in Villa Clara. Maseda, 61, is a scientist and academic as well as a prominent journalist who was sentenced to 20 years in prison during the crackdown against dissidents in 2003. Maseda was kept in solitary confinement for 17 months before being transferred to prison with common and dangerous criminals. (*Netfor Cuba*, 4/10/04)

October 5: Wives of jailed Cuban dissidents planted themselves in a park across from Havana's Revolution Plaza to protest delays in transferring one of the women's husbands to a hospital in the capital for medical treatment. The woman, Bertha Soler Fernandez, came prepared with food, water and bedding, and said she might be there for days. Soler was joined by five other women whose husbands, brothers or sons are in jail for opposing the government of Fidel Castro. Soler said her husband, Angel Moya Acosta, is a human rights activist among the 75 who was sentenced to 20 years in jail. He is suffering from extreme back pain due to a herniated disc in his prison cell in the eastern province of Granma, she said. "I have been asking for a temporary transfer to a civilian hospital in Havana where I can help care for him," she said. Earlier, Soler delivered a handwritten letter addressed to Castro explaining her husband's situation to state offices behind a monument of Cuban independence hero Jose Marti in the Revolution Plaza. (*AP*, *AFP*, *Reuters*, 5/10/04)

October 6: The wife of a jailed Cuban dissident demanding her husband to be transferred to the capital for medical treatment refused to leave her spot in a park after an authority told her the government was working on her case. Bertha Soler Fernandez, protesting delays in the transfer, vowed to stay until she saw her husband in person. "I am going to wait patiently here," Soler said. A government official approached Soler, some 30 hours after she planted herself in a park across from Havana's Revolution Plaza. Soler then met with the official in nearby offices for nearly an hour, during which time she said he told her the request was being dealt with. "He told me they are trying to find a solution to the case," she said. Soler said her husband Angel Moya Acosta is suffering from severe back pain due to a herniated disc in his prison cell in the eastern province of Granma. On August 10, Soler said authorities told her they would grant her request to temporarily transfer her husband to a civilian hospital in Havana. But more than 55 days later, he has yet to arrive, and Soler said she would stay in the park until she sees him or authorities arrest her -- whichever comes first. (*AP*, 6/10/04)

October 7: Blanca Reyes, the wife of Cuban political prisoner and journalist, Raúl Rivero, said that her husband's jail conditions have been improved. She said to the press that jail authorities

have rescheduled her visit to the jail –that was cancelled in September--, and that two criminal prisoners, who were in the same cell with Rivero, have been transferred to another cell. In a phone conversation with Reporters Without Borders, Reyes said that Rivero still needs some medication that was previously denied to him by the prison authorities. (*Europa Press*, 7/10/04)

October 7: The wife of ailing Cuban dissident Angel Moya achieved her goal of getting her husband transferred from prison to a Havana hospital, where she visited him, after staging a public protest in a city park close to the Revolution Square. "Everything was in my favor and I had the hope that the transfer would come about," Berta Soler Fernandez told the press upon her return from visiting her husband in the Carlos J. Finlay military hospital. She has said that her spouse needs urgent medical attention for a herniated disc. About 50 Cuban police forcibly removed Soler from her protest "camp" in "Parquecito de Comunicaciones" along with several companions. She and her supporters had been there for two days. "They weren't really violent with us, there was no violence. But for just 10 people, there were 50 of them with many cars and even ambulances," one of the women told the press. Gisela Delgado, Alejandrina Garcia, Margarita Borges and Ines Guerra, relatives of some of the 75 dissidents sent to prison last year in the communist regime's harshest crackdown on peaceful protest in decades, were evicted from the park along with Soler and her sister-in-law. According to Delgado, authorities told her that "this is an act we're not going to tolerate (...) (and) they took us by force, put us in cars and drove us to the doors of our houses." (*EFE, AP*, 8/10/04)

October 13: The Cuban Pro Human Rights Party, affiliated to the Andrei Sajarov Foundation celebrated a vigil for the liberty of all political prisoners, especially for the liberty of their General Secretary René Montes de Oca. The vigil was held at the home of Modesto Leopoldo Valdivia Varela, who resides in Barrio Azul, municipality of Arroyo Naranjo. After the invocation and the National Anthem, there was a moment of silence in memory of the Cubans that have disappeared in the Florida Straights trying to get to the United States due to the communist regime. After the vigil concluded, everyone was advised that Montes de Oca is in an isolation cell at the prison La Pendiente in Santa Clara and he is not allowed to receive correspondence and cannot receive any telephone calls. (*Puente Informativo*, 20/10/04)

October 15: Combined forces of the National Police and that of the State Security forced their way into the home of the peaceful opponent Lázaro González, located in Sibanicú, Camaguey, declared Juan Carlos González Leyva in a telephone conversation with Acción Democrática Cubana. Said agents accused Lázaro of civil disobedience and proceeded to brutally beat him and drag him all the way to a Jeep and threw him inside, taking him to the police station. The day before the incident, State Security agents incited his neighbors to throw rocks and to threaten the physical integrity of the opponent, and that of his wife, Marilyn Díaz Fernández, an independent journalist who was also beaten mercilessly in front of her 10 year old son who at the time of this violent beating tried to escape through the only door of the house screaming. (*Puente Informativo*, 19/10/04)

October 15: Political prisoner Jorge Luis García Pérez "Antúnez", was finally transferred to a prison close to his home in Santa Clara. After several protests by the prisoner and his relatives, that included a hunger strike, Antúnez was transferred from Ariza prison, in Cienfuegos, to La Pendiente, in Santa Clara. A month ago, Bertha Antúnez Pernet, the prisoner's sister, had gone into hunger strike in demand of better conditions for her brother in jail. (*Puente Informativo*, 15/10/04)

Octubre 19: The Cuban political prisoner Oscar Elías Biscet went on a hunger strike to call attention to "the abuses against him and two other inmates", reported his relatives who have appealed to the international community to "save his life". Last September 30, Biscet's 70 year-old mother handed a letter to the Council of State addressed to Fidel Castro, "detailing all the abuses committed against her son" and requesting permission to contact her son, but has received no reply yet. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 20/10/04)

October 25: Fidel Castro threatened to imprison those who travel to Cuba carrying funds for the dissidents. "It could well be that one day they would be arrested here and sent to trial", said Castro during a long speech broadcast on Cuban radio and television about the new measures to end the circulation of US dollars on the island and to replace it with the Cuban "convertible peso". Castro said that the new measures would hold back money transfers for dissidents, whom the Cuban government calls "mercenaries paid by the United States". (*EFE*, 25/10/04)

November 1: The health of jailed Cuban dissident Raul Rivero has deteriorated following the appearance of cysts in his kidney, his wife Blanca Reyes said. "His kidney has multiple cysts, seven cysts, one of them measures 20 millimeters (3/4 inch)," the wife of the journalist and poet told the press. Reyes noted that Rivero suffers from emphysema, which "is not receiving proper treatment in jail." Rivero, 59, was sentenced in 2003 to 20 years behind bars in a summary trial following the arrests of 75 pro-democracy advocates accused of conspiring with Washington against the Cuban state. The writer is serving his sentence in Canaleta prison, some 460 kilometers (285 miles) east of Havana. (*EFE*, 2/11/04)

November 2: Prominent Cuban dissident, Oswaldo Payá, leader of the Christian Liberation Movement (MLC), denounced the "massive torture" practices against imprisoned dissidents in the island, and asked the international community to join together in a petition of amnesty for all political prisoners in Cuba. Payá expressed his concern for the "systematic cruelty applied" to "the prisoners of the Cuban Spring", the 75 dissidents sentenced in 2003, and further denounced "particular sadism in the actions of the prison authorities". "The physical and psychological damage the prisoners suffer should not leave Cubans and the international community in silence and insensitive", pointed out Payá in a press release issued from Havana. (*EFE*, 3/11/04)

November 6: Although no executions have been carried out in Cuba in the last 18 months, a human rights organization has denounced that Cuban authorities' continue to ignore international requests for a ban on capital punishment on the island. According to a special report by the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN), the last executions on record were those of three individuals accused of hijacking a ferryboat and taking those on board hostage in April 2003. "Presently, there are 40-50 people on death row," said the organization, whose estimates place the number of executions by firing squad in the last 4 decades on the island between 5,000 and 6,000. (*Sun Sentinel*, 6/11/04)

November 7: Political prisoner Fabio Prieto, jailed in Kilo 8 prison, Camaguey, denounced what he calls "never ending beatings" against political prisoners by prison authorities. Prieto specially denounced beatings against Daniel Ferrer Martínez, Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta and other prisoners, locked in the torture area known as "Major Severity". Prieto said that the prison guards broke the telephones, mostly to avoid news getting out of the prison. Prisoners refused to stand up for the morning "count" as a form of protest, causing extreme anger to the State Security guards who then authorized the brutal beatings in retaliation. (*Puente Informativo*, 7/11/04)

November 7: In a letter sent to Fidel Castro, Dolia Leal Francisco, the wife of political prisoner Nelson Aguiar Ramírez, denounced the abuses against her husband by prison guards at Combinado de Guantánamo facility. "Today I received the terrible news from Guantánamo that my husband Nelson was a victim to another beating", the letter says. Nelson is 69 years old and suffers from several illnesses all of which have been aggravated in jail. "How can such an ill, peaceful and defenseless individual be brutally beaten? Why such terror? Isn't it enough to keep him in jail? Is it that they want to kill him?," Dolia asked in her letter to Castro. (*Puente Informativo*, 7/11/04)

November 9: After being more than 60 days in a punishment cell at the Kilo 8 prison, Pinar del Río, political prisoner Nelson Moline Espino was transferred to a unit with criminal prisoners, at Kilo 5 ½ prison. "They had him locked in a punishment cell for over 60 days for refusing to follow military orders, and for refusing to eat the food served in prison", Moline's wife, Kirenia Guerra Lugo said. Moline Espino was sentenced to 20 years in jail, during the March 2003 repression

against dissidents. He has been recognized prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International. (*Puente Informativo*, 9/11/04)

November 9: Cuban communist authorities convicted two dissidents on "vandalism" charges and sentenced them to prison terms of three years and four months, a human rights organization said. The two - Alexis Triana Montesinos and Jose Lorenzo Perez Fidalgo - are members of the Cuban Liberal Movement, which is banned by authorities on the island, said the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, also not officially recognized. The pair were arrested in July and accused of breaking windows at an exchange house and a computer club. "Triana, 25, and Perez Fidalgo, 49, "are members of the Cuban Liberal Movement, an opposition group that in no way promotes acts of that kind," said the Commission, headed by dissident Elizardo Sanchez. (*EFE*, 9/11/04)

November 16: The members of the Villa Clara delegations of the Cuban Party for Human Rights, which is affiliated with the Andrei Sakharov Foundation, have joined an open-ended fast organized in support of the Party's incarcerated secretary general, René Montes de Oca Martija. The fast is being held in demand of proper medical care for Montes de Oca. (*Puente Informativo*, 16/11/04)

November 18: A group of dissidents and wives of political prisoners attended a Mass, in Havana which they said was dedicated to "the freedom of Cuba." "It's simply something to demonstrate our desire for Cuba to be free soon," said dissident and former political prisoner Martha Beatriz Roque as she left the service at the capital's Church of Our Lady of the Rosary. Other attendees included Rene Gomez Manzano and Felix Bonne, Roque's colleagues in the Assembly to Promote Civil Society, and the wives of jailed dissidents Oscar Elias Biscet, Angel Moya, Adolfo Hernandez and Arnaldo Ramos. The Mass followed the drafting and dispatch of a letter to leaders meeting at the Ibero-American Summit in Costa Rica asking them to press Fidel Castro's regime to free political prisoners. (*EFE*, 18/11/04)

November 24: Independent journalist Manuel Vazquez Portal, one of the 75 dissidents rounded up and jailed by the Fidel Castro regime in April 2003, told the press that the Cuban government has authorized him to migrate to the United States. Vazquez Portal said he has just been given the green light by Cuban migration authorities to leave the Communist-ruled island, accompanied by wife Yolanda Huerga and 10-year-old son Gabriel. Vazquez Portal said that upon his release a State Security agent told him leaving the country would be his best bet. "What made me decide to leave is the Cuban government's stubborn attitude toward the request made by Europe and the world for democratic changes, openness, the possibility of honorably exercising my profession within a legal framework," he said. Faced with the government's attitude, Vazquez Portal said, "The Cuban people have two options: massive migration or rebellion". (*EFE*, 24/11/04)

November 26: Cuban authorities have transferred 13 imprisoned dissidents, journalist-poet Raúl Rivero among them, from facilities around the island to Havana, a move the opposition hopes signals their imminent release. All were part of the "Group of 75," peaceful dissidents who were sentenced to up to 28 years in prison after summary trials in the spring of 2003. The prisoners were told that they would be transferred to Havana for medical checkups, a procedure usually undertaken prior to release, said Elizardo Sánchez of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation. Among the transferees is Raúl Rivero, who was serving a 20-year sentence at Canaletas, 280 miles from Havana. (*EFE*, 28/11/04)

November 29: Cuban authorities began releasing some jailed dissidents, including independent economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe. Espinosa was granted parole on his 64th birthday for health reasons and returned to his Havana home. Espinosa said the Cuban government made "a very serious mistake" when it jailed 75 dissidents in the spring of 2003, and the releases came because authorities "should be reconsidering (the issue)." Despite the difficulties he suffered in jail, Espinosa Chepe said he had no intention of leaving Cuba. "I feel Cuban and I want to die in my own country," he said. Also freed were dissidents Marcelo Lopez and Margarito Broche. The

three prisoners released (Oscar Espinosa Chepe, Marcelo Lopez and Margarito Broche) were the most ill among 10 prisoners whose health was delicate. (*EFE, Notimex, CNN, 29/11/04*)

November 30: Cuba has freed one of the country's best-known dissidents, the acclaimed poet and journalist Raul Rivero. The 59-year-old was among 75 people arrested in a huge government crackdown last year and given long prison terms. He said he was in good health and attributed his release to international pressure and in particular efforts by the Spanish government. "I thought I might be released because they told me they were moving me to Havana, but they didn't make anything clear until today," Rivero said, explaining that he had been paroled indefinitely and that, during the last few minutes, "the treatment was very cordial." Rivero insisted his intention was to "continue writing and doing what I've always done." He would not say if he planned to stay in Cuba or leave over the next few months. "I believe this is a time to wait. I'm going to see what's happening, how much movement I'm allowed and how much work I can do," he told the press. According to Rivero, the release of dissidents over the past few hours indicates "a desire to correct certain positions" on the part of the Cuban government, although "I don't know if they realize it was a mistake to jail the 75 dissidents." (*BBC, EFE, The Globe and Mail, 30/11/04*)

November 30: Though the releases from prison of poet and journalist Raul Rivero and dissident Oswaldo Alfonso were applauded by Cuba's internal opposition, opponents of Fidel Castro's regime nonetheless continued to demand that all political prisoners be released from the island's jails. "Raul is the most emblematic Cuban political prisoner for most of the world, but I think that the government is providing ammunition for the Spanish government's agenda," activist Elizardo Sanchez, of the banned Human Rights Commission, told the press. "Raul is the crown jewel, but there are still more in the prisons, and the Cuban government has presented foreign governments with political prisoners in some fashion over all these years," said Sanchez, who recalled that Havana released 3,500 such inmates in 1978-79 as part of an effort to forge a dialogue with the United States. Sanchez also expressed concern that many of the nearly 20 political prisoners who, such as Rivero, were recently transferred to prison hospitals in Havana would return to jail after undergoing medical exams. Vladimiro Roca, spokesperson of the opposition group Todos Unidos, said Rivero's release "changed nothing ... (and) the government is not giving any positive signs with respect to human rights." Roca was critical of the government's parole system, noting that the released prisoners' freedom is "reversible" and may be revoked at the discretion of authorities. "They put the sword of Damocles over their heads and are showing that the petitions by Spain and the European Union are a despicable request," he said. Marta Beatriz Roque, one of the released members of the "Group of 75," said Rivero's parole is directly related to the maneuverings of the Spanish government. (*EFE, 30/11/04*)

December 1: At least 18 jailed Cuban dissidents have been transferred to a prison hospital in Havana amid speculation they may be released. Relatives say activist physician Oscar Elias Biscet and opposition politician Hector Palacios were among those transferred. The move comes after authorities this week released five of 75 pro-democracy activists jailed last year in a crackdown on dissidents. (*AFP, VOA, 2/12/04*)

December 2: The Cuban authorities have released a journalist who was serving a 15-year term for anti-government activities. Edel Jose Garcia Diaz, 60, was freed following a medical checkup at a Havana prison hospital, his sister, Esperanza Garcia, told the press. She said he suffered from emotional problems and a cyst on his kidney. "Now I have to recover my health," Garcia said after showing up at the home of the wife of another dissident still behind bars. Garcia said he was granted an immigrant visa by the US government years ago and would now try to get permission from the Cuban government to leave. The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists said it was heartened and relieved at the release, but spokesman Carlos Lauria said it was vital to remember that 24 independent journalists are still behind bars in Cuba "simply for doing their jobs." (*BBC, AP, 2/12/04*)

December 3: Migdalia Hernández Enamorado, a 35 year old forgotten activist and member of the group of the 75 was released from the prison Combinado de Guantánamo for women on November 12, 2004, said Ada Kaly Márquez Abascal, acting national delegate of the Democratic Party November 30 "Frank País". Agents of the State Security arrested Hernández Enamorado and her husband Rafael Benitez Chui on March 19, 2003, when they protested the regime's 2003 crackdown against the Cuban internal opposition in front of the local police headquarters in Guantánamo. Immediately thereafter, they were both sent to the prison Combinado de Guantánamo. On September 18, 2003, Hernández Enamorado and Benitez Chui were tried for the supposed crime of contempt and were sentenced to 2 and 4 years in prison respectively. (*Puente Informativo*, 3/12/04)

