

FOCAL SUMMARY OF NEWS ITEMS REPORTED ON CUBA January-December 2005

This resource is a compilation of news items on Cuba listed in FOCAL's monthly Chronicle on Cuba throughout 2005

EXILE COMMUNITY

ACTIVITIES AND STATEMENTS

(See also, Domestic Affairs/ Dissidents/ Activities and Statements/ Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba's May 20th Meeting; Foreign Affairs/ European Union/ Ibero-American Summit; and US-Cuba Relations/ Luis Posada Carriles Case/ The Wasp Net-The Cuban Five)

January 5: Florida residents are raising money to deliver a transportation care package to impoverished people in Cuba. Local groups — the Cuba Study Group, the Live Oak Grange and Three Americas — are working to support Pastors for Peace, a national organization, to buy a used bus and load it with much-needed educational and medical supplies. The bus and other items will be driven from Santa Cruz to Tampico, Mexico, where they will be put on a ship and sent to Havana. (*Sun Sentinel*, 5/1/04)

January 12: Cuban-Americans in South Florida were outraged with statements by Pope John Paul II criticizing the embargo. Telephone lines for Spanish-language radio programs lit up as upset callers aimed to vent their frustration with the pope. "It's nothing different than the same attitude that the pope has had in regards to Cuba, which is really sad because it's not the same attitude he had toward Poland or toward communism [in other countries]," said Cuban exile activist Ninoska Perez Castellon. "It's really disappointing." Alfredo Mesa, executive director of the Cuban-American National Foundation, another staunch supporter of the embargo, said his organization respectfully disagrees with the pope's position. However, Mesa said the pope has been helpful on Cuba. He cited the pontiff's 1998 visit to Cuba, a trip that made the Catholic Church on the island important for the dissident movement, as an example. For some, the pope's message struck a chord. Silvia Wilhelm, a Cuban-American anti-embargo activist in Miami, said his comments were on target. "I think, once again, the pope is looking at this issue from a humanitarian perspective," Wilhelm said. "[The embargo] is immoral." But on Spanish-language radio in South Florida, the pope's comments sparked a firestorm. Some callers had strong words for the Catholic Church and some said they might stop attending church altogether. (*Sun Sentinel*, 12/1/05)

January 13: Jorge Mas Santos, Chairman of the Cuban American National Foundation, will meet with Spain's Foreign Minister, Miguel Angel Moratinos, to discuss issues regarding Cuba. The meeting will take place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Office in Madrid, Spain. The timing of this visit is significant due to the meeting of the European Union Committee on Latin America that is taking place in Brussels. (*CANF Press Release*, 13/1/05)

January 15: The chairman of the Cuban American National Foundation criticized the Spanish Foreign Minister for inviting the organization to a meeting in Madrid to discuss Cuba -- then canceling at the last minute. The reason for the cancellation, says director Jorge Mas Santos, is pressure from the Cuban government, which has been lobbying the European Union to normalize relations with the island nation after tensions mounted over the arrest of scores of dissidents in 2003. "Any government is free to advance its own agenda, but it's important to listen to our point of view," said Mas Santos, who spent more than eight hours on the flight from Miami to Madrid. Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Maratinos was supposed to meet with Mas Santos and two other CANF members. (*CANF Press Release*, 13/1/05)

February 26: The Cuban American National Foundation is under fire from Mexican politicians demanding that the influential exile organization be investigated for "anti-Cuban activities in Mexico." The lower house of Mexico's legislature is expected to vote on what it calls a "point of accord" on the issue. "In Mexican territory, between 1959 and 2004, Mexicans and people from other nationalities have ended up dead, injured or affected by terrorism from organizations like CANF," the resolution's supporting documentation states. CANF's new executive director, Alfredo Mesa, vehemently rejected the allegations, saying the foundation is considering legal action if the Mexican government moves forward. (*The Miami Herald*, 26/2/05)

March 2: In Miami, representatives of Cuban exile groups said there exist "democratic disagreements", not campaigns against the leader of the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL) Oswaldo Payá. The activists rejected the accusations made from Cuba the day before by Payá that an organization from the internal dissident movement and some "minority" groups in Miami have tried to discredit and pressure him. "There is no campaign against Payá from the exile community. Instead, what there has been are open and democratic disagreements, as it should be, regarding his strategies", said Ninoska Pérez Castellón, director of the Cuban Liberty Council. (*EFE*, 2/3/05)