December 3: Oppositionist leader Bertha Antúnez Pernet initiated a protest in front of the penitentiary La Pendiente, in the city of Santa Clara. Berta has been protesting a 21-day-punishment imposed on her brother, the imprisoned dissident Jorge Luis García Pérez "Antúnez". Luis Pozo, the prison's director, told Berta that Jorge Luis was sent to a punishment cell for disrespecting Fidel Castro. Over 15 oppositionists have joined Berta in her protest, despite the deployment of police forces in front of La Pendiente. (*Grupo Decoro*, 3/12/04)

December 6: The Cuban government released independent journalist Jorge Olivera Castillo, the seventh dissident to be released in the past week. His release brings to 14 the number of prisoners let out this year for health reasons from among the "Group of 75" democracy advocates, including rights activists, independent journalists and non-official librarians, sentenced to long prison terms in the repressive wave of the spring of 2003. Speaking to journalists at his home, Olivera defended his opposition to Castro. "Dissent shouldn't be seen as a criminal act," he said. Olivera said he planned to leave Cuba for the United States on a visa he was granted before his arrest. The former television editor worked for an independent news agency, Havana Press, which is coordinated by a Cuban exile in Miami. He also contributed to the country's first dissident magazine, *De Cuba*, which was closed down after publishing two issues last year. (*EFE, CNN, Los Angeles Times*, 6/12/04)

December 6: Cuba plans to release more dissidents from jail and expects a thaw in the European Union relations with the communist government of the island, said Ricardo Alarcón, President of Cuba's National Assembly. Alarcón indicated that the release of prisoners was not done for political reasons but on the grounds of health, age and good behaviour. During an interview in Caracas, Alarcón confirmed more would be freed. He also added that "maybe the entire group" could eventually be granted an early release from prison. (*Reuters*, 6/12/04)

December 6: Vicente Campanioni, a human rights activist and member of the Democratic Party November 30 "Frank País" was fired from his job at a health care center in Centro Habana. According to the report given to the press, the dissident was fired after refusing to participate in political activities organized by regime authorities during working hours, and for refusing to join the National Health Workers Union, under the control of the official Cuban Workers Union (CTC). According to data provided, more than three thousand human rights activists, independent workers and members of the opposition have been fired from state posts for political reasons. (*Reuters*, 6/12/04)

December 7: Daybreak found the walls of several streets of Santiago de Cuba plastered with anti-government posters and slogans like "Down with Fidel". Anti-government posters and graffiti appeared on some of the main streets, on walls and facades of homes. (*Cubanet*, 7/12/04)

December 8: The Cuban government denied permission to the President of the Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation, Elizardo Sánchez, to attend a ceremony at the Élysée Palace, said the spokesperson of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hervé Ladsous. Sánchez had been invited by the French government to attend the presentation of the Human Rights Award of the French Republic, which he himself had received in 1996. (*Europa Press*, 8/12/04)

December 8: Cuban authorities confirmed the prison sentences recently imposed on two opponents of the Communist regime. The sentences against two militants of the opposition Cuban Liberal Movement (CLM), considered illegal by the Cuban government, were handed down during an appellate hearing in Havana's provincial court. Last month, Alexis Triana Montesinos, 25, was sentenced to three months in prison and Jose Lorenzo Perez Fidalgo, 49, to four months on charges of damaging state property. Both were arrested July 5 and accused of throwing rocks at the windows of two buildings. Leon Padron Azcuy, the leader of the CLM, said there was no convincing evidence against the pair. Triana Montesinos and Perez Fidalgo "have been sentenced simply for being members of the Liberal Cuban Movement and opponents of the government," said Padron. (EFE, 8/12/04)

December 8: Cuban political prisoner Héctor Palacios Ruiz, one of the 75 dissidents sent to prison in the spring of 2003, visited his mother in Havana for nearly four hours, according to family sources. This is the first time that authorities have allowed Palacios to leave prison to visit a relative. On November 30, Palacios, together with other jailed dissidents, was transferred to the hospital of Combinado del Este Prison in Havana, but was not released. (EFE, 9/12/04)

December 10: Some 20 white-clad Cuban women - wives and mothers of political prisoners - marked International Human Rights Day with a public fast to demand the release of those jailed for peacefully opposing the 45-year-old Communist regime. "We have come together because we aspire to free our men, reunite our families and denounce the human rights violations existing in our country," the women said in a communique. The fast was held at the home of Laura Pollan, wife of Hector Maseda Gutierrez, one of 75 dissidents sentenced in the spring of 2003 to up to 28 years in prison. On the 56th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the women said "we are alone, but not for having chosen the path of retreat and solitude. Our fate has been truncated because they have taken away our men, our youth, and destroyed our families." They said that for almost two years they have "suffered the locking up, the ill treatment and the lack of human rights that our relatives endure in Cuban jails." "We, the 'Women in White,' on this day ask that justice be done and that they unconditionally release our husbands and relatives, and we pledge to continue struggling as long as a single one remains in prison," they said. Surrounded by other wives and relatives, Pollan read the communique in her home against the backdrop of a Cuban flag inscribed with the names of the 75 imprisoned opponents of the regime who were sentenced in March and April of last year. (EFE, 10/12/04)

December 13: Three Cuban dissidents say they have found tiny listening devices in their homes, underlining and to some degree embarrassing the communist government's efforts to monitor the affairs of its critics. Prominent activist Oswaldo Payá showed foreign reporters in Havana two small microphones he said he found inside the telephone junction boxes in the walls of his bedroom and dining room. "We are indignant that such a low method was used against a family's home," Payá, leader of a signature drive for a referendum on democratic reforms, told the reporters. Laura Pollán, wife of jailed independent journalist Héctor Maseda, said that she had found a listening device hidden in the telephone box in her dining room -- a frequent gathering spot for visitors. "It's a tiny rectangular chip," Pollán told the press. "It's not a complete surprise because I've always suspected they listened to my conversations. But when I actually found [the device], I was somewhat stunned. All I could do was laugh." (*The Miami Herald*, 13/12/04)

December 20: Three youths, Alexis Pérez Ricardo, Yordanis Hernández and Angel Millan, were brutally attacked and beaten by combined forces of the police and the so-called "Brigadas de Respuesta Rápida" (*Rapid Response Brigades*) after attending a patriotic ceremony organized by the Christian Democratic Party. They were intercepted on the street by over 20 people chanting pro-government slogans, who threw rocks at them and beat them with sticks. (*Cubanet*, 20/12/04)

December 21: With support from other dissident organizations, members of the Liberal Democratic Party of Cuba (PLDC) went on a fast in solidarity with Héctor Maseda, president of

the PLDC, who is in the La Pendiente Prison, in Santa Clara. The protesters demanded his release. (*Cubanet*, 21/12/04)

December 22: State Security agents seized several documents from activist Fredesvinda Hernández, coordinator of the Varela Project campaign in San Cristóbal, Pinar del Río. Among the documents seized were several issues of the "Revista Hispano Cubana" (Spanish-Cuban Magazine) and a draft list of the signatories of the copy of the Varela Project which was submitted to the National Assembly in 2002. (*Cubanet*, 22/12/04)

Relations with the international community and Cuban exile organizations

[See also, Foreign Affairs/ Europe/ Latin America]

January 10: Wives and mothers of Cuban dissidents that received harsh prison sentences last year demanded more activism on the part of the Latin American governments with regards to the social and political crisis in the island. Under the title "Message to the Heads of State of the Americas," a score of women wrote a letter to the presidents in the Hemisphere, asking them to consider the human rights situation and lack of democracy under Fidel Castro. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 10/1/04)

January 13: Reporters Without Borders has strongly condemned an assault against Victor Rolando Arroyo Carmona, a journalist who was brutally beaten by prison guards in the provincial Guantánamo prison, eastern Cuba, and urged the authorities to punish his assailants and to protect prisoners from further harm. Arroyo was taken from his cell by three prison guards and dragged to a room where they beat him about the face and body. They also deliberately shut his leg in a door. He told his wife Elsa González Padrón in a telephone call that he was still suffering from the after effects of the attack. "It is the second time in a month that a jailed journalist has been attacked," said Robert Ménard, secretary general of Reporters Without Borders. (*Notimex*, 13/1/04)

January 20: Reporters Without Borders demonstrated against the imprisonment of 30 journalists in Cuba, at an art exhibition at a major Paris landmark attended by the Cuban Culture Minister. Demonstrators made their protest at the Great Arch of La Defense as the Cuban minister and the Cuban ambassador to Paris visited the rooftop opening of a major exhibition of contemporary Cuban art. (*Netfo Cuba.com*, 20/1/4)

January 21: In a press statement issued by the State Department, the US government condemned "the continued unfair detention" of political prisoners in Cuba, and demanded to Cuban authorities their release. The document emphasizes the release of 75 independent Cuban journalists, librarians, and human rights defenders, who have been kept in jail since April 2003. But it adds that: "Such deprivation and flagrant abuse of human rights have not been limited to the group of 75. In February, human rights activist Leonardo Bruzon Avila, who is in poor health due to repeated hunger strikes, will soon complete two years in prison without a trial. In March, blind pro-democracy activist Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leyva will also complete two years in prison without a trial. Gonzalez was jailed for protesting the police beating of an independent journalist. Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet, who has worked tirelessly to express his commitment to the use of non-violence to achieve change, was arrested in December 2002 for attempting to teach others about international human rights practices ." (*Europa Press*, 22/1/04)

January 22: Following denunciation by Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF), the French Minister of Culture, Jean-Jacques Aillagon, expressed his "firm condemnation" of the physical assault of a reporter at the hands of the security staff during a Cuban art exhibit in Paris. (*EFE*, 22/1/04)

January 24: Oswaldo Paya, leader of the banned dissident Christian Freedom Movement (Movimiento Cristiano Liberación), issued a statement saying that those "wanting to be respectful and supportive of the Cuban people" should support "peaceful democratic change, referendum

and dialogue, liberation of political prisoners, raise their voice and pray for our silent people, and not lose hope." The statement was handed to Orthodox Archbishop Dimitrios of New York - who traveled to Cuba for Ecumenic Patriarch Bartholomew's visit - at a reception at the residence of the US representative in Havana, James Cason. Several dissidents asked the Archbishop to press the Cuban government to free dozens of opposition figures sentenced to lengthy prison terms in last year's sweeping political crackdown. "I told him about the situation of the 75 political prisoners in Cuba and that they had to be released," said Miriam Leiva, wife of imprisoned dissident Oscar Espinosa Chepe. "He said that they are praying." Cason's event was attended by several dissidents, spouses of jailed dissidents, foreign diplomats and a delegation of Greek Americans. Bartholomew I and his entourage, invited and expected to attend the reception, did not show up. (AFP, *The Chicago Tribune*, 24/1/04)

January 26: The International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (CIDC) and the Czech non-governmental organization People in Need Foundation (PINF) have nominated Cuban dissident Oswaldo Paya Sardiñas for the Nobel Peace Prize 2004. The nomination reflects their acknowledgement of Oswaldo Paya and the Cuban democratic opposition's continuous effort for a non-violent transition to democracy, CIDC and PINF said in a statement. According to the organizations, Paya is a man of firm moral principles and an example of courage who contributes to the strengthening of freedom and peace in the world. The nomination of Paya for the Nobel Prize also means full support for the Varela Project, which strives for a referendum on extending political freedoms in Cuba, and for the Cuban opposition in its fight for freedom and democracy, according to the organizations. (*Czech Republic Business News Service*, 26/1/04)

January 29: Amnesty International added four more Cubans to its list of "prisoners of conscience," reinforcing Cuba's status as the country with the highest number of such prisoners in the Western Hemisphere. "At least in terms of prisoners, it's not getting any better in Cuba," Eric Olson, Amnesty's Americas advocacy director, said in a telephone interview. The move brought to 84 the number of "prisoners of conscience" in Cuban jails. That includes all 75 government opponents convicted in summary trials during an island-wide sweep last spring. (*The Miami Herald*, 29/1/04)

February 3: The People in Need Czech humanitarian organisation has supported dissidents and families of political prisoners in Cuba for seven years and its delegation visited some of them recently, the daily *Mlada fronta Dnes* (MfD) reports. Selected families of imprisoned Cuban dissidents will receive a one-off humanitarian aid of 200 dollars from the money collected within the SOS Cuba public fund raising, MfD notes. "Our aim is simple. We have been trying by all means to support democratic forces in Cuba," People in Need director Tomas Pojar told the paper. (*CTK*, 3/2/04)

February 17: French Member of Parliament, Yves Bur, asked the Cuban Ambassador in Paris permission to visit two political prisoners he sponsors. They are brothers José Daniel and Luis Enrique Ferrer García. Bur, also Vice-President of the ruling Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), expressed during his meeting with Ambassador Eumelio Caballero that "the situation of Cuban prisoners of conscience is unacceptable," according to a release by the French MP. (AFP, 17/2/04)

February 24: A UN organization has awarded its World Press Freedom Prize to Cuban journalist Raúl Rivero Castañeda, who is currently serving a 20-year prison sentence. The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said it gave Mr. Rivero the prize for his "brave and long-standing commitment to independent reporting." The group also said it is concerned about the conditions in which Mr. Rivero is being held, and called on Cuba to release him and other reporters. Last April, Rivero and 25 other journalists were sentenced to lengthy prison terms on charges of undermining Cuba's communist government. (VOA, 24/2/04)

February 26: Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, refused to receive a letter signed by over twenty Argentinean lawmakers asking for the liberation of 75 Cuban dissidents.

The letter was handed over to Roque by lawmakers Martín Borrelli (Frente Compromiso para el Cambio) and Fernanda Ferrero (Unión por Buenos Aires) minutes before the minister's meeting with the mayor of Buenos Aires. Pérez Roque didn't accept the letter saying that "there are no political prisoners in Cuba." (*Encuentro en La Red*, 27/2/04)

February 27: Cuban independent journalist Raul Rivero, who is serving 20 years behind bars, was "moved, surprised and happy" to find out that he was awarded the UNESCO World Press Freedom Prize, his wife told the press. Rivero's wife, Blanca Reyes, broke the news to him over the phone. She said Rivero asked her to convey his gratitude to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and send a message "to the world's free journalists telling them he will uphold with dignity the name of the late Colombian journalist," referring to Guillermo Cano whose name is that of the Award. (*EFE*, 28/2/04)

March 7: In a letter to MP Yves Bur, French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin said that the French Ambassador to Cuba received instructions to intervene with Cuban authorities to obtain a "swift improvement of the incarceration conditions" of the jailed dissidents. (*AFP*, 7/3/04)

March 10: The organization "People in Need", with headquarters in the Czech Republic, is preparing different activities to commemorate the first anniversary of the crackdown on dissidents in Cuba. A replica of a cell will remain in one of the most important arteries in Prague, the Wenceslao Square, for 75 hours, one hour for each dissident sent to prison. The whole activity will conclude with a peaceful protest close to the Cuban embassy. (*Puente Informativo*, 10/3/04)

March 16: A new report by Amnesty International reveals the current state of 75 prisoners of conscience arrested during the March 2003 crackdown when scores of dissidents were detained in a series of targeted sweeps. Some were subsequently released, but many were subjected to hasty and manifestly unfair trials and sentenced to long prison terms. "After a detailed review of the legal cases against them, it is clear that they are prisoners of conscience -- detained for the peaceful expression of their beliefs. They should be released immediately and unconditionally," Amnesty International said. (*Amnesty International Press Release*, 16/3/04)

March 16: Czech senate chairman Petr Pithart said that even up to 15 years ago there were political prisoners in the Czech Republic and that is why he volunteered to spend one hour in a symbolic prison cell in protest against the imprisonment of 75 Cuban political prisoners today. "Only 15 years ago there were political prisoners in this country, and it is in human nature not to forget. Our duty is to remind people of it," Pithart said. The four-day "Stop Repression in Cuba" campaign started when a mock prison cell was erected in Prague's Wenceslas Square. Seventy-five Czech political and cultural personalities will gradually spend one hour in the mock prison during the action by day and night. (*CTK*, 16/3/04)

March 16: Over 600 writers linked to the US and Latin American media requested from Fidel Castro the release of Cuban journalists imprisoned in the island since last year. The letter was released by the Committee to Protect Journalists to the Cuban Interest Section in Washington, and is signed by well-known Latin American journalists and writers like Tomás Eloy Martínez (Argentina), Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Monsiváis (Mexico), Sergio Ramírez (Nicaragua) and Fernando Vallejo (Colombia). Also US writers Carl Bernstein, Ed Bradley, Anthony Lewis, Clarence Page, David Remnick, Gwen Ifill and Michael Massing signed the letter. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 17/3/04)

March 18: The Cuban exile community joined an international effort to mark the first anniversary of Havana's harshest opposition crackdown in years, during which 75 peaceful dissidents were sentenced to prison terms of up to 28 years. Writers, artists, journalists, students, clergymen and human rights activists were among those demanding the immediate release of the dissidents at a ceremony held in tandem with other similar gatherings in cities across the United States, Europe and Latin America. Each participant placed the photograph of one of the 75 prisoners on a mural located in front of the Friendship Torch in downtown Miami. Next to the mural, organizers built a

replica of a jail cell 3 meters (9 feet) by 2 meters (6 feet) with some of the items that were confiscated from the dissidents by Cuban authorities: typewriters, computers, radios, paper, pencils and plastic chairs. (*EFE*, 18/3/04)

March 18: Cuban exiles' groups in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut are commemorating the first anniversary of the repression unleashed by Fidel Castro's regime in 2003, during which 75 dissidents, journalists and human rights activists landed in jail. (*Radio y TV Martí*, 18/3/04)