March 3: An international coalition called Cuba Democracy Now comprised of Cuban exiles announced congress plans at an event in Madrid, where it displayed a copy of the letter that the Asamblea para Promover la Sociedad Civil in Cuba sent to Fidel Castro informing him of their meeting in Havana on May 20. Speaking at the headquarters of the Fundacion Hispano Cubana (Spanish-Cuban Foundation) in Madrid, coalition president Rigoberto Carceller said such personalities as Mikhail Gorbachev, former Czech President Vaclav Havel and Poland's Lech Walesa would be in attendance. In Spain, the group has invited Socialist Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and his conservative predecessor, Jose María Aznar. (*EFE*, 3/3/05)

March 2: Members of the Cuban Democratic Directorate and the Cuban-American Bar Association testified before the Inter-American Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States (OAS) to condemn the situation on the island. The presentation at the Commission follows a series of previous denunciations on the imprisonment, in 2003, of 75 Cuban dissidents sentenced to up to 28 years in jail. Blanca González, mother of independent journalist, Normando Hernández, who is serving a 25 year sentence, appeared before the Commission. (*AFP*, 2/3/05)

March 19: The funeral of two Cuban rafters who perished in Mexican waters was held in Mexico City. Lourdes Plasencia, 41, and Eddier Tamayo, 30, died in their boat in an attempted

crossing from Cuba across the Gulf of Mexico to Florida. The Mexican Navy recovered their bodies on February 27 but the government only handed them over to the families on March 18. The bodies of Juan Manuel Alcala Pavón, Novadhít García Betancourt and Carlos Lopez Ávila, who made the trip together with Plasencia and Tamayo, are still missing. Cuban authorities did not respond to reports made by Mexican authorities informing of the finding of the corpses. Cuban exile and president of the Washington-based Cuban Movement of Democratic Unity, spoke during the funeral at the Panteon Cemetery in Mexico City. (*Netfor Cuba, Reuters, 20/3/05*)

March 31: Six of the world's most repressive regimes are on the United Nations panel that is supposed to uphold human rights, the US campaign group Freedom House said. China, Cuba, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Zimbabwe, which have "dire human rights situations," work in concert to prevent the 53-nation UN Human Rights Commission from combatting abuses, said a statement by the private group, which is based in Washington, D.C. (*The Miami Herald, 31/3/05*)

April 7: Cuban exiles in Spain accused the Department for Refugees, a branch of the Spanish Ministry of Interior of "negligence" for not responding to a request for asylum by Cuban heart surgeon Milvio Ramírez López. The Vice-president of the Cuban Liberal Union, Antonio Guedes, said the Cuban doctor had been an aide worker in Algeria, where he decided to break ranks with Fidel Castro's regime. To call attention on his case, according to his account, he "threw himself out a window". On a stopover on the way to Havana, Ramírez was admitted to a hospital in Madrid due to serious health conditions. The Spanish "Association Cuba in Transition" indicated he was accused by Cuban officials of "being a CIA agent, jeopardizing state interests and slandering Fidel Castro." (*ABC, 7/4/05*)

April 12: A freed Cuban dissident expects more political prisoners to be released soon, but said there can be no real change in Cuba until Fidel Castro dies. "It's a shame that a country has to wait for the death of somebody to become democratic," poet and journalist Raul Rivero told a news conference in Spain, his new home since being released in November from 20 months in jail. Rivero said he expected a group of eight to 10 dissidents to be released soon because the Geneva-based UN Commission on Human Rights was due to conduct its annual vote later this week on a resolution - presented by the United States and backed by the European Union - about Cuba's human rights record. The dissidents - including Ricardo Gonzalez, Hector Palacios, Jose Luis Garcia Paneque and Luis Milan - have been moved to a prison psychiatric ward in a sign of their impending release, he said. "They move them into better conditions when they are about to be released so the sick can be cured and start looking better. Each day, their relatives have the hope that it could be today - maybe before Geneva, maybe after. I, too, think they are going to be freed," Rivero said. (*Reuters, 12/4/05*)

April 19: A group of Cuban exiles -- known to have to vastly divergent political and ideological views -- have set aside their differences to craft an 18-point blueprint of how the island should be governed after Fidel Castro. Representatives from 16 groups, including the Cuban American National Foundation, Agenda Cuba, the Cuba Study Group and members of the clergy, spent months working up the template called "Pillars for a Cuban Consensus." Among the ideals set forth by the group: the right of all Cubans -- both on the island and abroad -- to participate in the island's political future; the elimination of the death penalty and the release of all political prisoners; amnesty for political crimes "within the boundaries established by international law"; and unrestricted travel for Cubans to and from the island.

The groups also advocate the signing over of titles of residential properties confiscated by the government to current tenants, and they support allowing former owners or descendants to claim compensation for those properties from the state. While a broad range of political ideals were represented, the most conservative -- and arguably among the most influential -- groups did not participate, including the Cuban Liberty Council, and Cuba Democracy Advocates. (*The Miami Herald*, 19/4/05)

May 10: More than 40 Cuban-American organizations are celebrating New Jersey's first Cuban Heritage Month in May with a series of events to raise funds and provide moral support for the Cuban dissidents, who are planning the May 20-21 Assembly to Promote a Civil Society in Cuba. In New Jersey, Silvio Acosta, spokesman for the group, said that whether the meeting occurs or not, it is already a success, especially because human rights activists from all over the world are keeping a close eye on Cuba. "If they put them all in jail, before the eyes of the world, they will be arresting people simply for trying to attend a public meeting," Acosta said. "And if they let them hold the meeting, they will be denounced for their atrocities. It's a win-win situation." (*The Record*, 11/5/05)

May 17: An influential exile group will help publicize a \$1 million reward now on the head of a convicted black militant who escaped from prison and is living in Cuba. At an afternoon news conference, the Cuban American National Foundation will renew a call for the capture and return to the United States of Joanne Chesimard, now making her home in Havana. Chesimard, 57, a Black Liberation Army member, was given safe haven in Cuba after she escaped from a maximum-security prison in 1979. Chesimard, known as Assata Shakur, returned to the spotlight when the US government added her to its terrorism watch list and the bounty for her arrest was increased from \$150,000 to \$1 million. (*The Miami Herald*, 17/5/05)

May 17: Following the International Tourism Fair held in Havana, the Group for Corporate Social Responsibility in Cuba, comprised of organizations, independent trade unions and NGOs, has released a document denouncing the "unethical" treatment that foreign investors, shielded by current Cuban labour legislation, afford their Cuban employees. The Group, created in Madrid last April and made up of members of diverse organizations, seeks to raise awareness regarding the working conditions of Cuban workers. (*Europa Press*, 17/5/05)

May 18: Cuban journalist and author Raúl Rivero remembered his friends still imprisoned in Cuba when he was bestowed the "Award in Acknowledgment to Tolerance" by the Autonomous Community of Madrid. "For me, being tolerant means being willing to respectfully listen to views different than my own while being allowed to voice the latter with passion and conviction, so that a middle ground can be found that may lead to satisfactory solutions to any issues at hand," said Rivero, adding that, in that vein, "Cuba needs a large dose of tolerance." (*AFP*, 18/5/05)

July 12: The commemoration of the anniversary of Cuba's deadly sinking of a tugboat packed with fleeing refugees was cancelled due to bad weather conditions. Ramón Saúl Sánchez, the president of the Democracy Movement, told the press that because of adverse "weather conditions" his group had decided not to hold the traditional flotilla it has staged each year in the Florida Strait to pay homage to the 37 victims of the July 13, 1994, sinking of the "13 de Marzo." In place of the normal commemoration, the group had planned to hold a ceremony on

Miami's Biscayne Bay with boats, helicopters and small planes that would have dropped thousands of flowers onto a "cemetery" of crosses floating on the waves. (*EFE*, 13/7/05)

July 14: Plataforma Internacional Cuba Democracia Ya! (a movement advocating changes in Cuba) pleaded in Madrid for the Spanish government and the European Union to intervene in the wake of the events that took place in Havana when supporters and opponents of Fidel Castro's regime clashed. The Plataforma called on Madrid and Brussels to intercede to "prevent peaceful demonstrations taking place in different parts of Cuba ending up in a blood bath, as could have happened when about 20 peaceful dissidents were harassed by paramilitary forces in Havana". (*AFP*, 14/7/05)

August 17: The reconstruction of the island, participation in the first stages of the democratic transition and emergency assistance to a society in a precarious state constitute the goals of Cuba Corps, the latest effort by the Cuban exile community to support civil society in the island. "We have set ourselves the task to assist in the reconstruction of civil society," said Olga Nodarse, president of the newly created organization. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 17/8/05)

October 11: Raúl Rivero, a Cuban poet, journalist and former political prisoner was able finally to appear before the Americas' main press organization to deliver his report on how the Communist regime quashes freedom of expression, calling on media and governments not to forget the 26 independent reporters still jailed on the island for trying to inform the citizenry. Rivero, released from jail in Cuba last year on medical grounds and now an exile in Spain, addressed the general assembly of the Inter American Press Association in person for the first time. For more than a decade, Havana denied one of the island's most prominent intellectuals the right to travel abroad. In his speech to the IAPA meeting in Indianapolis, Rivero implored editors, publishers and media executives from throughout the hemisphere not to forget their colleagues condemned to prison in Cuba for defending freedom of expression. (*EFE*, 11/10/05)

October 10: Twenty-four Cuban oppositionist organizations agreed in Madrid on a "Road Map for the democratization of Cuba" during a meeting that in spite of differences demonstrated the almost unanimous rejection of violence. Some 80 delegates from liberal, social-democrat and conservative groups of Cuban residents of the US, the UK, Sweden, Portugal, Costa Rica, France, Belgium, Cuba and Spain, met in the Centro Cubano in Madrid. (*AFP*, 11/10/05)