March 18: The Cuban Ambassador to Holland, Elio Rodríguez Perdomo, refused to accept a letter signed by seven organizations demanding the release of the 75 dissidents incarcerated a year ago and of all prisoners of conscience in the island. The letter, addressed to the Cuban authorities, was signed by Amnesty International, CLAT, CNV, Cuba Futuro (Future Cuba), Glasnot en Cuba (Glasnost in Cuba), the Dutch Association of Journalists (NVJ), and Pax Christi Netherlands. (*El Mundo*, 19/3/04)

March 18: The Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) demanded the "immediate release" of the independent journalists jailed in Cuba, following an act in commemoration of the first anniversary of the repressive crackdown in Cuba that culminated with harsh prison sentences for 75 political opponents and independent journalists. (*Europa Press*, 18/3/04)

March 18: During a conference in Argentina, former Czech President Vaclav Havel expressed his sympathy for the victims of the repression in Cuba. In a video released in Buenos Aires, Havel said that the Cuban situation is of great importance to him and that he wishes to do more to promote freedom in the island. (*Radio Martí*, 18/3/04)

March 18: US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, requested solidarity with "the courageous men and women in Cuba who champion democracy's cause". In an official statement, Powell referred to last year's imprisonment of 75 dissidents in Cuba. (*Radio TV Martí*, 18/3/04)

March 24: Cuba is protesting UNESCO's decision to award jailed independent reporter Raul Rivero its World Press Freedom Prize, saying the action is an echo of US policies intended to isolate the island and promote dissidents. "It is deplorable and embarrassing that the Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Award has been used for ends separate from UNESCO's fundamental ideals, objectives and principles," read a communique posted on Cuba's Foreign Ministry web site. "Giving the award to this Cuban citizen who is serving a prison sentence for activities related to subversion of the constitutional and legal order of the Cuban system -- acting as a mercenary at the service of a foreign power -- threatens the legitimacy of the Press Freedom Award," the communique said. Last year, UNESCO granted Cuba an award for its work in literacy campaigns, also Michael Olomewa, president of the 32 nd UNESCO' General Conference visited the island. (*AP, La Jornada*, 24/3/04)

March 27: Around a dozen members of the support committee of journalist and poet Raúl Rivero handed out postcards and books, some of which are banned in Cuba, to French tourists leaving for Havana from Charles de Gaulle airport at Roissy, north of Paris. Activists handed the books to the tourists so that they can give them to Cubans in the street or to the "independent libraries" the addresses of which were listed for them. The campaign, launched by the human rights organisation Pax Christi-Hollande, was due to be replicated simultaneously in several European countries. (*NetforCuba.Com*, 27/3/04)

March 27: About 50 Cuban residents in Spain took part in a demonstration outside the Cuban Embassy in that country, demanding freedom for the 75 dissidents incarcerated in the island, and for all the Cuban people. (*Europa Press*, 27/3/04)

March 30: In a letter sent to Fidel Castro, over 107 civil society organizations from around the world requested the liberation of political prisoners in Cuba. Gathered at the CIVICUS World

Assembly in Gaborone, Botswana, the signing organizations include 67 NGOs from Africa, and the rest from Latin America and Europe. (AFP, 30/3/04)

April 6: A total of 78 French members of parliament and senators have joined the sponsorship campaign of Cuban political prisoners, launched by member organizations of *Colectivo Solidaridad Cuba Libre*. The parliamentarians and senators have sent letters to Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin, and to Cuban Ambassador in Paris, Eumelio Caballero, expressing concern over the health and prison conditions of their protegés and demanding their immediate release. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 6/4/04)

April 11: Honduras President Ricardo Maduro said that he himself wrote the resolution asking Cuba to authorize a visit of the UN's High Commission for Human Rights - and not someone from the United States government as has been charged. Maduro was answering critics from across the political spectrum who claimed that the United States had handed him the text - in English - to be presented to the UN High Commission for Human Rights in Geneva. "I wrote the resolution myself," the chief executive told journalists. He added that this would be the third time that the (Honduran) government backed "exactly the same position". "This resolution is almost identical to the one I voted for last year and the year before. It was written here, it is proudly Honduran, because with it we defend human rights," Maduro said. "If defending human rights is servile, then I'll go on defending them and anyone can call me what he wants to," he said. (EFE, 11/4/04)

April 13: Argentine Ambassador to the UN Human Rights Commission, Alfredo Chiaradia, stated in Geneva that his country will abstain on the US promoted anti-Cuba resolution as it did in 2003. President Kirchner maintains the stance of his predecessor Eduardo Duhalde, which broke a decade of votes against Cuba by Presidents Carlos Menem (1989-1999) and Fernando de la Rúa (1999-2001). (*Prensa Latina*, 13/4/04)

April 13: The World Medical Association is pressing the Cuban Government for information on four physicians and two dentists who have been in prison in Cuba for the past two years for human rights activities. The WMA is urging its 80 national medical association members to write to their governments and to the European Commission requesting them to put pressure on the Cuban government to disclose information about what, if any, trials the six are facing, the exact nature of their sentences and to ask for their fair and humane treatment in prison. Dr Delon Human, secretary general of the WMA, said: We are particularly concerned about one of the six, Dr Oscar Elias Biscet, who has been in poor health, and this has been exacerbated by his imprisonment in an underground dungeon.' The other five are Dr. Marcelo Cano Rodriguez, Dr. José Luis Garcia Paneque, Dr. Luis Milàn Fernández and the two dentists, Alfredo Manuel Pulido Lopez and Ricardo Enrique Silva Gual. (*WMA Press Release*, 13/4/04)

April 15: The UN Human Rights Commission condemned Cuba for its spring 2003 crackdown that sent 75 peaceful dissidents, mostly democracy advocates and independent journalists, to prison for terms averaging 20 years. The resolution presented by Honduras passed narrowly, by a vote of 22-to-21, with 10 abstentions. Most Latin American countries represented on the panel agreed to censure the Cuban government, with Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru and sponsor Honduras voting for the resolution. Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay abstained. With the exception of the Dominican Republic, Paraguay and Honduras, which were not on the commission last year, Latin American countries stuck to the positions they took in 2003. Non-governmental organizations considered the resolution, with its moderate language, too soft on the wave of arrests in Cuba last year. The resolution said that Cuba "should refrain from adopting measures which could jeopardize the fundamental rights, the freedom of expression and the right to due process of its citizens." It added that it "deplores the events which occurred last year in Cuba," referring to the sentencing of the 75 dissidents. It also urges the Cuban Government to cooperate with the UN's special rapporteur for Cuba, French jurist Christine Chanet. (EFE, AP, Reuters, 15/4/04)

April 15: Within minutes of the vote being passed in Geneva, Cuba rejected it. Describing the resolution as "ridiculous", Cuba's Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said that his government would not adhere to the commission's key request that a human rights investigator be allowed into the country. "Cuba rejects the spurious resolution approved in Geneva and would not abide by any of its stipulations", he said. Cuba co-operates with the international community but not when it is discriminated against, Pérez Roque added. Mexico's UN vote against Cuba on the human rights front earned it a reproach from Havana. Pérez Roque said that Mexico's vote made the resolution pass. (*BBC, EFE, Radio Habana Cuba, 15/4/04*)

May 3: The jailed Cuban journalist, Raúl Rivero Castaneda, was awarded the UNESCO World Press Freedom Prize. The prominent journalist and poet, who was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment last year, was awarded the prize for his "long-standing commitment to independent reporting - the hallmark of professional journalism". Imprisoned along with 25 other journalists in March 2003, Mr Rivero was tried under Article 91 of the penal code, for "undermining the independence or territorial integrity of the State". He was said to have written biased articles and to have collaborated with the United States. Chairman of the international jury, which recommended he receive the \$25,000 award Jamaica's Mr Oliver Clarke of Gleaner Co Ltd, said he hoped the international attention would encourage the Cuban authorities "to respect individuals' basic human rights to express their views freely". (*Irish Times, 5/4/04*)

May 3: US and European diplomats visited the home of jailed Cuban reporter Raul Rivero, offering support to relatives of the dissident and others put in prison after a government crackdown on the opposition last year, Rivero's wife said. James Cason, chief of the US Interests Section in Havana, and officials from half a dozen European countries arrived together on the same day Rivero was awarded a press freedom prize in Belgrade, Serbia-Montenegro. The diplomats said they lamented the imprisonment of all the activists and called for their immediate release, according to Blanca Reyes, Rivero's wife. (*CNN, 3/5/04*)

May 13: The Irish Presidency of the European Union issued a Declaration on the continuity of violations of human rights in Cuba. The European Union is "deeply concerned at the recent trials and sentencing of a further group of 13 Cuban human rights activists and journalists, all of whom were arrested while peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, opinion, association and assembly", the official statement says. Among those dissidents was blind Cuban attorney Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva, sentenced to four years under house arrest. (*EU Press Release, EFE, 13/5/04*)

May 13: Václav Havel, Former President of the Czech Republic, sent a message to the Cuban People on the birth date of the Cuban martyr Pedro Luis Boitel, and Day of International Support to the Cuban Opposition. The message was read at the Church of Our Lady of Charity, in Miami, Florida, by Carlos González, an activist of the Czech NGO People in Need. (*PuentelInformativo, 13/5/04*)

May 17: United States denounced that Cuba's human rights record worsened during 2003. In its new Report 2003-2004, Supporting Human Rights and Democracy, the US Department of State affirms that the Cuban government "continued to commit numerous serious abuses." (*Notimex, 17/5/04*)

May 19: The United States condemned Cuba's sentencing of three dissidents to three years in prison, more than one year after they were arrested for studying human rights in a Havana home. Activists Orlando Zapata, Raul Arencibia and Virgilio Marante, who were arrested in December 2002, were charged with "public disorder, disobedience and resisting authority." They each received the maximum of three years in jail after a one-day trial. "The real, quote-unquote, 'crime' was to study the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at a home in Havana over a year ago. And in the year since that, I would say, innocent gathering, they've been awaiting trial," State Department spokesman Adam Ereli said. (*AFP, 19/5/04*)

May 25: Amnesty International (AI) expressed concern in its annual report over the health of many prisoners of conscience in Cuba, where the organization found the human rights situation deteriorated significantly in 2003. In its 2004 report, issued simultaneously in London and Madrid, AI noted that in mid-March of 2003, Cuban authorities unleashed an "unprecedented wave of repression" against dissidents with the arrests of 75 people. According to AI, the 75 activists "were arrested," tried without due process and sentenced to up to 28 years in prison, leading to an upsurge in "criticism (of the Fidel Castro regime) by the international community." (*EFE*, 25/4/04)

May 26: Clara Chepe, whose son Oscar Espinosa Chepe was jailed last year as part of Cuba's biggest opposition crackdown in years, asked leaders taking part in the EU-Latin America and Caribbean Summit in Mexico to lobby Havana authorities to release him. Chepe sent an open letter to the heads of state and government saying her son is gravely ill and denouncing his living conditions in a Havana hospital. "I beg you to intercede with Cuban authorities so that Oscar Espinosa Chepe is adequately treated and, basically, released," she said in the letter. (*EFE*, 26/5/04)

May 27: Reporters Without Borders is urging the heads of state of the 58 countries attending the EU-Latin America and Caribbean summit in Guadalajara, Mexico to press the Cuban delegation for the release of journalists jailed in Cuba (*RWB Press Release*, 27/5/04)

June 1: An urgent appeal to the UN Convention Against torture, and to the international public opinion, was made by Alejandrina García on behalf of her husband, political prisoner Diosdado González. Alejandrina requests urgent assistance due to inadequate treatment" received by her husband, a prisoner at Provincial Prison, Km 51/2, Pinar del Rio, where he is serving a 20 years sentence. She points out in the appeal that the prison regulations do not classify prisoners and that her husband is "in danger of being placed alongside prisoners of different categories whom authorities do not care if they have had a criminal past or bad conduct". (*NetforCuba*, 1/6/04)

June 16: A group of European and Latin American activists and lawmakers announced the establishment of a joint commission to monitor human rights abuses and promote democracy in Cuba. The non government commission will pressure Fidel Castro's government to respect the rights of citizens seeking democracy in the communist nation, said Francisco Landero, a Mexican federal congressman from the conservative National Action Party. Also present at the announcement at Miami's Our Lady of Charity Shrine were Anna Maria Stame Cervone, an activist in Italy's conservative Christian Democratic party, and Alvaro Dubon, a conservative Guatemalan member of the Central American Parliament. Stame said the Joint Commission of European and Latin American Parliamentarians in Support of Democracy and Human Rights in Cuba has 50 members from Chile, the Czech Republic, Argentina, Guatemala, Mexico and Italy, and expects many more to join in coming weeks. (*The Miami Herald*, 17/6/04)

June 18: The International Labor Organization (ILO) criticized Cuba, Venezuela and Zimbabwe for violations of the right of citizens to associate freely. Regarding Cuba, the same report deplors the government refusal to have direct contact with an ILO mission, which was proposed in November 2003. It also complained that Havana had not sent information requested by the ILO in connection with the long jail sentences - in some cases more than 26 years - given to seven union leaders, whose immediate release is being requested. With respect to the monopoly of unions established by Cuban law, the ILO asked Havana to adopt regulations that recognize in practice the right of workers to organize independently based on the results of their own elections. (*EFE*, 18/6/04)

June 20: Members of the Mothers' Committee for the Freedom of Political Prisoners delivered a letter to the pope's representative to Havana. "There are more than 200 political prisoners in Cuba, some imprisoned only because of the way they think, while others endure excessive sentences," said the letter delivered to papal nuncio Luigi Bonazzi, who gave mass at the Church of Jesus on the Mount in Havana. The group asked to meet with Bonazzi so they could talk about

their jailed relatives. Nuris Duran, mother of Lazaro Duran and president of the committee, stood in line to greet Bonazzi and to hand him the letter. She was accompanied by a dozen women similarly dressed in black and white. (AFP, 20/6/04)

June 25: Amnesty International (AI) welcomes the release of two further prisoners of conscience by the Cuban authorities, but calls for more to be released. AI has received numerous reports of illnesses among prisoners having been aggravated by prison conditions, insufficient access to appropriate medical care and, at times, hunger strikes. (AI Press Release, 25/6/04)

July 12: The number of political prisoners held in Cuba remained nearly constant over the past six months, according to a report released by a rights group. The Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation reported that at mid year there were 317 political prisoners held in Cuba, slightly up from the 315 reported at the end of 2003. "The fact that the total number of prisoners in this category has not significantly dropped shows the government's position of immobility," wrote Elizardo Sanchez, the head of the Havana-based commission. The commission said it did not remove from its list the names of six dissidents paroled for medical reasons in recent weeks because they were not released unconditionally and could be returned to custody if they violate parole. (AP, 12/7/04)

July 21: The US government expressed concern over the treatment of jailed Cuban dissident Oscar Elias Biscet, who has been placed in solitary confinement. Biscet was arrested on December 6, 2002, at his home, where - according to US officials - he was holding a discussion on human rights, and later convicted and sentenced to 25 years in prison. A communique released by the US State Department said Biscet, whose health has significantly deteriorated, "has been forced to live on handouts from fellow prisoners because regime authorities refuse to permit his wife to bring in the meager rations of food and medicine that are allowed other prisoners." (EFE, 21/7/04)

July 22: The United States welcomed the release from prison of Cuban dissident Marta Beatriz Roque, one of 75 opponents of the Fidel Castro government jailed in a widely-criticized political crackdown last year. Her release, confirmed by family members in Havana, was welcomed by State Department spokesman Steven Pike, who said the 59-year-old Ms. Roque should never have been imprisoned in the first place. "Like many other prisoners of conscience held in Castro's Gulag, she suffered from inadequate medical care in prison," he said. "Typically, the Castro government has once again released an activist only when her deteriorating health became an inconvenience." (VOA, 22/7/04)

August 5: Six former presidents and over 300 lawmakers from different Latin American countries have issued a public statement, in support of the Cuban dissident movement. In the statement, the Latin American politicians request from their countries' embassies in Havana to "open" their doors to oppositionist leaders, following the European Union position. (Europa Press, 5/8/04)

August 15: On the eve of the world's largest library conference, prominent ex-dissidents from the former Soviet bloc issued a sharp rebuke to Fidel Castro for jailing librarians and called on the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) to condemn human rights violations in Cuba. Drawing parallels between present-day Cuba and the former Soviet bloc and citing newly-disclosed evidence as "irrefutable," the public letter released by the Czech-based People In Need Organization protested a 2003 crackdown on the island's dissidents, including volunteer librarians, and declared: "We know what it is like to live in a society where freedom is repressed in the name of democracy and national sovereignty, and where the voicing of dissent is banned in the name of safeguarding freedom of expression." The letter, signed by renowned human rights activists such as Vaclav Havel, Elena Bonner, Yuri Orlov, and the former Prime Ministers of Bulgaria and Estonia, was sent to Paul Sturges, the head of IFLA's intellectual freedom committee, which is known by the acronym FAIFE. (La Nueva Cuba, 15/8/04)

August 24: Reporters Without Borders is concerned by the state of health of journalist Fabio Prieto Llorente, who has been on hunger strike since 11 August to protest against his prison conditions. "It is the third time since the beginning of the year that the journalist has been driven to take this course," said the international press freedom organisation, reiterating that it held the Cuban government responsible for his state of health. Also, the state of health of journalist and economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, sentenced to 20 years, is giving rise to particular concern. His family says he is suffering from cirrhosis of the liver and cancer that was detected in February 2004. He can barely eat. Initially treated at the Carlos J. Finlay of Havana military hospital, he was moved on 12 August to the infirmary at Combinado del Este prison in Havana province before Hurricane Shirley hit the area. Despite promises, as of 19 August he had still not been returned to the military hospital. (*RWB Press Release*, 24/8/04)