October 14: Cuban dissidents asked a Spanish court to indict Fidel Castro on charges of genocide and other offenses, resorting to a Spanish doctrine that allows criminal charges in human rights cases even if the offense is alleged to have been committed abroad. The suit was filed at the National Court by a dissident group called the Foundation for Human Rights in Cuba. Besides genocide, it accuses Castro of crimes against humanity, torture and terrorism. The court must now decide whether it will consider the petition, but the request is almost certainly doomed because Castro is still in power and thus enjoys immunity from prosecution. (*AP*, 14/10/05)

October 16: The twenty-five member organizations of Consenso Cubano organized a three-day workshop. The organizations, ranging from socialist democratic leftist groups to conservative ones, agreed to work together to reach their "objective" of a democratic Cuba, indicated Julio Pich, Director of the Cuban American National Foundation. That means we need to have a strategy. What's important, said Carlos Saladrigas, director of the Cuba Study

Group, is not "how the conflict that leads to the transition is going to end; the important thing now is to prepare ourselves for its beginning". (*El Nuevo Herald*, 17/10/05)

November 7: A legal suit against Fidel Castro filed by the Foundation for Human rights in Cuba (FDHC) for genocide, crimes against humanity, torture and terrorism was dismissed by Spanish judge Ismael Moreno, who deemed the affairs of a head of state to be beyond his jurisdiction. This magistrate of the Spanish National Court argued the same reasons to reject in 1998 another suit filed by the same Foundation against Castro based on similar charges. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 7/11/05)

November 17: Two Cubans are suing Fidel Castro in Florida for 60 million dollars, claiming they were tortured at a psychiatric hospital on the communist-run island, their lawyers said. Both plaintiffs claim they were tortured at the Mazorra psychiatric hospital in Havana more than 30 years ago. Nilo Jerez, who filed a lawsuit at a Miami court, claimed he was subjected to electroshocks on his testicles, which left him sterile. Belkis Ferro, 51, who filed suit in Tampa, said she was also subjected to electroshocks, and was given injections that made her lose consciousness. Both said the torture sessions were supervised by Eriberto Mederos, a nurse at the hospital. Mederos had migrated to the United States in 1980, and was later found guilty of torture and of hiding his links with Cuba's Communist Party, but he died in 2002, shortly after his trial. (*AFP*, 17/11/05)

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

GENERAL

January 4: Mel Martinez was sworn in as Florida's newest senator, and fielded questions from Telemundo as from The Washington Post, toggling freely between the languages of Cuba, his homeland and his adopted country as Miami-Dade leaders have done for 30 years. His comfort with two languages in front of cameras in Washington is a testament not only to the rising political clout of Hispanics across the United States, but to the multicultural society that allowed a young immigrant to rise to the national political stage. To many of the hundreds of thousands of Cubans who also fled their homeland, he personifies the accomplishment of El Exilio. "I think it's a historic event for our community," said Jorge Mas Santos, chairman of the Cuban American National Foundation, who celebrated with Martinez at a reception in the Capitol. (*The Miami Herald*, 4/1/05)

January 5: Antonio Benítez-Rojo, an award-winning author and Spanish professor at Amherst College, died after a brief illness. He was 73. He died at Cooley Dickinson Hospital in Northampton, the college said in a prepared statement. Benítez-Rojo, a native of Cuba who came to the United States in 1980, won one of Latin America's most prestigious literary awards, the Casa de las Americas Prize, in 1967 for his collection of short stories, "Tute de Reyes." "Sea of Lentils," the English translation of his novel "El mar de las lentejas," was selected by the New York Times as one of the Notable Books of 1992. His 1998 book "La isla

que se repite" was the co-winner of the 1993 Modern Language Association Katherine Singer Kovacs prize for an outstanding book in the field of Latin American and Spanish literature. The novelist, short-story writer and essayist has had his work translated into nine languages. (*The New York Times*, 7/1/05)

January 10: For more than two and a half hours, the saxophonist, clarinetist and composer Paquito D'Rivera opened up the atlas of his musical life at Carnegie Hall in celebration of his 50 years on stage. The biggest treat of the evening was the appearance of three imposing figures from Cuban music: the pianist Bebo Valdes, the bassist Israel (Cachao) Lopez and the conga player Candido Camero, who are all in their mid-80's. All had room to solo, and Mr. D'Rivera joined the band on clarinet. Quietly, they worked up a roomy, airy groove and moved the audience to its feet. (*The New York Times*, 12/1/05)