September 10: Concerned about tougher prison conditions and dissident poet Raúl Rivero's precarious health, his wife appealed to international public opinion to push for his release, and blamed Fidel Castro for the risks the prisoner is facing. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 11/9/04)

September 13: Oswaldo J. Payá Sardiñas sent another SOS to the international community denouncing the Cuban regime's desperate attempts to stop the work of the Christian Liberation Movement (MLC) and the Varela Project. Now, they showed no mercy to Adrián Curly Cedeño, member of the MCL, who was sent by a Tribunal to the Psychiatric Hospital San Luis de Sagua as a patient. This abusive and Stalinist style of punishment is a recurrent pattern with the members of the Christian Liberation Movement (MLC) and other activists in favor of the Varela Project. (*Puente Informativo*, 13/9/04)

September 4: Cuba's civic movement received the support of six former Costa Rican presidents and some 300 congressional members from 12 Latin American countries, including Argentina, Chile, Mexico and Venezuela. The group released a letter stating that, "Cuba is governed at present by the only dictatorship remaining in Latin America. There, the values of freedom are disregarded in the most visible manner". "In collective and general terms, our region still has not expressed itself in a clearly defined manner regarding this opening to the budding Cuban civic movement. In view of the hope for a peaceful change that emerges from the depths of Cuban reality, Latin American regional organisms and the embassies of our countries in Havana have a moral obligation to respond in a positive manner", the letter adds. (*The Miami Herald*, 4/9/04)

September 9: The wife of political prisoner Oscar Elías Biscet made an urgent appeal to the international community in support of her husband. In an open letter, Elsa Morejón, Biscet's wife, blamed prison authorities for the "acts of cruelty and abuses" her husband has suffered while in jail. "I feel the urgency to denounce these acts of abuse against him", she said. "Nothing justifies to have a human being living in a catacomb, sleeping on a cement floor with a thin mattress that is handed to him at night and retired at dawn, with no access to fresh air, nor to his belongings", Morejón added. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 10/9/04)

September 16: Mothers, wives and daughters of 75 imprisoned Cuban dissidents have sent a letter of thanks to the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC) which will shortly meet in Prague. The statement of Cuban women recalls that the dissidents are kept under extremely severe conditions which have a negative impact on their health. They suffer from various diseases which are not treated properly in prison. Cuban women in their letter appreciated solidarity and the committee's interest to help liberate those who are guilty only of the love for their country. Most of the women are relatives of the political opponents who were imprisoned by the Cuban regime last year. Among the signatories is the wife of Cuban poet and journalist Raul Rivero, 57, who was sentenced to 20 years in prison and whose health condition is allegedly very poor. One of his books has recently been published in the Czech Republic. (*CTK*, 16/9/04)

September 17: Former Czech President, Vaclav Havel, will be joined by politicians, intellectuals, and non-governmental organizations, during the first meeting of the International Committee for

Democracy in Cuba. The meeting will discuss strategies for a peaceful transition on the island. Also in attendance will be Chile's Patricio Aylwin, his nation's first democratic president after the end of the Pinochet regime in 1990, former Canadian prime minister, Kim Campbell, and Luis Alberto Monge and Luis Alberto Lacalle, former heads of state in Costa Rica and Uruguay, respectively. Former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar is also slated to take part in the gathering that is taking place under the auspices of the Czech Foreign Ministry and Senate. (EFE, 16/9/04)

September 17: Former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar called for the release of dozens of inmates in Cuba, charging they're political prisoners held "simply because they have a different opinion from the official line." He spoke at a meeting of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba, which is examining ways to support resistance to Fidel Castro's regime. Participants highlighted the case of Raul Rivero, a dissident journalist and author who was arrested in March 2003 along with 74 others in a crackdown on the opposition. (AP, 18/9/04)

September 18: Former Czech President Vaclav Havel has opened an international conference in Prague on promoting democracy in Cuba. He told delegates that Cuba's situation would change soon and that opponents to Fidel Castro's 45-year rule should prepare for the end of "dictatorship". Mr Havel said a free, post-Castro Cuba should take inspiration from the experience of eastern Europe. "Some will be surprised to have so much freedom after all these years of communism and to have so much weight on their shoulders," he told delegates. Former Czech president Vaclav Havel described Cuba as "a giant prison", as he called for international mobilisation to persuade the country to commit to a peaceful transition to democracy. "Cuba is a giant prison. We have to put up alarm bells around the walls," he said. "With every signature, every conference we make another step towards freedom in Cuba." The Prague meeting is being organised by the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba, founded by Mr Havel a year ago. (BBC, AFP, 19/9/04)

September 18: Swedish MEP Cecilia Malmstroem said at a meeting of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC) in Prague, that pressure on the United States to lift the economic embargo should be one of the pillars of EU policy towards Cuba. Malmstroem said that most of the European Parliament believes that the embargo has not been effective, has not brought anything positive and is used only as an alibi for the dictatorship in Cuba. Former Uruguayan President Luis Alberto Lacalle said he agrees with this opinion, adding that if George Bush wins re-election as president of the United States, he should re-evaluate this ineffective policy. Malmstroem said that coordination of activities between countries in Latin America, the United States and Europe is key, which a UN resolution from last year's conference on human rights shows. (CTK, 18/9/04)

September 19: The three-day conference of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC) concluded with a discussion between European and Latin American NGOs. The groups agreed to ask the European Commission to work out a plan on how to deal with Cuba after a regime change. "Eastern European countries can contribute their experiences so that chaos is avoided," Milan Nic from the Pontis group said. Former Czech President Vaclav Havel also stressed the need to prepare for communism's fall in Cuba. NGOs also debated on how they can help Cuba. "Spain and the Netherlands are the largest investors in Cuba. Every investment, into a hotel for example, violates international conventions in several ways, labour codes, for example," Nic said. He added that the fact that the Cuban government charges several times what it pays out to workers means that investments are moral support for the regime. (CTK, 19/9/04)

September 19: The declaration adopted by the Summit of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba, known as the "Prague Memorandum," seeks "to set out common objectives for a general plan of support for democracy in Cuba that can be implemented in a coordinated manner at different levels and from different parts of the world. The task of general coordination

and support for this plan will correspond to the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba." (*El Nuevo Herald*, 19/9/04)

September 20: Slovakia hosted a conference for the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba, indicating a seismic shift in Slovak foreign policy towards Cuba. Meanwhile, Slovak non-governmental organisations (NGO) have been actively supporting Cuba's political dissidents, and several Slovak representatives have criticised the Castro regime for human rights violations, especially after the Cuban government detained a number of people accused of conspiring with the US. Slovakia's increasing involvement was highlighted when Bratislava hosted a conference supporting the democratic movement in Cuba. The conference came after a meeting held in Prague by the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba. "We are observing increasing interest in some groups, for example, the NGOs, the media, and citizens who have visited Cuba as tourists," programme manager of the Pontis Foundation Milan Nič told the press. (*Slovak Spectator*, 27/9/04)

October 5: The chairman of Slovakia's parliament sent a protest letter to Cuba's ambassador, voicing concern over the treatment of a Cuban political prisoner. In his letter, Pavol Hrusovsky called on Cuban officials to provide better and more decent treatment to Luis Enrique Ferrer Garcia, whom he said was brutally beaten, psychologically tortured and went on a hunger strike last week. "I voice my serious concern," Hrusovsky said. He said his knowledge of the case came from dissident, Oswaldo Paya, and was contrary to Cuba's statements to the international community that it adheres to global human rights conventions. (*AP*, 5/10/04)

October 5: Dissident leader Oswaldo Payá, awarded by the Andrei Sajarov Foundation in 2002, requested from the European Union not to change its position towards Cuba. Payá said that to change the Common Position on human rights adopted by the EU towards the island means to "abandon" the Cuban people. "The Common Position should be strengthened, if the Europeans wants to be coherent with the values they defend for their continent", added Payá. (*AFP*, 5/10/04)

October 6: During a telephone conversation with Havana, organized by the Madrid based Platform "Cuba Democracia Ya", Cuban dissidents expressed their concern about the Spanish government attempts to change the European Union's position on Cuba. Juan Carlos González Leiva, Cuban oppositionist currently under home arrest, said that many lives could be at risk if Europe lifts diplomatic sanctions against Havana. Leiva expressed his doubts on the potential release of all political prisoners by the Cuban government, as a response to a request by the Spanish government. Oswaldo Paya, leader of the Movimiento Cristiano Liberación and main promoter of the Varela Project, expressed the same concerns in a public letter issued in Havana. (*Europa Press*, 6/10/04)

October 26: According to a report from media watchdog Reporters Without Borders, Cuba ranked second worst for being "second only to China as the biggest prison for journalists", with 26 in jail along with some 50 dissidents. This is the third annual index published by the Paris-based group. (*BBC*, 26/10/04)

October 28: The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights said it will open an investigation on Cuba for arresting and jailing dissidents and executing hijackers, the first such move in five years. The IACHR, part of the Organization of American States, announced the decision after its regular three-week period of sessions, when judges examine human rights abuses in the Americas. The IACHR investigation of Cuba is likely to have little practical effect for more than 70 dissidents in jail since March and April of last year, following a crackdown on the opposition. Cuba does not recognize the authority of the IACHR. (*AP*, 29/10/04)

November 4: The United States has denounced Fidel Castro's communist government in Cuba for repeated and persistent human rights violations, putting Havana on notice that the situation on the island remains a US priority. The State Department said Washington had not forgotten that

scores of Cuban dissidents arrested in a widespread crackdown in March 2004 were still languishing in prison and repeated demands for their immediate release. (*IOL*, 4/11/04)

November 5: Cuba struck back at the United States, calling it the world's worst human rights offender two days after the US State Department criticized the island nation for continuing to imprison scores of dissidents rounded up more than 1 ½ years ago. "The government of the United States doesn't have the minimum moral authority to accuse Cuba," the island's Foreign Ministry said in an official note published in the Communist Party daily *Granma*. "It's the government of the United States that is the worst violator of human rights in the world," the note said, pointing to alleged abuses of prisoners in Iraq and terror suspects at the US naval base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The foreign ministry also said the US trade embargo against Cuba "is a cruel, inhuman and genocidal blockade that over more than four decades has violated the human rights of all the Cuban people." (*AP*, 7/11/04)

November 8: Two Cuban opposition fronts, *Asamblea para Promover la Sociedad Civil en Cuba* and *Todos Unidos*, sent a letter to the Heads of State meeting at the 8 th Ibero American Summit in San José, Costa Rica. In the letter, the dissidents request the liberation of political prisoners in Cuba. (*MAR por Cuba*, 18/11/04)

November 14: A group of Cuban dissidents urged the European Union to maintain current sanctions against Cuba's communist government, few days before a debate in Brussels to decide future policy toward the Caribbean island. "Our experience is that every time a foreign government gives in to the pressures of the totalitarian government in Havana, repression is intensified," dissidents including Martha Beatriz Roque and Vladimiro Roca said in a letter sent to the international press. "For us, a policy of any country saying it is in favor of democracy and human rights that at the same time accepts the demands of a government that systematically violates democratic principles would be incomprehensible," the letter said. (*AP*, 14/11/04)

November 16: The European Union's indication that it might soften its diplomatic stance toward the Communist government produced varied reaction here among dissidents, with higher-profile opponents of the regime saying such a move would be a mistake. Dissident Elizardo Sanchez opined that "in no way is Castro thinking about changing the repressive mood that has characterized him these past several years." Sanchez told the press that the EU proposal "would be very positive if it produced some visible and practical fruit, but I very much doubt that the government will respond positively to these goodwill gestures." Marta Beatriz Roque of the Assembly to Promote a Civil Society, criticized the EU's stance because "it's an opportunity for the Cuban government, and they shouldn't be given the chance to win any fight." "The Cuban government is deaf to dialogue," noted Roque, who predicted that Brussels "will look bad if it gives in to pressure" by Havana. Vladimiro Roca of the All United Movement does not support the EU's strategy either, because "the Cuban government has not given any real signs of change," and the conditions that prompted the EU to adopt the political sanctions last year still continue. Some moderate dissidents, such as Manuel Cuesta Morua, of the Progressive Arch, or Cuban Change leader Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo, say the present tension does not favor democratic Cubans, and they see in the EU's position an opportunity to resume a "critical dialogue." Oswaldo Paya, a 2002 laureate of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize, urged the EU not to change its common position. In a letter to the heads of Parliament and Commission Mr Paya said that the position of some governments would be understood, but that a change of EU policy is not in Cuba's interests. (*EFE, EUObserver*, 16/11/04)

November 16: The wife of Cuban dissident author and journalist Raúl Rivero, serving out a 20-year prison sentence, asked the heads of states participating in the 14 th Ibero-American Summit to demand that the Cuban government release all political prisoners. Oswaldo Payá, leader of the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL), also made public a declaration regarding the Latin American conclave. However, in his case, it was a denunciation of the lack of Summit support for the Cuban opposition. (*EFE*, 16/11/04)

November 17: Reporters Without Borders appealed to heads of government attending the Ibero-American Summit meeting in San José, Costa Rica, to press Fidel Castro to release 26 journalists he has imprisoned. "The summit must uphold the principles it swears by," the worldwide press freedom organisation said. The 21 government heads at the last summit, in Santa Cruz (Bolivia) last November, said they would encourage the promotion and protection of human rights. Since then, 11 journalists have been killed in the 21 participant countries, 24 arrested and 336 threatened or physically attacked. Twenty-six journalists are in prison, all of them in Cuba, where Castro's regime has a monopoly of all news. (*RWB Press Release*, 17/11/04)

November 18: Cuban dissidents hailed Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero's statements regarding the need for change in Cuba, but say they are skeptical Madrid's strategy will bear fruit. Elizardo Sanchez, who heads a human rights group banned by Cuban authorities, said Cuba must offer "some sign" in response to "the Spanish government's multiple efforts." "Let's hope that at some time that sign will come, but I doubt it, because the Cuban government, instead of opening its doors, or at least opening its windows, seems to be hunkering down even more in its own ruinous bunker," said Sanchez. Vladimiro Roca, of the opposition group All United, praised Zapatero's remarks, but said "they are not congruent with the policy he's promoting for Cuba." Marta Beatriz Roque of the Assembly to Promote a Civil Society also agreed it is necessary to request changes from the Cuban regime, but she criticized the Spanish administration's efforts to rely on "dialogue" while removing even symbolic sanctions. (*EFE*, 18/11/04)

November 24: More than 100 journalists are currently imprisoned for nothing other than doing their jobs and Reporters Without Borders is pushing to change that. Tanya Churchmuch, the group's president, is calling for the release of Raul Rivero from a Cuban prison, where he has been held since March 2003. The head of the independent Cuban Press was sentenced to 20 years in jail on charges of acting to the detriment of Cuban independence, operating in a group of three or more people and operating for profit. "They went so far as to have people pose as journalists to infiltrate these groups and testify against them," Churchmuch said, adding Rivero is not politically motivated in his work. "People like Raul Rivero are not saying (Fidel Castro) is some kind of monster; they're talking about the expression of free thought." (*Canadian Press*, 24/11/04)

November 29: In Washington, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher welcomed the release of three political prisoners in Cuba, but said the detainees never should have been imprisoned in the first place. "We continue to condemn the unjust incarceration of dozens of other prisoners of conscience in Cuba," Boucher said. "We hope that they can return to their work to build a truly just and open Cuban society," Boucher said. (*AP*, 29/11/04)

November 29: The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), the most influential Cuban exiles' organization, described as a "political scheme" the unexpected release on health grounds of political prisoners in Cuba. "It is the Cuban government's old tactic of recycling political prisoners to manipulate public opinion" said Omar López Montenegro, Executive Director of the Foundation for Human Rights in Cuba. The Madrid-based Spanish association Cuba in Transition, expressed joy for the release of independent journalist and poet Raúl Rivero although it warned that the legal mechanism Fidel Castro's regime resorted to – the so-called "extrajudicial license" – allows for a swift "return to prison" of any of the released dissidents. (*Notimex, Europa Press*, 30/11/04)

November 30: The Permanent Commission of the Uruguayan Parliament approved by a majority vote a declaration denouncing the situation of political prisoners in Cuba and expressed concerns with regards to their mistreatment and health condition. In a seven point declaration, the Commission, which holds its sessions during a break in legislative activities in Uruguay, alluded to reports by UN organizations, Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders, as well as denunciations from the prisoners' families and human rights organizations. (*EFE*, 30/11/04)

November 30: The president of the Inter American Press Association (IAPA), Alejandro Miró Quesada, expressed his satisfaction over the release of independent Cuban journalist and institution director, Raul Rivero, and asked that the release be extended to all the others who were sent to jail in March 2003 following summary trials. "Undoubtedly this news was a very pleasant surprise for the entire world and we are very delighted because it is a significant victory for the cause of freedom of expression and of the press in Cuba," said IAPA president and publisher of El Comercio newspaper in Lima, Peru. "However, it is not enough – he warned – since nobody should remain behind bars under the pretext of having committed a crime for the sole reason of expressing his or her ideas or for criticizing the government of Fidel Castro." Twenty-eight journalists are still in jail in Cuba. (*IAPA*, 30/11/04)

November 30: Reporters Without Borders said it was "delighted" at the release from prison of Cuban journalist Raúl Rivero, calling it "the end of a huge injustice towards a renowned journalist and writer" and his family. It repeated its call for the release of 24 other journalists detained in Cuba since spring last year. "Rivero's release is great news for democrats everywhere, but it must not be forgotten that Cuba's human rights record remains worse than it was before his arrest and that the regime still controls the media and the country with an iron hand," it said. (*RWB Press Release*, 30/11/04)

December 1: Former President Vaclav Havel welcomed the release of Cuban author Raul Rivero and four other dissidents, his secretary said. Havel's secretary, Jakub Hladik, said Havel, himself a former dissident, called the Cuban's release good news. "Rivero's release is a very good news," he quoted Havel as saying. "It's also a good sign that something is happening in Cuba." (*AP*, 1/12/04)

December 1: France hailed the recent release from prison of Cuban dissident journalist and poet Raúl Rivero and called for the release of "all prisoners of conscience" on the island. "We welcome the recent releases of the last few days, particularly Raúl Rivero's", said the deputy spokesperson of the French Foreign Ministry, Cecile Pozzo di Borgo. "We continue to hope for the release of all prisoners of conscience in Cuba", she added. (*AFP*, 1/12/04)

December 14: Two acclaimed Cuban dissidents criticized the proposal emerging from a European Union committee to consider softening the hard line the bloc adopted against Cuba in mid-2003. Elizardo Sanchez, who heads the outlawed Cuban Human Rights Commission, told the press the recommendation from the EU's Committee on Latin America, or COLAT, "lacks a foundation." "The circumstances that led to the measures adopted by the EU continue to be the same, given that the Cuban government has not released the prisoners of conscience, except for several who were very sick. It keeps in effect the sentence of execution by firing squad and maintains around 50 convicts on death row," Sanchez said. Vladimiro Roca, of the banned opposition group Todos Unidos (All United), said he respects "the sovereignty of the EU and the decisions they reach." "The only thing I feel bad about is that they will again be lost with a distorted vision of the Cuban problem, in a mirage created by the ruler Fidel Castro," he said. According to Roca, the EU panel's recommendations do not reflect "the real Cuban problem". Regarding a return to dialogue between the EU and Cuba, Roca said "it has to be with the entire Cuban society and not just a part of it." (*EFE*, 14/12/04)

December 29: France is "watching very closely" the situation of Cuban prisoners of the so-called "Group of 75", says Foreign Minister Michel Barnier in a letter to a group of wives of jailed dissidents. Yolanda Huerga, wife of ex-prisoner Manuel Vázquez Portal, said Barnier's letter is a reply to a message sent by the wives to the European Union foreign ministers last November. (*EFE*, 30/12/04)

EDUCATION

March 3: Cuban elementary school students from third to sixth grade will start studying English this year, as announced by an official from the Cuban Education Ministry. Up to now, the English language was just taught in secondary, senior high schools and universities in the island. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/3/04)

April 1: "You are breaking precedent and historical ground in education for the world", Fidel Castro told the more than 460 young people studying to be elementary and junior high teachers in Cuba's innovative program. Castro spoke with the students at Havana Convention Center during the events preceding the VIII Young Communist Union Congress about the audacious junior high program now underway in the country. (*Prensa Latina*, 1/4/04)

April 8: The first international conference on Values in Education will review more than 100 papers submitted by European and Latin American experts on ways to instil positive values in children, adolescents and young people. Deans, academics, researchers and other professionals on this field connected to institutions in Portugal, Spain, Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, the Dominican Republic and the host country, Cuba, are meeting in Camaguey, to discuss training of ethics and new realities in developed societies, among other topics. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 8/4/04)

April 9: Cuban universities have welcomed more than 13,945 foreign students from 113 countries, via a cooperation program that is systematically growing. In the past semester, 17,654 students received their degrees, with 70% of them from African countries, and it is expected that the number of those from Latin America and the Caribbean will grow during upcoming semesters. (*Granma International*, 9/4/04)

April 18: Cuba's fourth television channel went on the air, kicking off programming with coverage of the second-ever National Olympics. It is Cuba's second educational channel. During its first two weeks on the air, Canal educativo 2 will cover the athletic games. Following the athletic event, the station will "continue to broadcast experimental programs with educational goals," the official press reported. (*EFE, Europa Press*, 18/4/04)

June 5: About 11,000 third age elderly students are currently registered in the University for the Elderly Program, a project that contributes to improving quality of life in old age. The 4-year old initiative, promoted by the Ministry of Higher Education and Cuba's Union of Workers, among other institutions, involves 450 professionals with 5,000 professors and lecturers, Granma daily informed. (*Prensa Latina*, 5/6/04)

July 22: Fidel Castro said the current evolution and changes shaping the local educational system allow the island to occupy an exceptional and privileged place worldwide. Addressing a graduation ceremony for 1,880 students from Havana City and Havana province Pedagogical Institutes, Fidel Castro noted that these educational achievements are the result of a privatization-free socialist system. "I am totally confident in the future of our revolution," Castro said. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/7/04)

July 28: More than 61,400 Cubans have graduated from the island's 300 Computer Clubs. The centers are equipped with 5200 computers and have Internet access. According to reports, enrollment in computer courses has increased considerably over the past several years. Over the summer vacations, the computer clubs host some 50,000 users, in two-week courses. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 28/7/04)

July 19: The regional director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Alfredo Missair, has praised Cuba's achievements in education. The UN official, who recently attended an educational meeting in the Cuban capital, said that such achievements in a Latin American country are extraordinary. During a visit to an institution developing the preschool teaching program in Cuba, Missair said participants to the meeting agreed to maintain contact with the

center. He said that this would favor a dialogue supporting policies aimed to develop intelligence as a child's right. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 19/7/04)

September 7: Fidel Castro underscored the quality of the educational system in Cuba, a country with the highest teacher-student ratio in the world, with a teacher for every 36.8 people. The Cuban leader focused on the advantages of the Cuban educational system, which is free to all at all levels, as well as the universal use of audio-visual and computing programs in teaching in a TV discussion. He said capitalist countries cannot do what Cuba does because their system has not been designed to give education to everyone, "what feelings can a savage and selfish society have, when it is poisoned by all possible means?" he asked rhetorically. It has taken a great effort to start the current academic year just three weeks after the passing of Hurricane Charley through western Cuba, the leader said. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/9/04)

September 21: Just one week after hurricane "Ivan" hit the province of Pinar del Río, local students were back in school. According to government newspaper *Granma*, the only exceptions were 17 boarding schools that remain without power. In order to allow schools to resume classes, the authorities have turned various facilities into makeshift classrooms temporarily substituting for those damaged in 251 schools affected by the hurricane's strong winds and heavy rains. (*Europa Press*, 21/9/04)

October 29: The 12th World Congress of Comparative Education concluded in Havana with the participation of more than 1000 delegates from 85 countries. During the final day of the event, Randy Alonso, a member of the National Bureau of Cuba's Young Communist League (UJC), read a message sent by Fidel Castro to the participants in the meeting. "Only education can save the human race," wrote the Cuban leader in his message. "Educating means (...) if we don't become human beings in the most comprehensive sense of the word, our species will not survive," added the Cuban president. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 29/10/04)

December 9: Cuba's Higher Education Ministry announced that there is one university graduate for every 17 inhabitants. According to *Granma* newspaper, the report also notes that one out of every seven workers on the island is a university graduate. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 9/12/04)

December 30: Shortages of schoolteachers and the need to fill teaching staff vacancies in schools were the central themes of debates during the plenary sessions of the Provincial Committee of the Communist Party in Villa Clara. Although 921 schoolteachers have graduated in the last three years, that figure is still insufficient due to the number of teachers who leave the education sector and the shortage of students who enter teacher training, according to a report presented at the Plenary. (*Granma*, 31/12/04)

ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES

[See also, Economy/ Corruption]

Drugs

February 20: The first exchange of experiences organized by the International Police (INTERPOL) on the struggle against drug in the Caribbean, closed in Havana. According to *Granma* newspaper the meeting was held in the Ministry of the Interior Conference Center with the participation of delegates from 11 countries of the Caribbean, Central America and South America. The meeting was attended by six INTERPOL professors and officials headed by Mr. Stephen Schumerberk, director of Specialized Crime of INTERPOL's General Secretariat, as well as Salvatore La Barbera, undersecretary of Organized Crime and Drug. The objective of the meeting was to update participants on the latest world tendencies in the use of synthetic drugs, traffickers' ways to operate and techniques to fight drug trafficking. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/2/04)

March 2: The US Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs released the 2003 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) which describes the efforts of key countries to attack all aspects of the international drug trade in calendar year 2003. The report states that in the case of Cuba the "regime security officials did take a much more aggressive posture with respect to all activities deemed "illegal," including narcotics trafficking, beginning in the first quarter of 2003." (*US Department Press Release, 2/3/04*)

March 23: Cuba blasted a US State Department report that alleges the island's government "chose" not to devote sufficient resources to its war on drugs as "vulgar and infamous." "If the previous annual reports by the Department of State (. . .) had been tendentious and manipulative in their references to Cuba, the one announced March 1 in Washington is vulgar and infamous," the official Granma newspaper reported. The latest report by the department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, issued to little notice, said Cuba is doing little to stop drug smuggling and that its cooperation with U.S. efforts is sporadic and limited. (*The Miami Herald, 23/3/04*)

April 20: Jamaica and Cuba will sign an agreement pledging greater cooperation against drug trafficking through the Caribbean, a Jamaican official said. The memorandum of understanding will allow for intelligence sharing and joint training for anti-drug operations, National Security Ministry spokesman Donovan Nelson said without giving details. The agreement will also set a framework for prosecuting transnational crimes like money laundering and counterfeiting, Nelson added. (*AP, 20/4/04*)

September 16: Cuba began a three-day National Crime Watch Training for neighborhood organizations to reinforce control of drug trafficking and other crimes in the community. The training, organized by the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, is within the scope of the normal activities performed by this organization in each neighborhood. The preparation is in conjunction with local police forces and includes reinforcement of the control of crime and encouraging CDR vigilance. (*Prensa Latina, 16/9/04*)

October 4: Cuban authorities have confiscated more than 7 tons of drugs since 2003, breaking up 18 international drug trafficking operations, Granma reported. According to statistics from the Ministry of the Interior, the government seized 7.8 tons of marijuana and cocaine between January 2003 and last July. The majority had been dropped by planes, or abandoned or lost by speedboats. The ministry indicated it had stopped four maritime drug-trafficking operations, which resulted in the detainment of 13 people. (*UPI, 4/10/04*)

October 5: Cuba is still investigating what to do with a major Colombian drug lord arrested on this Caribbean island while traveling on a false passport this summer, Cuba's top anti-drug official said. Authorities have determined, however, that the drug lord was "in transit" in Cuba and didn't have any intention of developing a local drug market here, General Jesus Becerra, chief of Cuba's anti-narcotics agency, told reporters. Luis Hernando Gomez Bustamante, an alleged leader of Colombia's Norte del Valle drug cartel, was arrested in Havana in July. He simply "chose (Cuba) as a country to pass through," Becerra said. "He is detained, he has a defense lawyer, he enjoys the rights provided by our constitution," Becerra added. "We are working (on the case)." (*AP, 5/10/04*)

October 6: Cuba is still ready to sign a cooperation agreement with the United States on drug smuggling, Cuban Vice Foreign Minister Abelardo Moreno told the press. Moreno stressed that any agreement must be based on mutual respect for sovereignty and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. Washington has rejected six proposals from Havana on the issue since December 2001 although the American people will be the principal beneficiary of such an agreement, he said. (*Xinhua, 6/10/04*)

October 13: A United Nations report released in Mexico City recalls Havana's repeated efforts to sign cooperation agreements with Washington in order to jointly fight drug trafficking. The

document refers to the application of recommendations adopted in the 13th Meeting of Heads of National Organizations to Fight Drug Trafficking in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Brazil last year. The countries participating in that meeting suggested establishing and applying official agreements beyond national borders and the region to facilitate operations against international crime. Cuba has signed cooperation agreements with 33 countries. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/10/04)

December 21: Custom officers at the Havana José Martí airport seized a chess set whose pieces were made of cocaine, reported the daily *Granma*. Since the beginning of 2000 until July this year, Cuban custom officers have uncovered 92 drug-trafficking operations, mainly cocaine. (*AFP*, 21/12/04)

General

January 7: According to a report from the National Tax Administration Office (ONAT), in the course of two months, operations involving several Ministries and departments from the Assembly of the People's Power as well as the Ministry of the Interior uncovered over 9,643 alleged violations, carried out primarily by unauthorized self-employed individuals. Among these, there were 1,764 food processors and vendors, 838 transporters, 768 produce market vendors, 95 landlords, and 658 in other independent productive and commercial sectors. Since 2002, the ONAT has not issued any new operating licenses to self-employed workers. (*Cubanet*, 7/1/04)

February 20: More than a third of the audits conducted on Cuban companies, almost all managed by the government, in 2003 uncovered irregularities, forcing authorities to exercise greater surveillance, especially with regard to products in high demand on the black market, officials said. Last year, the Audit and Control Ministry (MAC) conducted 5,917 audits and in 36 percent of the cases, the "conditions uncovered merited a grade of poor or deficient." Audit and Control Minister Lina Pedraza told official newspaper *Granma* that special attention would be paid this year to "control and supervision of sensitive products that are frequently diverted to the black market." The volume of irregularities discovered at the companies matched the results of Finance Ministry price inspections of establishments selling to the public. Finance Ministry supervisors conducted more than 316,000 inspections in 2003 and found price violations in 35 percent of the cases. According to Finance Ministry price supervision chief Miriam Rodriguez, most of the irregularities were found in the food sector, followed by the agricultural market. The majority of the irregularities have to do with short-weighting, sale of out-of-date products and charging more than the established price, a practice Cubans call imposing a "multa" or "fine." (*EFE*, 20/2/04)

July 5: Cuba's ruling Communist party has launched a far-reaching assault on "corruption and illegalities" that could lead to the expulsion of moderate members. The campaign - yet to be reported by official government media - reflects the party's ideological retrenchment and underlines the extent to which the government has renounced its timid market-oriented reforms of the early 1990s. Over the past two or three months members of the party's political bureau have been visiting local party branches to tell militants that they have one last chance to clean up their acts. The new focus on corruption has been accompanied by measures to strip state businesses of their limited operational autonomy and to scrap executive perks such as expense accounts. A prominent voice in the anti-corruption effort has been Raul Castro, defence minister and apparently the man next in line to succeed his brother, Fidel Castro, as Cuba's president, according to party cadres who attended high-level national and provincial party meetings two months ago. The meetings were shown a video prepared as part of Raul Castro's anti-corruption drive. (*Financial Times*, 5/7/04)

November 22: According to the illegal Christian Workers' Union, self-employed citizens in Downtown Havana were targeted by a large operation during which fines of up to 1,500 pesos were imposed for alleged price-gouging practices and sales of unauthorized products. Large

amounts of merchandise were confiscated while offenders were threatened with operating license suspensions. (*Info Lux Press*, 34/11/04)

INTERNET

January 10: Cuba tightened its controls over the Internet, prohibiting access over the low-cost government phone service most ordinary citizens have at home. The move could affect hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Cubans who illegally access the Internet from their homes, using computers and Internet accounts they have borrowed or purchased on the black market. Cuba's communist government already heavily controls access to the Internet. Cubans must have government permission to use the Web legally and most don't, although many can access international e-mail and a more limited government-controlled intranet at government jobs and schools. Now Cubans will need additional approval to access via the nation's regular phone service. Since few Cubans are authorized to use the Internet from home _ only some doctors and key government officials _ the new law amounts to a crackdown on illegal users. (*AP*, 10/1/04)

January 12: Amnesty International expressed concern at the impact on freedom of expression and information of Cuba's new law restricting internet access. "The new measures, which limit and impede unofficial internet use, constitute yet another attempt to cut off Cubans' access to alternative views and a space for discussing them," said Amnesty International as a new law came into force. "This step, coming on top of last year's prosecution of 75 activists for peacefully expressing their views, gives the authorities another mechanism for repressing dissent and punishing critics." (*Amnesty International Press Release*, 12/1/04)

January 12: Cuba ended 2003 with 750 sites in the Internet and some 1,100 domains .cu, a report of the Cuban Ministry of Computing and Communications (MIC) showed on January 12, 2004. According to the same report some 270,000 computers are operating on the island, 65 pct of them are connected to the Internet. The report also showed that the accounts of e-mails were more than 480,000 and that the Cuban Internet users increased every year. According to the report, the use of the information technologies and communications in the country is low and must increase in the next years. Most of the island's residents who can send and receive international e-mails, do not have open access to the world wide web. (*Latin American News Digest*, 13/1/04)

January 14: In Cuba, there is a veritable underground cyber-market, which includes the design, production and placement of pages on web sites outside of Cuba, advertising rental property, tour guides, art galleries and private restaurants on the island. A web page of this type can cost 600 to 800 dollars to post. For every legally connected computer, there could be 10 or more with illegal Internet access, according to estimates by communications experts. (*IPS*, 14/1/04)

January 14: A large portion of the Cubans with electronic mail accounts connect with servers at their places of work, allowing them to download or send messages without going beyond to the Internet itself. Economists consulted on this matter say it would be much more beneficial for the country to open up Internet services for everyone who is interested, instead of maintaining high rates payable only in dollars. A full-time connection can cost 230 to 300 dollars a month, depending on the Internet service provider. Communications authorities assure that the Fidel Castro government would be willing to make Internet access available to the general public, but that there are major economic barriers that have forced the government to give priority to certain sectors of the population and to what is known as "social use". According to Ignacio González Planas, minister of information technology and communications, "The country's policy of giving priority to access from institutions is based on technical limitations." (*IPS*, 14/1/04)

January 15: Speaking with the press, Cuban Information Technology and Communications Minister Ignacio González Planas said that in Cuba, there are over 480,000 e-mail accounts and

nearly 100,000 Internet users. He added that Cuba maintains 1,100 .cu domains, and 750 Websites or portals. "Currently, there exist 270,000 computers in the country, 65% of which are network-connected," the Minister pointed out. (*AP*, 16/1/04)

January 18: The Cuban Information Technology and Communications Minister, Ignacio González Planas, denied that his country is restricting Internet access for Cubans. He said that the "social use" of online access provided in the island is the "most democratic and widespread" among Third World nations. (*El País*, 19/1/04)