January 24: Thirteen people living near the Little Havana house, Miami, from which US government agents seized Cuban "rafter child" Elián González in 2000, accused the police of using excessive force during the operation at the beginning of the civil trial on the matter. Maria Riera, the trial's first witness, told US District Judge K. Michael Moore that she believed she would choke to death after police sprayed her from close range with tear gas in her driveway. Eduardo Rodriguez, Riera's former husband and another plaintiff in the case, testified that the gas used by police caused him to develop chronic eye problems, which recently forced him to undergo an operation for cataracts. The 13 plaintiffs are asking for compensation from the government of up to \$250,000 each. A total of 108 people filed lawsuits over the raid, but Judge Moore excluded from the case those people who were on the Gonzalez family property and were inside police barricades. (*EFE*, 24/1/05)

February 21: Cuban writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante died in a London hospital. He was 75. He was one of the most original voices in 20th-century Spanish literature and an outspoken and unforgiving critic of Fidel Castro. Guillermo Cabrera Infante had long been lauded for a Joycean, experimental use of language in his novels, essays and cinema criticism. In 1997, he won the Miguel de Cervantes prize for literature, the most prestigious literary award in the Spanish-speaking world. His effervescent novel "Tres Tristes Tigres", published in English as "Three Trapped Tigers", captured the rum-soaked, salacious Havana of the late 1950s and became a classic of Cuban literature. He had actively opposed dictator Fulgencio Batista in the 1950s, and after Castro took power in 1959, Cabrera Infante became a cultural representative for the new government in Brussels from 1962 to 1965. By 1965, his discontent with the totalitarian direction of the Castro government led to a break over a highly critical interview. Cabrera Infante then sought refuge in London, where he has lived the last four decades, authoring "La Habana para un infante difunto" (published in English as "Infante's Inferno") and "Mea Cuba", among other works. [See also Domestic Affairs] (*The Miami Herald*, *EFE*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Reuters*, 22/2/05)

April 11: Cubans who fled during the Mariel boatlift tend to have more middle-of-the-road views than Cubans who arrived before or after the 1980 exodus on issues such as invading Cuba or traveling to the island, according to a new poll. About half of Mariel exiles polled feel that US citizens should be allowed to travel to Cuba compared to about 34 percent of exiles who came before 1980 and about 60 percent of those who came after 1980. The poll -- conducted by Coral Gables-based Bendixen & Associates for The Herald's coverage of the boatlift's 25th anniversary -- also found that about half of all Mariel refugees questioned would support a military invasion to depose Fidel Castro compared to 60 percent of exiles who came

before 1980 and just 38 percent of those who came after 1980. "Mariel exiles tend to have an intermediate point of view on most issues that impact Cuba policy," Pollster Sergio Bendixen said. "They are likely to be more conservative than those who arrived after 1980 but more progressive than those that came in the 1960s and 1970s." (*The Miami Herald*, 11/4/05)

May 6: Attorney Rafael Diaz-Balart, a bitter enemy of Fidel Castro's regime and father of two Cuban-American congressmen, died of leukemia in the city of Miami. "His death is one more reason to continue to fight for Cuba's freedom, which was my father's ideal all his life, as it was of so many Cubans who died yearning for a democratic Cuba," said the man's son, Lincoln Diaz-Balart, a Republican who represents a Florida district in the US Congress. Youngest son Mario Diaz-Balart, also a Republican congressman, said his father was "a guide, leader, inspiration, a man who to the last kept teaching us to live, with his love, commitment to one's word and to honor." Rafael Diaz-Balart was a senator and undersecretary of the interior in Cuba prior to the 1959 revolution. One of his sisters, Mirta Diaz-Balart, was Castro's first wife and mother of his eldest child, Fidel Felix Castro, born in September 1949. Castro and Mirta divorced in 1955. (*EFE, AP*, 6/5/05)

May 10: Cuban journalist and author Raúl Rivero, released from prison last November, opened the 2nd International Poetry Festival "Ciudad de Granada." In this edition, the festival honours Rivero, whose presence in the opening ceremony realizes the objective of the "Granada Declaration"-- a document written last year by writers, musicians, professors and journalists, seeking Rivero's release. (*Europa Press*, 10/5/05)

May 23: At age 87, an architect and professor of art history, Manuel de la Torre, was still fighting to recover the art collection he left behind when he fled Cuba more than four decades ago as an anti-Castro protester after the communist revolution. Two months after his death, members of de la Torre's family picketed the Upper East Side headquarters of Sotheby's, repeating claims that the international auction house had attempted to sell one of their prized paintings that had been seized by pro-Castro militants. The picketing was sparked by the breakdown of settlement talks between the family and Sotheby's. Absent a settlement, the tangled and lengthy court battle over the ownership of "La Hamaca," a painting by a Cuban artist who was de la Torre's friend, Mariano Rodriguez, is likely to continue into the summer. (*The New York Sun*, 24/5/05)