January 20: Public librarians from around the world have condemned Cuba's violation of human rights after it introduced new restrictions on access to the Internet. The new law increases the Cuban government's control over Internet use. It had previously taken measures to block various Internet sites and restrict general access to the Web. "While the World Summit of the Information Society was debating how best to improve access to information using information technology, the Cuban government was preparing a law that will further restrict Internet access for its citizens," said International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions Chair Paul Sturges. (*Local Government International Bureau UK*, 20/1/04)

January 24: Cuba's government has backtracked on plans to limit internet access for the Cuban population, Latin American newspapers reported. Cuban telecoms operator Etecsa said it has postponed the measure which was scheduled to come into effect this weekend, and did not set a new date. The law prohibits Cubans who pay their telephone bills in local currency from accessing the internet from their homes. Only government institutions, foreign companies and foreign individuals that pay their bills in United States dollars are excluded from the restrictions. Etecsa said the measure was designed to eliminate theft of passwords, "international degradation" and fraudulent, unauthorized use of the internet. (*Business News America*, 24/1/04)

May 16: The Cuban government is stepping up efforts to further restrict Internet access for Cubans and to better control telephone services through a centralized structure. The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications has implemented an Information Technology Security Policy, under the supervision of Ministry of the Interior experts. Restrictions involve warning authorized cybernauts against "indiscriminate use" of e-mail through charge-free internet-based service providers like Yahoo! or Hotmail, as well as of international chat rooms. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 16/5/04)

May 28: Three hundred community informatics clubs will be soon inaugurated, the National Informatics Program director Nestor Rodriguez said. He added that the increase of such community centers will further consolidate ongoing national education and cultural programs, such as the expansion of higher education courses at community level as well as socially-oriented initiatives aimed at providing the community with access to information technologies. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/5/04)

June 4: It was reported in Santa Clara, that Cubans will have access to 11,000 new scientific electronic magazines as of October. That opportunity will be possible by virtue of a cooperation agreement between Belgium's Council of Flemish Universities and the Central University of Las Villas. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/6/04)

November 22: Cuba's Communist regime edges out China's when it comes to censoring the Internet, according to a study released by Reporters Without Borders (RWB) to coincide with a meeting between those countries' leaders in Havana. The comparison is based on 10 categories, in four of which Cuba ranks "worst" compared to three in which China receives bottom billing. In the other three, the two countries are judged to be virtually tied. It should come as no surprise, then, that in a section titled "Governmental position toward the Internet," the RWB report notes that Hu Jintao's China says the Internet must be "developed and controlled," while Fidel Castro's Cuba says it must be "above all, controlled." In that same chapter, Beijing is reported to consider the Internet "indispensable for economic development, an instrument of propaganda and a

'subversive' force," while Havana calls it "the great malaise of the 21st century," RWB said. Cuba also ranks last in the number of Web surfers, having "tens of thousands of selected Internet users," since governmental authorization is required to buy a modem. (*EFE*, 22/11/04)

MIGRATION

[See also, US-Cuba Relations/ Migration]

January 28: Still confined after more than nine months in a Curacao prison, five Cuban immigrants, three of which with have alleged ties to the Cuban dissidence, risk deportation back to their country. (*El Miami Herald*, 28/1/04)

February 11: Cuban police inspected a house and several auto repair shops in a neighborhood where residents recently converted two 1950s cars into boats that refugees used in attempts to reach the United States. The search came a day after eight residents of the Diezmero neighborhood in Havana were returned to Cuba by the US Coast Guard, after their converted 1959 Buick was spotted floating off Key West, Florida. (*The Seattle Times*, 12/2/04)

February 11: A family of four intercepted at sea while trying to get to Florida in a floating 1959 Buick returned home to jubilant relatives and cheering neighbors after Cuban authorities released them. "We feel good. They treated us as well as could be expected," Marcial Basanta said as he hugged and kissed the friends and family who gathered for his return to Havana's Diezmero neighborhood. (*AP*, 12/2/04)

February 23: "I don't think it is worth commenting on them," says Alicia Alonso about the five young dancers who bailed out of her Ballet Nacional de Cuba tour last fall and defected to the United States. She then proceeded to comment anyway on the actions of Cervilio Amador and Gema Díaz, of Adiaris Almeida, Violeta Serrat and Luis Valdés, the latest protagonists of a Cuban ballet diaspora that has been going on for nearly half a century, including 20 in 2003. "Of course it affects us," says Alonso, founder and head of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba. "Not as a company, because we have 110 beautiful dancers, and we have more coming up each year through our school. But as human beings, I wish they had waited to develop a little more, to be better formed. Those young people who left may not believe this, but I worry about them." (*Sun Sentinel*, 23/2/04)

February 27: Fourteen Cubans who left their country made it to the Honduran city of La Ceiba after their boat capsized, officials said. La Ceiba Deputy Police Chief Juan Lopez said one of the "rafters" told him the group sailed toward Honduras, southwest of the island, with the intention of requesting political asylum and finding work there. Immigration authorities will make the Cubans' names public and ultimately decide their fate, Lopez added. (*EFE*, 27/2/04)

March 11: After nearly a year in custody, five Cuban refugees have been released and given permission to live in Curaçao while authorities consider their asylum requests, the government said. Authorities detained the five in April in St. Maarten, another territory in the Netherlands Antilles where they had been working illegally, the government said in a statement released. The five were to be deported back to Cuba, but they applied for political refugee status and were transferred in August to Curaçao, the seat of the Antillean government. (*AP*, 12/3/04)

April 30: Because of José Ariel Contreras's defection, Cuban government officials have not allowed his wife and two daughters to leave Cuba. Contreras, through his interpreter Leo Astacio, told the press after pitching six strong innings in a 5-1 victory over the Oakland Athletics that he had arranged Nicaraguan visas for his wife, Miriam Murillo Flores, and their two daughters, 11-year-old Naylan and 3-year-old Naylenis, but Cuban government officials have not granted them permission to leave. "I call them every day," Contreras said, alluding to his wife and daughters. "They're fine, they're healthy." According to Contreras, there is a five-year waiting period before

his family will be allowed to leave Cuba. "I have to wait three and a half more years," he said. "It's already been a year and a half since I left." (*The New York Times*, 30/4/04)

May 3: Ten Cubans on a raft rowed their way to Honduras from their native communist-ruled country, landing on a beach northeast of Tegucigalpa after a seven-day journey. Two had to be treated for dehydration. The seven men and three women were transferred to the Migration Department, a spokesman for the Honduran Security Ministry said. (*AFP*, 3/5/04)

May 7: 20 Cuban illegal migrants, who reached the Cayman Islands, told local authorities that their boats had been destroyed when they hit nearby reefs. (*AP*, 8/5/04)

June 9: Honduran authorities have taken into custody a group of 22 Cuban rafters who arrived at Puerto Lempira, on the Caribbean coast, indicated an official source. Captain Salvador Miralda, of La Ceiba Fire Department, said the Cubans were brought to Honduras after being rescued by a fishing vessel. The group includes six women, two children 11 and 14, and fourteen men. One of the women is pregnant. (*EFE*, 10/6/04)

June 20: Eleven Cubans recounted how they reached the Honduran coast after drifting at sea for a week on a small boat. A previous group of 22 rafters had reached Puerto Lempira, on Honduras's Atlantic coast. And last May another 23, including six women and two children, were shipwrecked along different places on the North coast. Official Honduran statistics indicate that at least 200 Cubans have arrived in the country in the last two years aboard rafts and later left for the United States. (*AP*, 20/6/04)

June 22: Honduran officials said they would mount operations "by sea and by land" to prevent the mass arrival of Cuban rafters trying to use the country as a stepping-stone to the United States. Ramon Romero, the director general of immigration, made the announcement a day after saying he believed that Miami-based groups were encouraging Cubans to flee to Honduras. About 300 Cubans have arrived in Honduras aboard rafts or small boats over the past two years - most apparently trying to head by land to the United States. (*CNN*, 22/6/04)

June 23: Eleven Cubans recounted how they reached the Honduran coast after drifting at sea for a week on a small boat. A previous group of 22 rafters had reached Puerto Lempira, on Honduras's Atlantic coast. And last May another 23, including six women and two children, were shipwrecked along different places on the North coast. Official Honduran statistics indicate that at least 200 Cubans have arrived in the country in the last two years aboard rafts and later left for the United States. (*Europa Press*, 23/6/04)

June 24: Abelardo Fernández, a Cuban citizen who requested from Spanish authorities political asylum for him and his family, has been deported to Cuba. On arriving to Havana's airport, Cuban authorities denied him and his two daughters - 4 and 12 years old - permission to enter to their country alleging that they left the island under "permanent bases". "It is an untenable situation", Victoria Fernández, technical director of the Fundación Hispano Cubana said. "The girls have been traveling for 20 hours. In Cuba, they were not allowed to enter, and Spain insists on deporting them to Havana", Fernández added. Officials from the Centro Cubano de España are also trying to obtain from Spanish authorities permission for Fernández and his family to stay in that country under humanitarian bases. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 24/6/04)

June 26: Spanish authorities deported to Cape Verde three Cuban citizens who requested political asylum and had been in detention at the Barajas airport after being turned down by both Havana and Madrid. Abelardo Fernández, and daughters Valentina and Lesly, 4 and 12 years old respectively, were sent to the African nation after failed attempts by exile organizations to secure their asylum on humanitarian grounds. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 29/6/04)

June 29: Ten Cuban illegal migrants who arrived on Mexico's Caribbean coast in a fragile boat were detained by the Mexican navy, authorities said. The rafters set sail four days ago from the

western Cuban province of Pinar de Rio, but their boat's engine broke down. Among the rafters, all of whom were adults, were three women. The Cubans were all sent to the migration station in Cancun so that their immigration status can be determined. (*EFE*, 29/6/04)

July 16: Two Cuban dissidents who arrived in Paris on a flight from Havana are being held at Charles de Gaulle airport, following their request for political asylum in France. "We surrendered to the French police and asked for political asylum," said Mario Osvaldo Ruiz Fleites, 48, a former army officer and member of the anti-Castro group "Todos Unidos" (All United). Ruiz Fleites traveled with fellow Cuban Raúl Rolando Ruiz Fernández, 46. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 17/7/04)

July 22: German police and Prosecutor's Office sources informed that the lifeless body of a 20-year-old Cuban stowaway was found in the wheel-well of an airplane when it landed in Düsseldorf. The aircraft had stopped in Cuba and had since been flying between the Dominican Republic and Düsseldorf. According to a passport he was carrying, the young man, who died from hypothermia, was Cuban, said Johannes Mocken, a spokesman with the North-Rhine-Wesphalia Prosecutor's Office. (*AFP*, 22/7/04)

July 30: Six Cuban balseros are missing after they left for Honduras in a raft. Jorge Luis Eguiguren Rodriguez, and 11 other men left Havana in the late-night darkness on July 6. They planned to go to Honduras, using a channel where the currents and winds were in their favor. Some days later, four of the men drowned. Six wanted to keep going, but the two remaining survivors fought to return to Cuba. They argued. Finally, they cut off a piece of the raft and split into two parties. When the two men got back to Cuba, they recounted what happened. From the six, there has been no word. (*The Miami Herald*, 30/7/04)

August 4: While successfully completing a sea journey from Cuba to Florida has become more difficult, one 1998 federal policy announcement drew attention to a back door for Cubans thinking of crossing the Mexican border. That year then-INS Commissioner Doris Meissner issued a memo saying that Cubans who illegally crossed the Mexican border should be considered eligible for residency under the Cuban Adjustment Act. "All that's left now is the Mexican border and the sea," said one woman who made the trip two years ago. All they need is an invitation from a friend or relative in that country. Some Cubans go directly to Mexico; some first pass through other Latin American countries and hook up with smugglers to help them reach the Mexican border. Most Cubans now know that once there, they can simply walk across a bridge and ask an immigration inspector for political asylum. Like Cubans who come to South Florida by sea, most are detained several days. Sea crossers and border crossers alike almost always pass an initial "credible fear" interview with asylum officers and are released if they pass security checks. The dangers of sea travel make flying to Mexico a more attractive option for the Cubans who can afford it. (*Sun Sentinel*, 5/8/04)

August 24: A Cuban woman tucked herself inside a wooden crate the size of a small filing cabinet and had herself shipped from the Bahamas to Miami aboard a cargo plane. The woman, whose name was not released, will be allowed to stay in the United States. A cargo crew found her curled up inside the crate after unloading it at the Miami airport. "Certainly she's lucky to be alive," said Zach Mann, spokesman for Customs and Border Protection. (*CNN*, 24/8/04)

September 8: Seven Cuban rafters missing at sea for a week are safe and sound in the Bahamas, Miami activists have confirmed. "We are glad to confirm that the seven missing young men are in Nassau," said Angel de Fana, head of the organization "Plantados." (*El Nuevo Herald*, 9/9/04)

September 10: Seven Cubans reached the Caribbean island of Guanaja, off the coast of Honduras, in a small wooden boat, a Honduran immigration official reported. The Cubans, all males, said they were from Camaguey, Cuba, from where they had sailed the previous week, he added. The men also said they wanted to go to Tegucigalpa, perhaps to travel to the United States from there, officials speculated. (*EFE*, 11/9/04)

September 14: A group of eight Cuban refugees arrived by boat in the isles of Cisne, Atlantic Honduras. The group is under the custody of Honduran authorities, it was officially reported. (AP, 15/9/04)

October 1: Cuban political activist, Reynaldo García Llerena, denounced that two Cuban political activists held at the Nassau Refugee Detention Center, in Bahamas, were harshly beaten by prison guards. René Mendoza and Jorge Luis Conde, two Cuban refugees held at the Center, were threatened by two prison guards, who removed their pistols, aiming at their heads and shouting, "We are going to kill you!" After brutally beating them in front of other refugees, they were taken into isolation. When asked what was their reason for beating those refugees, they replied that, "Here the guards do not need a reason to beat up refugees", added García Llerena. Citizens Against Human Rights Abuse (CAHRA) denounced these abuses and requested all Cuban American organizations do the same. (*Puente Informativo*, 4/10/04)

October 13: An urgent call was made by Cuban refugees detained at the Nassau Refugee Detention Center to stop the beatings and abuse against Cubans and Haitians held in that place. In a document addressed to Amnesty Internacional, Cuban political refugees David Martinez, Frank Garcia Llerena and Jesus Montes de Oca denounce lack of medical attention, proper hygiene, spoiled food, merciless beatings, lack of spiritual and moral support, the spreading of tuberculosis, and other serious problems. "Please visit the camp (...) as soon as possible (...), demand medical attention and humane treatment for the refugees". "We are very concerned and appalled by this barbaric conduct and trust those responsible for this cruelty will be held accountable", the document said. (*Netfor Cuba*, 13/10/04)

October 20: Amnesty International has opened an investigation on recent allegations of torture, beatings and other abuses against Cuban and Haitian citizens who are also allegedly denied medical attention at a detention centre in the Bahamas. According to human rights investigators, the detainees refer to the Carmichael Detention Center in Nassau as a "hell hole" of brutality lacking attention to basic needs. (*The Miami Herald*, 20/10/04)

October 28: Seven Cuban men have reached the Honduran island of Roatan in a small boat as part of a continuing trickle of refugees, officials and local news media reported. "We are all adults and we made the trip because of the tough economic situation in Cuba," boat captain Raul Dominguez Castro told a local television station. He said the group came from the town of Santa Cruz in southeastern Cuba. The government announced that it would give the group permission to stay temporarily in Honduras. (AP, 28/10/04)

November 3: Eleven Cuban rafters, among them three doctors, arrived on Honduras' Caribbean coast, police said. National Police spokesman Leonel Saucedo told the press that the rafters, who were fleeing Cuba in a small boat, washed up on the beach at Trujillo. "All of them are men, but I don't know their identities," Saucedo said. (*EFE*, 3/11/04)

November 9: Twelve Cubans – eight men and four women --, fleeing Cuba aboard a small boat, reached the Atlantic shores of Honduras, said local authorities. (AP, 9/11/04)

November 19: Agenda Cuba and Net for Cuba International denounced to the international community the abuses and human rights violations committed against Cuban refugees retained at the Carmichael Detention Center in Nassau, Bahamas. "The group of 48 Cubans, among them 7 members a of the Democratic Party November 30 "Frank País", a group of the Cuban internal opposition, and 2 children and 6 women, are extremely pale, thin and extremely anxious", Mayra Enriquez, a member of Agenda Cuba who visited the detention center, said. (*Netfor Cuba*, 19/11/04)

November 24: The South African Department of Health is currently considering whether or not to endorse a group of Cuban doctors seeking permanent residence in South Africa. It has received

requests from at least 17 Cuban nationals requesting it to endorse their applications for permanent residence. Spokesperson for the department Sibani Mngadi said the doctors were requesting certificates confirming their employment at provincial departments of health for a period of five years and above and therefore qualify to apply for a permanent residence. "We are considering these requests in line with the Immigration Act which allows for foreign nationals who have been in South Africa for a minimum of five years on valid work permit to apply for permanent residence," he said in a statement. (*Bua News*, 24/11/04)

December 4: The organization Solidarity Without Borders (SSF) revealed that some 500 Cuban doctors have defected in Venezuela and presented two doctors who claimed to have left that country two weeks earlier. The government of President Hugo Chavez promotes the so-called 'Plan Barrio Adentro'. "We promote 'Plan Barrio Afuera' to help these doctors escape the working slavery which has been imposed on them", said Dr. Julio Cesar Alfonso, president of SSF. (*DPA*, 4/12/04)

December 6: Luis Conde Morales, a member of the Democratic Party November 30 "Frank País" retained at the Center for Refugees in the Bahamas, said that all the Cubans at the camp (58 in total) began a hunger strike -- with the exception of the two children also retained in the camp. They are protesting that Bahaman authorities are not providing them with sufficient food. Conde Morales said that the food Cubans receive at the camp has been progressively reduced, to the point of having a piece of bread and some tea for breakfast, and another piece of bread, on this occasion with fish, for lunch. These actions forced the Cubans to start a hunger strike because he said that, "not eating anything is similar to eating very little". (*Netfor Cuba*, 7/12/04)

December 9: At least 20 people were injured, including 5 Cubans who were hospitalized, during a riot at the Carmichael Detention Centre in Nassau, Bahamas, where a group of detainees set a dormitory on fire and clashed with prison officers. A total of 48 Cubans, including two children, have been held at Carmichael since September, after being intercepted at sea en route to the United States. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 10/12/04)

December 10: Reports of possible use of excessive force by law enforcement officials during a fire and confrontation at the Carmichael Detention Centre, in which 9 detainees and 11 soldiers were injured, underline the need for the Government of the Bahamas to establish an independent commission of inquiry into conditions at the Carmichael Detention Centre, said Amnesty International. Amnesty International has received reports that some detainees are alleging that several people, including women and children, were severely beaten with batons and that police prevented detainees from leaving the facility once the fire started. The authorities have stated that soldiers fired rubber rounds to restore order after detainees tried to secure and subsequently set fire to a room. A newspaper also published an unconfirmed report that one man sustained a gunshot wound. The action reportedly followed what appeared to be attempts by immigration staff and soldiers to remove Cuban detainees for deportation. (*AI Press Release*, 10/12/04)

December 13: A Cuban couple who have been granted political asylum in the Czech Republic, demonstrated in front of the Cuban Embassy in Prague in an effort to make communist Cuba allow their two small children to join them in the Czech Republic. Liuver Saborit and Mayda Arguelles arrived in the Czech Republic about 1.5 years ago and were granted Czech asylum last December. They say their children were left behind in Cuba, but the Cuban authorities do not want them to leave. "We haven't seen the children for 17 months," Saborit told the press. The couple were not received by authorities at the Cuban Embassy and they said are ready to launch a hunger strike if their efforts fail. (*CTK, El Nuevo Herald*, 13/12/04)

December 16: Mr. Ruppert Missick Jr., a senior journalist of the Bahamas Tribune, gave confirmation on the number of Cuban nationals that were returned to the island from a detention center in the Bahamas. He confirmed that Immigration Authorities repatriated 28 of the 62 Cubans detained in the Carmichael Road Detention Center in Nassau. It was also confirmed that 3 of the 6 women were sent back to Cuba, among them was Eida Caballero and her two small

children. Yanelys Acosta González, an activist with the Cuban Pro Human Rights Party affiliated to the Andrei Sajarov Foundation is one of the women that remain in the center along with three men, among them her husband Jesús Montes de Oca Martija, an activist with the same organization. (*Puente Informativo*, 16/12/04)

December 19: Six men and two women from Cuba arrived on Honduras' Atlantic coast in a small boat as part of an attempt to reach the United States, authorities said. Police spokesman Porfirio Escobar said the group, originally from Camaguey province, was being held temporarily at a police station in La Ceiba. (*AP*, 20/12/04)

December 22: At least 90 Cuban rafters have washed up on Honduras' Caribbean coast in the last days, almost one-half the number that have arrived so far this year, a migration official in Tegucigalpa told the press. Eight immigrants arrived on December 19 at the port city of La Ceiba and 82 others came ashore days later at different points along the coast, Population and Migration Policy Office advisor Carlos Sanchez said. (*EFE*, 22/12/04)

December 27: Two boats carrying 28 Cubans refugees arrived in Honduras, authorities announced. Apparently hoping to use the country as a stepping stone to the United States, the refugees were staying in police offices on the island of Roatan, 400 kilometers north of the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa. "We fled out the country because of the bad economic situation," said Reinaldo Guerrero, 35, of Vertiente, Cuba, in a televised interview. "It was a hard trip, but worthwhile (...) We just want to work in the United States." The new arrivals were from Camagüey province. (*AP*, 27/12/04)

POLITICAL AFFAIRS

Cuban Communist Party, Youth Communist Union, Mass Organizations and National Assembly of People's Power

[See also, Economy/ General indicators and budget/ General]

January 28: Otto Rivero Torres, First Secretary of the Young Communists Union (UJC), publicly call to the celebration of the 8 th congress of the organization. "We are encouraged by that infinite faith of Fidel in people and his deep conviction that only those who fight have the right to victory", the young leader said. "Cuba, attacked and blocked, is one of the favorite targets of the current US government", adds the call and states that in view of such strategic challenge "it is necessary to make a deep and critical analysis of the present, looking to the future to make a better homeland". (*A/N*, 28/1/04)

February 20: As a goal achieved for its upcoming 8th Congress, the Federation of Cuban Women reported a record membership of four million in more than 40 years of foundation. Founded in 1960, the FMC is the only women's organization in the island. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/2/04)

March 7: In commemoration of the International Day of Women, hundreds of representatives of the Cuban Women's Federation (FMC) announced their eighth congress next year. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 8/3/04)

June 28: Prior to formal meetings of the National Parliament, the Parliament started sessions, with its members being informed about the performances of several state bodies,. Divided into 10 commissions, the members of the National Assembly of People's Power will analyze topics such as the results in food production, use of fertile lands and economic performance. Also included in the agenda will be the universalization of Higher Education, stemming from the establishment of colleges in the country's 169 municipalities. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/6/04)

July 2: The National Assembly of People's Power --also known as the Cuban Parliament -- began its second day of debates at Havana's International Convention Center concerning the universalization of education on the island. Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón opened the morning session. Fidel Castro, who also serves as a delegate to the island's legislature, spoke from the floor. He recalled how educational programs were negatively affected by the economic problems of what is known as "the Special Period." He noted that the 90s were times of shortages and hardships for the Cuban people -- having severe effects on the social and educational programs of the Cuban Revolution. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 2/7/04*)

November 13: The City of Havana is celebrating its 485th anniversary by receiving delegations from some 30 countries for the 12th annual Meeting of Solidarity and Cooperation of City Halls with Havana. Local authorities from all 15 municipalities in Havana participated in welcoming the foreign guests who joined more than 1, 200 people in a ceremony in the city's Gran Teatro to mark the founding of Villa de San Cristóbal de la Habana in 1519. Havana's mayor, Juan Contino, and city historian Eusebio Leal were the guest speakers. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 13/11/04*)

December 2: The Karl Marx Theater served as the venue for a political-cultural gala that opened the 8th Congress of the Young Communist League (UJC). The cultural gala was also a tribute to the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) on its 48th anniversary. It was attended by Raúl Castro, minister of the FAR; Ricardo Alarcón, president of the Cuban Parliament; Felipe Pérez Roque, foreign minister; and Esteban Lazo, vice president, and 1, 200 delegates and invited guests attending the Congress. (*Granma Internacional, 2/12/04*)

December 3: The 8th Congress of the Cuban Young Communist League (UJC) began its debates with the participation of 1,200 people in six working commissions on issues related to the work of the political organization. The meeting, being held at Havana's Conference Center, gives delegates the opportunity to analyze topics such as the "Battle of Ideas", social workers' work and its impact on the population, role of youth in the current educational revolution, improvement of health care services, economic activity and defense, among others. (*Prensa Latina, 3/12/04*)

December 5: Fidel Castro pronounced the closing speech of the VIII Congress of the Young Communists Union (UJC), in a session at Havana's Palacio de Convenciones that was attended by 1200 delegates and guests. Ideas will decide this universal struggle, stressed the Cuban leader when he referred to the vital role of Cuban youth in facing the US government attempts to destroy the island's economic and social project. (*Prensa Latina, 6/12/04*)

December 22: Delegates to the Cuban Parliament, meeting in 10 permanent commissions, discussed different topics, as a prior step to the 4th session period of the current legislative body. The agenda included a discussion on international affairs, as well as other issues on services, health and sports, education, culture, constitutional and legal affairs, national defense, science, technology and the environment. Parallel to this, the economic affairs commission will debate behind closed doors the budget plan for 2005, which will be discussed and approved by legislators. (*Prensa Latina, 22/12/04*)

December 22: The Cuban Parliament's ten working commissions continued in Havana with discussions on Cuba's economic development and government's response to difficulties during 2004. Participating in the parliamentary session were Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Directors and representatives of different institutions of the State's Central Administration responsible for evaluating the performance of the different sectors. The Economic and Social guidelines and the State's Budget Law for 2005 were also debated at Havana's International Convention Center. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 22/12/04*)

Government of Cuba [See also, Economy/ Energy/ Energy crisis]

February 11: The Cuban Council of State appointed Manuel Marrero Cruz as the country's new Tourism Minister, replacing Ibrahim Ferradaz Garcia, the Granma newspaper reported. Architect Manuel Marrero Cruz was before the Executive President of the Gaviota Group, a tourism and services corporation. He had worked for more than a decade in investment projects, hotel management and held several public posts. Without providing further details, Granma says Ibrahim Ferradaz "will be assigned to other tasks". (*Prensa Latina*, 11/2/04)

February 17: Sources from the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Trade (MINCEX) confirmed that after a long police investigation about ten officials are being prosecuted under corruption allegations. Among those involved are Gabriel Villar, director of foreign negotiations at MINCEX; Arnaldo Vega, a CIMEX executive, the largest business group on the island; and Iván Esteva, Cuban manager of the Spanish firm Provimar S.A. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 17/2/04)

April 14: Fidel Castro denied he's considering stepping down after 44 years in power, and his influence on the Cuban people could grow after his passing, he said in a documentary aired in the United States. "I'm not willing to please Mr. (George W.) Bush," said Castro, 76, in reply to a question from U.S. movie Director Oliver Stone as to why he doesn't transfer power to a younger successor. "I've had no time to consider that option. It does not cross my mind to step down from my post of Commander in Chief," added Castro. "I believe I will die working," he affirmed. (*AFP*, 14/4/04)

May 27: A Press Release in the official daily Granma informed that, at the suggestion of Fidel Castro, 72-year old José Ramón Balaguer Cabrera, with a lengthy leadership career, has been appointed Public Health minister, due to the "importance and intensity" of work in that sector. (*AFP*, 27/5/04)

October 14: The Cuban government fired its minister of basic industries, citing the mismanagement of an electricity crisis and working too independently of colleagues. The announcement of Marcos Portal Leon's dismissal was made in an official statement on the front page of state-run newspapers. He will be replaced by Yadira Garcia Vera, a Communist Party leader with a chemical engineering degree. The statement first praises Portal for years of service to the island nation, particularly during hard times in the 1990s known to officialdom as "the special period." Then the minister is harshly criticized for "not being capable, as he has demonstrated in recent days, of warning the top leaders of the (Communist) Party and the State about the risks of an entirely preventable (energy) crisis." Portal was also admonished for "strong tendencies toward self-sufficiency and underestimating the opinions of other experienced colleagues." This trait led him to commit many errors, particularly in policies dealing with the development of nickel production, the statement said. (*AP, AFP*, 14/10/04)

October 20: Fidel Castro tripped and fell after leaving the stage at a graduation ceremony, fracturing a knee and arm but later returning to say that he was "all in one piece." Castro's off-camera tumble after a night speech in the central city of Santa Clara was certain to launch a new round of speculation about the 78-year-old communist leader's health after 45 years of rule. A medical examination confirmed that Castro suffered a broken left knee and a hairline fracture in his upper right arm, said an official notice read on state television. Castro asked that the note be made public, the statement said. (*AP*, 22/10/04)

October 22: Fidel Castro will likely be off his feet for several weeks recovering from a fractured knee and arm, but experts said they don't expect the 78-year-old Cuban ruler to delegate any authority beyond ceremonial duties. Castro's determination to remain in control became abundantly clear in a lengthy letter he sent to "compatriots" and was read by radio and TV broadcasters and published in state-controlled newspapers. "From the moment of the fall, I have not stopped attending to the most important tasks that I am responsible for, in coordination with the other comrades," he wrote. "I'm recovering well and will not lose contact with you." (*The Miami Herald*, 22/10/04)

December 13: The Council of State of the Republic of Cuba has appointed Otto Rivero Torres vice president of the Council of Ministers to oversee investments of the Battle of Ideas and other tasks of the Revolution, "Granma" newspaper published. Rivero Torres has recently wound up his responsibility heading the Young Communist League. The so-called Battle of Ideas comprises 170 programs being implemented by the Cuban government in social, economic and political fields. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/12/04)

December 23: Cheered by hundreds of lawmakers, a smiling Fidel Castro walked in public for the first time since shattering his kneecap in a fall two months ago. Legislators looked stunned, then smiled and applauded, when Cuba's 78-year-old president entered the main auditorium of the Convention Palace on the arm of a schoolgirl to attend a year-end National Assembly meeting. "Long live Fidel!" a lone deputy shouted as Castro took his seat, followed by a shout of "Long live a free Cuba!" (*The Boston Globe*, 24/12/04)

PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH

January 4: Cuba is reporting a 6.3-per-cent infant mortality rate in 2003, which it views as proof of its social development. The local daily Granma newspaper reports say that the rate ranks the island among the top in the world for healthcare, especially in terms of mother-child care. Cuba reported 136,772 new births, that according to preliminary data stands for 4,243 less than 2002, with 862 deaths occurring as a result of birth defects, especially in the heart, in addition to influenza, pneumonia and home accidents. (*BBC*, 4/1/04)

February 10: Cuban scientists have developed a drug to control anemia. The medicine, Trofin, produced in the island's National Bio-preparations Center, is made from all natural materials and has no negative side-effects. Last year it won the Grand Prize at the 1V Food and Nutrition Congress. Production of the new tablet began in 2003 and since then the Center has increased production and lowered cost without affecting quality. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 10/2/04)

February 16: More than a half million Cuban children will receive doses of oral polio vaccine at the end of this month, according to the Ministry of Public Health. During the first stage more than 400,000 children from one month to three-years-old will receive the first oral dose. A second and final stage will be administered and over 150,000 nine-year-old children will have their vaccination reactivated. This is the 43rd polio vaccination campaign carried out across the island since 1959. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 16/2/04)

February 25: Cuban scientists disapprove of cloning for reproductive purposes; however, they support its therapeutic uses, according to specialists in the area. "Cuban scientists reject as unacceptable human cloning for reproductive purposes", said the Deputy Director of the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Centre, Carlos Barroto, on local television. (*EFE*, 25/2/04)

March 15: Dr. Omelio Borroto, Deputy Minister of Public Health, and Dr. Noel González, head of the Heart Transplant Team at the Hermanos Ameijeiras Hospital, revealed that Cuban scientists are currently working with mother cells to regenerate organs in animals. They said it was important to search for a better alternative to transplants, as the risk of rejection by the recipient's body is eliminated or greatly diminished. The doctors explained that the Cuban health system is against human cloning for ethical reasons -- primarily promoting preventive health care, transplants and organ regenerating procedures as ways of prolonging life. Among the pharmaceuticals developed to strengthen body response to the ageing process are Vimang -- made up of extracts from bark of mango trees -- and PV-2, a natural preparation based on morinda royoc and manufactured through homeopathic procedures. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 15/3/04)

March 23: Fidel Castro has urged the US and European governments to mirror Cuba's example of health cooperation; Cuba has more than 16,000 medical personnel volunteering in Third World

countries. In his speech at the commemoration of the founding of Cienfuegos Provincial Hospital 25 years ago, the Cuban leader noted how Cienfuegos alone has contributed almost 600 doctors, dentists and technicians to that assistance program. Try to find a similar number of US or European doctors to volunteer on similar missions and you won't find them, the president pointed out, because "those countries do not have our type of human capital." (*Prensa Latina*, 24/3/04)

March 24: The Cuban Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP) reported that, with 7 cases per 100 thousand inhabitants, the island's tuberculosis rate is one of the lowest in the Americas. The announcement was made as the island received an award from the World Health Organization's Stop TB Initiative for the development of efficient means of control and treatment of the disease. (*Notimex*, 24/3/04)

April 25: Cuban scientists are conducting a project for the creation of a vaccine against the avian mycoplasmosis—a disease that affects particularly hens, roosters and chicken. The project was initiated three years ago at the Centro Nacional de Sanidad Agropecuaria (CENSA), indicated the specialized magazine *Juventud Técnica*. (*DPA*, 25/4/04)

June 10: Cuba has opened in its southeastern hills the first museum dedicated entirely to medicinal plants, a farm where more than 300 species used to cure various ailments are being grown by a natural-remedy autodidact. The museum is the result of long years of study by Enrique Otero Fernandez, a 76-year-old Cuban farmer who loves folk medicine, the official Communist Party newspaper *Juventud Rebelde* reported. (*EFE*, 10/6/04)

July 4: Between January and June, 412 forest fires broke out in Cuba, affecting natural forests covering nearly 6,048 ha, a man-made forest area of 5,398 ha, as well as 5,670 ha of marsh grass. According to Cuban Forest Ranger Corps (CGB) figures, the total economic loss is estimated at 16, 751, 306 pesos. (*Juventud Rebelde*, 4/7/04)

July 22: Cuban scientists have produced the world's first effective human chemically-synthesized vaccine, intended to protect children from the type B Haemophilus influenza. According to an article by researchers from the Center for Synthetic Antigens and appearing in the prestigious magazine "Science," obtaining the vaccine has proved that a synthetic antigen can be produced under good conditions. The article notes that the immunization rate of Quimi-Hib is as good as that of conventional vaccines obtained from bacteria. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 23/7/04)

July 30: Cuba's special municipality of the Isle of Youth, located south of Havana, has registered its lowest infant mortality rate on record -- 3.7 deaths for every 1000 live births. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 30/7/04)

August 3: The western Cuban province of Pinar del Rio has reduced its infant mortality rate to 4.9 percent during 2004, with 17 deaths less than in a similar span last year, *Granma* newspaper published. According to *Granma*, Sandino and Guane -two of the westernmost municipalities there- registered the province's best results, as their infant mortality rate for every thousand live births has so far remained zero. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/8/04)