June 27: Cuban author Reinaldo Bragado Bretana, a pioneer of the human rights movement in Cuba passed away in Miami. He was 52. Bragado was a political prisoner on the island in 1977. As a member of the Cuban Committee for Human Rights (CCDH), he was in charge of the arts department and promoted independent artistic expression. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 28/6/05)

July 4: Cuban painter Guido Llinás, a pioneer of Abstract Expressionism in Latin America, died in Paris at 82. His paintings were displayed in many exhibits in Havana and abroad during the 1930s and 40s. However, it was in the 1960s when he became internationally renowned as a master of Abstract Expressionism. Llinás had left Cuba due to disagreement with the government of Fidel Castro and moved to Paris in 1963. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 5/7/05)

July 14: Cuban poet and journalist Raúl Rivero was awarded the 2005 International Thought and Humanities Award granted by the Spanish Cristóbal Gabarrón Foundation. Rivero was chosen from among 29 candidates from Cuba, the United States, Spain, France, Israel, Mexico

and South-Africa. The prize was granted in recognition "of his tireless fight in favour of the freedom of expression of every human being, a fight that has turned him into a symbol of that freedom". Raúl Rivero is one of the 75 dissidents rounded up by the Cuban government and sentenced to prison terms of up to 28 years in 2003. In late November 2004, he was granted a special release from prison on health grounds and in April arrived in Madrid with his family. (*Europa Press*, 14/7/05)

August 23: Organizers of Miami's book fair defended the event as a universal and tolerant forum, rebutting criticism from some conservative Cuban-exile sectors of the invitation of a Colombian writer who admires Fidel Castro. "The Book Fair is under the umbrella of a US university, which means that it deeply respects freedom of expression. Here, prohibitions are prohibited," said Alejandro Rios, a spokesman for event sponsor Miami Dade College. The controversy arose following the comments of poet Angel Cuadra, president of the Cuban Writers in Exile PEN Centre, an affiliate of London-based International PEN, an international association of writers whose mission includes defending free expression. Cuadra called Restrepo one author "who should never have been invited to Miami." (*EFE*, 23/8/05)

September 28: Elián González, who now refers to Fidel Castro as "a father," says in a new television interview that his Miami relatives held him against his will during his sojourn five years ago. Elián's Miami relatives immediately labeled the statements propaganda produced under pressure from the Cuban government. "He is a brainwashed little kid afraid of Castro, just like everyone else," said Armando Gutiérrez, former spokesman for the González family. Gutiérrez said he never heard Elián say he wanted to return to Cuba during the countless hours he spent with the boy. Elián's uncle, Delfín González, said he sees the boy on television, making speeches in support of the Cuban government and shakes his head. "The exile community here predicted that would happen," he said. "It's no surprise to me. But when you live in the devil's house, you have to do what he says." (*The Miami Herald*, 30/9/05)

October 13: Miami Dade College's Florida Center for the Literary Arts invited Cuban poet and journalist Raúl Rivero for his first public appearance in South Florida. He read his works to a captive audience after two whirlwind days of stops on Calle Ocho, where he was honored with a proclamation from the likes of City Manager Joe Arriola and was presented a pen by the Cuban American National Foundation's Jorge Mas Santos. Himself the beneficiary of negotiations with Castro - the Spanish government secured his release - Rivero encouraged the use of dialogue to free Cuban political prisoners. "It would be selfish, stupid and miserable if I tell the governments to slam the door to dialogue," he said. "I respect the people who feel that way, but for my own personal dignity, I cannot call for that door to be closed." Rivero criticized the Latin American governments that ignore the Cuban opposition, while the European Union works hard on their behalf. (*The Miami Herald*, 14/10/05)

October 18: During a Congress hearing, senators had few questions for a Cuban exile from Miami who was a top Latin America policy advisor in the Bush administration and is now on the verge of becoming director of the US Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services. Emilio González, introduced to the Senate Judiciary Committee by two Florida Republicans, Senator Mel Martinez and Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, said he would "bring an understanding of national security and my own personal immigration experience to bear" on the new job. González, whose family fled Cuba when he was 4, was an advisor on the National Security Council and served 26 years in the US Army. (*The Miami Herald*, 19/10/05)

November 10: Cuban-American ballet dancer, choreographer and artistic director Fernando Bujones died in Miami of complications from malignant melanoma, friends said. He was 50. Bujones, the Miami-born son of Cuban exiles, ranked alongside Rudolph Nureyev and Mikhail Baryshnikov as one of the top ballet soloists of the third half of the 20th century. For the past three months, the artist had been on sick leave from his job as artistic director of the Orlando Ballet, fighting lung cancer. (*EFE*, 10/11/05)