August 6: Cuba's socialist government has sent thousands of health professionals on a crusade to other developing countries, with high points like the 10,000 doctors actively in service in Venezuela. But complaints have been heard back home over the months-long absence of healthcare specialists. The exportation of medical services is not always understood by a Cuban population accustomed over the years to a quality system of specialist services as well as primary health care. Castro himself is aware of the complaints. "It could very possibly be true that in the midst of so much movement there is no doctor in a certain place for a short time. These situations must be immediately resolved," he said in a speech in September last year. Other frequent complaints are the scarcity of certain medicines, and the deterioration of health facilities over the last ten years. (*IPS*, 6/8/04)

August 8: Fidel Castro presented 797 new nurses with their titles in a ceremony held at the Astral theater in Havana. In this way, the Escuela de Formación Emergente de Enfermería Republic of Panama, in Cotorro municipality, supplies new staff to hospitals and policlinics with a third group of graduates to meet the shortage of nurses in the capital. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/8/04)

August 21: Cuban expertise in the field of clinical hypnosis was confirmed recently when a top psychologist received the prestigious HipnoCaribe 2004 prize in an international event in Puerto Rico. The award was the one of two Alberto Cobián Mena received at the First Congress of Therapeutic Hypnosis held in Puerto Rico. The judges praised Cobián for his contribution to the development of the specialty in both medical practice and academic research. Doctor Cobián is the current President of the Caribbean Association of Therapeutic Hypnosis that has offices in Puerto Rico, Colombia, Panama, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 21/8/04)

September 14: Nowadays less Cuban young women have an abortion to interrupt an unwanted pregnancy, according to official records, but the abortion rate continues to be high and its practice worries health specialists and authorities. According to official reports, the abortion rate of adolescents shows a major decrease (30, 8 percent) between 1990 and 2001. However, "the great problem is that it's mostly used by the young population as a natural fertility control, and it even precedes contraception," Dr. Aldo Izquierdo Rodríguez, assistant gynecology professor says. In a country where abortion is free, legal and performed by a specialized medical staff in medical institutions, it is use with extreme frequency and not considered a last option to prevent an unwanted pregnancy, specialists point out. (*WFS*, 14/9/04)

September 22: Over 1,000 senior citizens from the Cuban province of Matanzas will participate in an initiative of the World Alzheimer's Association to investigate factors that may increase the risk of contracting the disease. According to a story in the daily *Juventud Rebelde*, the study that includes 36 nations will be carried out in several municipalities of Havana where neurological and genetic tests will be performed in addition to interviews. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 22/9/04)

November 3: Cuba continues perfecting organ and tissue transplants as a procedure to improve the quality of life of those affected by different diseases. The eastern city of Santiago de Cuba is second nationally in this important activity with over 900 kidney and nearly 100 cornea transplants. Preparations are also being created for future heart and liver transplants. Transplant coordinator Dr. Manuel Rodríguez Beltran told reporters that Santiago de Cuba has effective technical infrastructure as well as qualified personnel and multidisciplinary groups created to advance in the field. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 3/11/04)

November 24: The UNAIDS Specialized Office recognized the low AIDS/HIV level in Cuba and said that the island represents the exception in the Caribbean, according to a report made public in Havana. The UN office claims the credit to the policy of taking patients into specialized centers (sanatoriums) since the 1980s and the later treatment with antiretroviral medicines. Estimates by the Cuban Public Health Ministry says that the highest level of AIDS/HIV is in the people between 35 to 44 years, followed by people from 20 to 24 years as people between 15 to 19 have maintained a stability in the last few years. (*Prensa Latina*, 24/11/04)

December 1: World AIDS Day was commemorated throughout Cuba with special media attention given to the fight against HIV/AIDS. Educational programs as well as radio and television announcements openly discussed AIDS and ways to prevent and combat the disease that is sweeping many countries around the world. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 1/12/04)

December 18: Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, Thoraya Obaid, praised Cuba for advances made in sexual and reproductive health. "What I have seen in the island in terms of sanitary conditions, reproductive and sexual health, as well as education is something I have not observed in any other country I visited in the past," said Obaid, of Saudi Arabia, who is on a three-day visit to the island. She noted that nearly all Cuban children are in school, the

health services have a universal character, and the dangerous pandemic of HIV/AIDS is kept at a low rate of incidence, thanks to a correct government strategy. (*Xinhua*, 18/12/04)

December 22: The need for youngsters to have access to sexual and reproductive health services and information has been a subject of heated debate in the workshop "Cuba, Ten Years After Cairo", organized by the United Nations Population Fund, among other institutions. Juan Carlos Alfonso, a National Statistics Office (ONE) official who coordinated the meeting, said a number of the goals set in Cairo for 2015 had already been met in Cuba even before the 1994 conference. According to ONE, Cuba already had a life expectancy of 72.9 years for men and 76.9 for women in 1994, while maternal mortality stood at 42.8 per 100,000 live births, and dropped to 33.9 per 100,000 by 2001. But even more difficult than preventing maternal deaths is the challenge of getting Cuban women to stop regarding abortion as a birth control method, or to overcome the widespread resistance to using condoms, a reluctance that cuts across gender and sexual orientation lines. The case of Cuba shows that guaranteeing services, rights and resources is only part of the long road towards full sexual and reproductive health and rights. The challenge now in this country of 11.2 million is to bring about cultural changes that would make it possible to maintain the gains achieved so far and to continue making progress. (*IPS*, 22/12/04)

December 25: The Cuban public healthcare system is undergoing profound changes. New ideas and concepts are being implemented with the purpose of bringing medical specialties closer to the community, and providing a service of excellence. A key element of these transformations has been the refurbishing of polyclinics. Over 200 physiotherapy gyms have been opened, and by the end of 2005, all of the polyclinics will have this service available. (*A/N*, 25/12/04)

December 26: Cuba has become something of an anomaly in Latin America: a destination for sex tourists where AIDS has yet to become an uncontrollable pandemic. Cuba has the lowest infection rate in the Western Hemisphere, less than 0.1 percent of the population, according to the World Health Organization. That is not to say the disease is not spreading in Cuba, and some outside the government say a thriving sex industry has contributed to its spread. Cuban health officials acknowledge that the number of infections has increased, as in most countries, but they say the overall rate is very low for a population of 11 million. UN officials who track AIDS say Cuba has done a better job than most countries at corralling the disease. "They have a very good medical infrastructure, and people have access to care and prevention," said Paloma Cuchi, who oversees the UN AIDS program in Latin America. (*The New York Times*, 26/12/04)

SOCIAL ISSUES

[See also, Economy/ Natural disasters]

February 16: A new and apparently growing food shortage in Cuba is making it increasingly difficult for those who depend on Cuban pesos and the government's ration system to obtain basic staples, according to residents and experts. Over the past three months, some items have become scarce even in usually well-stocked stores that accept US dollars, raising concerns that the Caribbean nation could be headed toward a nutrition crisis similar to one in the early 1990s. Even as the UN World Food Program carries out a supplemental food program in eastern Cuba, its Havana director disputed the reports of a food shortage. "That's totally out of context," Rosa Antolin said. "There is always a lack of one item or another, but there is no food shortage." It is nevertheless clear that monthly subsidized ration allowances have grown slimmer over the years, providing Cubans with what most experts agree is less than two weeks worth of food for every month. Eggs, for example, are restricted to 6 to 8 per person per month. (*The Miami Herald*, 16/2/04)

March 1: Raúl Castro's daughter called for an amendment of the Cuban constitution making it explicitly illegal to discriminate against homosexuals. Mariela Castro, head of the National Centre for Sexual Education (CENESEX), said that, while the National Constitution preserves the rights of all, it makes no specific reference to homosexuals. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 1/3/04)

April 1: Several residential areas in Havana have been without drinking water due to low levels affecting supply sources. This has created discomfort among the population who consider the government's water tank service is not enough. (*Cubanet*, 1/4/04)

April 9: It is reported that new regulations restricting the sales of cars to Cuban nationals in US dollars have become effective in the island. Under Resolution 54/2004 of the Ministry of Finances and Prices, the purchase of cars --in US dollars obtained abroad-- will only be allowed to "the ruling class, officials, technicians, professors, scientists, public health personnel, artists, administrative personnel working in official missions abroad", and "artists, athletes technicians, professors and scientists that have received international awards". The resolution was approved after Cuban police carried out the "HK Operation", aimed to confiscate all vehicles bought by foreigners and driven by Cuban nationals. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 9/4/04)

April 16: CMHW, the provincial radio network of Villa Clara, announced that the census for the distribution of sanitary pads to women has concluded. To register, women between the ages of 10 and 55 had to present their current ration card and ID document. Several women of the area who were interviewed regarded the initiative as a very positive one. As a result, it is expected that the supply of sanitary pads will be normalized, since the current distribution system of 2 or 3 times a year is insufficient. (*Cubanet*, 16/4/04)

June 20: Recent cuts to Havana's water supply are part of a batch of "special measures" announced by the authorities in the face of water shortages brought about by a prolonged drought, indicated the local media. "Surface and underground water resources supplying the City of Havana have decreased and, in some cases, depleted altogether, and continue to shrink," reported the weekly *Tribuna de La Habana*. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 21/6/04)

July 5: María Benítez, a demographics specialist and author of the 2003 book *The Cuban Family*, said that, "For every 100 marriages in Cuba, there are almost 70 divorces. It's alarming," she said. The island's severe housing shortage forces many people to live with their in-laws and other relatives, straining even the best of marriages. Economic conditions also create tension that drives many couples apart, Ms. Benítez said. Divorce is usually a simple process, and battles over possessions aren't common because most people have few belongings. "There isn't much property to divide," said Orlando Ramos, 42, an economist. Cuba legalized divorce in 1869 and introduced divorces of "Mutual Consent" by notary public in 1994. "No other country in the world has this kind of divorce," said Ayiadna María Verrier, a notary public in Old Havana. Divorces involving disputes over money, property or children are handled in Cuban courts and usually take several months. (*The Dallas Morning News*, 5/7/04)

August 19: Cuba called on unions and neighborhood groups to mobilize members for a massive clean-up effort to pick up trees and debris flung in the streets when Hurricane Charley ripped through the island on its way to Florida. The effort is necessary to help speed up recovery in Charley's aftermath, Pedro Saez, the Communist Party's first secretary for Havana, told Cuba's National Information Agency. (*AP*, 19/8/04)

August 21: Water supplies to some areas of Havana have not been restored and residents get their daily water ration from government tanker trucks. In some areas the fire department helps supply water to homes, hospitals and even the Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, among other institutions. According to the most recent figures, 12,869 people remain affected by the water shortage and 2,741 are still in shelters because they cannot return to homes that must be rebuilt. Thousands of residents in Old Havana still depend on water tankers, where a large number of companies, businesses, hotels and restaurants for foreign tourists are located. (*EFE, Europa Press, Granma*, 21/8/04)

August 21: Several slogans stating "down with Fidel", "down with the dictatorship", "Liberty for the Cuban People", appeared in the neighborhood of San Francisco de Paula, in San Miguel del

Padrón, declared Frank García Llerena, a member of the National Directive of the Democratic Party November 30 "Frank País". According to the information, the slogans appeared written on walls of stores and bus stops where many citizens gather on a daily basis. Officers of the State Security removed them by painting the walls with yellow paint. (*Puente Informativo*, 21/8/04)

August 21: People in Havana began an intensive effort to clear away the devastation left behind by Hurricane Charley a week ago. Organization of the cleanup work has been centered in labor associations of townships most affected by the hurricane, which summoned workers for a day of clearing and cleaning green areas and surrounding streets. Vice President Carlos Lage called upon Cubans to make sure every street is picked up in the hardest-hit neighborhoods - Playa, Marianao, Boyeros, Arroyo Naranjo, Plaza de la Revolucion and La Lisa. The notice circulated by local media said the cleanup is to be conducted by neighborhood organizations that should concentrate on picking up garbage, cleaning streets and eliminating possible mosquito breeding grounds, among other tasks. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, *EFE*, 21/8/04)

September 9: According to a WHO report, Cuba has the highest suicide rate in Latin America. "In Latin America, Cuban suicide statistics stand out as the highest, followed by Brazil's and Colombia's," said Jesús Ramón Gómez, a psychologist and director of the *Fundación Amor a la Vida* (Love for Life Foundation), a Colombian non-governmental organization devoted to suicide prevention. However, United Nation's affiliate organization WHO maintains that, compared to the rest of the world, Latin American suicide rates are among the lowest on record. (*BBC*, 9/9/04)

October 12: Driver negligence, traffic violations and drinking are the main causes of accidents in Cuba, according to local media. Between January and August, 603 people died and 5,126 were injured in around 6,700 car accidents. 40 percent of drivers and 25 percent of pedestrians who died were under the influence of alcohol, according to the official daily "Granma". Cyclists were also involved in many accidents (1,180) leaving 136 dead and 956 injured. (*EFE*, 12/10/04)

November 16: In the Isle of Youth, a region of an estimated 56 thousand inhabitants, inefficiency in state-run-companies has provoked a widespread dissatisfaction among residents. Deficiencies in public health services, sewer and community systems, gastronomy, and agriculture has been denounced in more than 100 neighborhood assemblies of the People's Power. The lack of physicians, crisis of public bus services, instability in food products, and lack of drinking water, have been the center of popular denounces. The local government has placed the blame on the embargo, and on damages caused by the hurricanes Isidoro and Lilly, which affected this territory on October and November of 2003. (*Puente Informativo*, 16/11/04)

SPORTS

February 13: At a press conference, the President of the Cuban Olympic Committee, Jose Ramón Fernández, ratified the island's aspiration to organize the 2012 Olympic Games. (*AIN*, 13/2/04)

March 14: Three-time Olympic medalist Juan Maren of Cuba defeated Moises Sanchez of Spain in a Greco-Roman wrestling Olympic qualifying tournament. (*Seattle Post*, 14/3/04)

April 18: The 2nd Cuban Sports Olympics, with the participation of three thousand Cuban athletes and over a thousand foreigners opened, with competitions in track and field, baseball and volleyball. The day began with 45 runners competing in the marathon followed by the opening ceremony at Havana's Sports City Coliseum, which holds 15,000 people. During the inaugural speech, Fidel Castro announced the use of new techniques in schools for athletes in the island. Castro said that these techniques constitute a revolution in Cuban sports. (*Europa Press*, 18/4/04)

April 25: Cuban Yipsi Moreno became one of the athletes to win the hammer gold medal at Athens Olympic Games in 2004. Moreno sent the hammer at 75,18 meters during Cuba's second national Olympic games in Havana. (*Reuters*, 25/4/04)

April 28: Cuban will participate with very young athletes at the World Figure Skating Championship scheduled for September in the United States, Alejandro Martinez Osorio, the National Commissioner, informed. The best international results by a Cuban figure skating team was in Santo Domingo during the Pan-American Games 2003 with a fifth place finish after the United States, Argentina, Chile and Colombia, Martinez recalled. He recognized Cuban skaters are still below the high technical and artistic level prevailing today in the world where more than 80 countries practice this discipline, which only began to be practiced on the island in 1989. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/4/04)

April 29: Thousands of Cubans, young and old, played their favorite game into the night to break the world record for most people playing chess simultaneously. Former world chess champion Anatoly Karpov was among the 13,000 people that Cuban officials claimed had succeeded in surpassing the current Guinness World Record of 11,320 players -- set in Havana in December 2002. Fidel Castro, who helped break the chess-playing record in 2002, was not present. A surprise guest, however, was Elian Gonzalez, the 10-year-old boy made famous after a high-charged custody battle between his Cuban family and relatives in Miami. (*CNN*, 28/4/04)

May 30: Yoanka Gonzalez Perez from Cuba won the Women's 10km Scratch Race final at the Track Cycling World Championships in Melbourne. Perez won the race ahead of Mandy Poitras from Canada and Olga Slyusareva from Russia, who came in third. More than 200 cyclists from 43 countries will participate in the championships, which will include 15 events. The Championships are also the last chance for nations to qualify places for the Athens Olympic Games and for the cyclists, their last opportunity to earn a place on their respective Olympic teams. (*Reuters*, 30/5/04)

August 22: Cuban shot-putter Yumileidi Cumbá became the first gold medal winner for Cuba in the Olympic Games, after Russian Irina Korzhanenko was positive in a doping control. Cumbá, who had won the silver after several fouls with a throw of 19.59m, will receive the gold medal. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/8/04)

August 29: Cuba ranked 11 at the close of the 2004 Olympics in Athens. It was the only Latin American country ranking among the top 15 countries in Athens, followed by Brazil ranking 18. Cuba obtained nine gold medals, five in boxing, one free style wrestling, one women's shot put, one women's javelin and of course, the gold in baseball. The Caribbean nation also secured 7 silver and 11 bronze medals for a total of 27. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/8/04)

September 2: Fidel Castro welcomed the Cuban athletes who competed at the Athens 2004 Olympics, at Havana's Jose Marti International Airport. Talking to the delegation, Fidel Castro praised highly various Cuban performances in the Olympic, including that of baseball, which won its third title, and the boxing squad with "its incredible straight winning streak." "This the first time a boxing tournament has been fairly refereed, although not 100 percent, and there were no big scandals," he noted. (*Prensa Latina*, 2/9/04)

October 15: Volleyball great Mireya Luis of Cuba was inducted into the Volleyball Hall of Fame. Mireya Luis' plaque was installed in a ceremony in the western Massachusetts city where the game was invented in 1895. Luis led Cuba to three Olympic Gold Medals in 1992, 1996 and 2000 and was named the most valuable player in the World Cup three times. He is currently vice president of the Cuban National Commission for Athletes. (*AP*, 15/10/04)