November 13: Popular salsa singer Willy Chirino celebrated the 35 th anniversary of his artistic career with a concert in Miami broadcast to Cuba via Radio and TV Martí. Recordings of the artist's songs are circulated underground on the island and they are even chorused and danced to in street festivities. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 14/11/05)

November 22: Manuel Vázquez Portal, a recipient of the International Press Freedom Award in 2003, has finally been able to collect the honor personally. Vázquez Portal had been imprisoned as a result of the crackdown on dissidents in March, 2003. He has been living in Miami after the Cuban authorities allowed him to leave the island. (*AP*, 22/11/05)

RELATIONS WITH THE US GOVERNMENT

(See also, US-Cuba Relations/ Embargo, Travel Restrictions, Remittances, and Radio and TV Transmissions)

January 21: A US federal judge ordered Cuba to pay \$1.75 million to a Miami pilot who survived a midair attack by Cuban MiGs over the Florida Straits in 1996. The pilot, Jose Basulto, evaded the jets and was able to fly home, but was traumatized by the knowledge that two other planes operated by the group Brothers to the Rescue had been downed, killing the four people aboard, said US District Judge Kenneth A. Marra. "He has suffered greatly. And perhaps the judgment will help ease the pain a bit," said Larry Klayman, the lawyer who filed the suit. Basulto did not immediately return calls seeking comment. (*AP*, 21/1/05)

January 21: A US federal judge has set a trial for the claims of a dozen people who said they were wrongly assaulted by federal officers during the raid that removed Elian Gonzalez from his family's home. The plaintiffs say they were innocent bystanders who were gassed and beaten outside the home during the early morning raid on April 22, 2000. "I think the public's going to be surprised that elderly people were gassed while praying the rosary," said Tom Fitton, president of Judicial Watch, which represents 11 of the plaintiffs. (*AP*, 21/1/05)

February 10: Cuban exiles closed ranks to oppose a draft bill to increase sales of US agro products to Cuba and were confident that President George W. Bush would veto the initiative should the Congress pass it. "It will be an important but by no means easy battle for those who do not understand that trade with Cuba only helps the tyrant (Fidel Castro)," said Ninaska Pérez Castellón, head of the Cuban Liberty Council. Pérez highlighted the unanimous position on that issue of Cuban-American legislators Mel Martínez, Bob Menendez, Ileana Ross-Lehtinen, Lincoln Díaz-Balart and Mario Díaz-Balart. (*EFE*, 10/2/05)

February 24: Nine years after the downing of two of its light planes and the killing of four pilots, the Cuban exile group Brothers to the Rescue asked US President George W. Bush to bring Fidel Castro to trial for the deed. Brothers to the Rescue president Jose Basulto said that then-President Bill Clinton bears some responsibility for the 1996 incident - in which Cuban air force fighter jets fired on the unarmed planes off the communist island's northern coast - because if he would have agreed to defend the exile aircraft they would not have been shot down. "That must be made known, and the current government is covering up for Clinton,"

Basulto said. "The United States didn't do anything to Fidel Castro that day. Moreover, Clinton prevented the departure of the US (military fighters), with their pilots already in the cockpits, that were about to take off and rescue us," he asserted. (*EFE*, 24/2/05)

March 4: Saying that Governor Kathleen Blanco will give legitimacy to a "dying monster," a group of Cuban Americans called on Louisiana's chief executive to cancel a planned trade trip to Cuba. George Fowler, the New Orleans head of the Cuban American National Foundation, said there is very little real trade to be had with the impoverished island nation and Blanco stands only to give Fidel Castro a propaganda coup that can be used against US interests - and the Bush administration, which has adopted a harder line against Cuba. "Castro is a dying monster and if the governor goes over there, she will tie Louisiana to this dying monster forever," Fowler said. Blanco is leading a state delegation to Cuba for four days. (*Dateline Alabama*, 4/3/05)

March 11: Brothers to the Rescue founder José Basulto, a longtime opponent of Fidel Castro, said that he had complained to the FBI about what he said was a death threat from the Cuban government. The alleged threat came last month on the Cuban television program *Mesa Redonda Informativa*. On the program, which was aired on the anniversary of the 1996 shutdown of Brothers to the Rescue planes, a panelist said: "Impunity won't be eternal, José Basulto León. Even though the White House accepts you as a son, be careful, like a hunter of terror, that your own arrow doesn't kill you." Basulto takes the comments seriously. "It is well known that there are many Castro operatives working under the direct control of the Cuban Intelligence in the US," he said. FBI spokeswoman Judy Orihuela said the Miami FBI office was aware of the comments on Cuban TV. "There's nothing actionable," Orihuela told the press. "We're aware of it, but we don't have any information, based on our sources, of an actual threat." (*The Miami Herald*, 14/3/05)

March 22: Cuban dissidents told Miami congressional representatives that the government of Fidel Castro "has never been as weak as it is now." The chat via speakerphone energized the crowd of Bay of Pigs veterans meeting in Little Havana at Brigade 2506 headquarters to express support for a planned meeting of dissidents in Cuba on May 20. US Representatives Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Mario Díaz-Balart crowded around the phone emitting the voice of a man who identified himself as Felix Antonio Bonne Carcasses, one of the Cuban dissidents organizing the Assembly to Promote Civil Society. "If it weren't for the 53,000 barrels of oil that Hugo Chávez sends every day to Cuba, it would be over," Bonne Carcasses said. "You can be sure that we won't betray the confidence which Cubans have placed in us. "The Bay of Pigs Veterans, also known as Brigade 2506, declared their support for Carcasses and the May 20 meeting. They are the latest exile organization to say that they plan to support the dissidents in Cuba that day. (*The Miami Herald*, 23/3/05)

March 22: Cuban exile groups and South Florida legislators are hoping to turn political attention to human rights in Cuba. Florida's Hispanic Legislative Caucus members announced that they will mark the first "Free Cuba Day" celebration in the state Capitol in hopes of building awareness of human rights violations under Fidel Castro's rule of the island nation. "We want to expose what goes on behind communist Cuba's lines," said Representative Julio Robaina (Republican-Miami), explaining why various Cuban exile groups will descend on the Capitol at the invitation of the 15 members of the Hispanic Legislative Caucus. The daylong event, modeled after a similar recognition held by Hispanic members of Congress each year in Washington, is expected to include political speeches, the airing of a film documentary about the lives of impoverished children in Cuba and a series of exhibits, including a "refugee raft"

and a "jail cell" reproduction. "It's a day of visuals so people can see what Cubans living with communism are going through, and their plight to freedom," said Robaina. (*Sun Sentinel*, 23/3/05)

April 7: Miami congressional representatives are prodding the Social Security Administration to change a policy that denies benefits to scores of elderly Cubans who settled in the United States after overstaying their visas. US Representatives Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, both Republicans, fired off letters to SSA Commissioner Jo Anne Barnhart demanding answers. A press article detailed cases in which elderly Cubans said they were struggling without Social Security benefits. Two public-service lawyers who are representing most of the Cubans, Jose Fons and Lizel Gonzalez, said their clients should be eligible -- just like Cubans who arrived without visas. (*The Miami Herald*, 7/4/05)

May 12: The Social Security Administration has relaxed its policies to benefit elderly Cuban and Haitian immigrants, *The Miami Herald* reported. The change would mean hundreds and maybe thousands of elderly and disabled Cubans and Haitians will soon get monthly checks from the Supplemental Security Income program. Each immigrant could receive up to \$579 a month and couples as much as \$869. Some Cuban immigrants were being denied benefits because they had overstayed their visa before becoming legal residents. Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart, (Republican-Florida), and Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, (Republican-Florida), both asked for a review of the situation in March. (*UPI*, 12/5/05)

May 12: The US government announced a contribution of \$6 million USD to the efforts of the Support Group to Democracy (GAD), a Miami-based organization with a broad network providing humanitarian assistance to activists, political prisoners and their relatives on the island. The donation was channelled through the US Agency for International Development (USAID), whose Cuba Program has a budget of \$15 million USD. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 13/5/05)

May 24: A Cuban exile organization asked for the US government's help in securing an indictment of Cuban Defense Minister Raul Castro for the 1996 downing of two of the group's planes by fighter jets over the Straits of Florida. Jose Basulto, president of Brothers to the Rescue, pleaded for support from other Cuban-American groups to join him in his call for charges against Castro -- Fidel Castro's brother and his designated successor. "We also respectfully ask President George W. Bush to convert, into action, his recent words and his expressed desire for a democratic Cuba by removing the political obstacles to the indictment," Basulto said. Even if Raul Castro were indicted, it is unlikely that he would ever face US justice. Still, an indictment would make it more difficult for Raul Castro to succeed his brother, Basulto said. The Cuban government has always maintained that the Brothers to the Rescue planes were in Cuban airspace when they were shot down. A UN inquiry concluded they were outside Cuban territory. (*AP*, 24/5/05)

June 6: At the OAS General Assembly, a score of political leaders of the Cuban exile community asked the US government to continue to promote policies aimed at isolating Fidel Castro's government and encouraged the rest of the Americas to assist in bringing democracy to Cuba. In a meeting behind closed doors with US State Secretary Condoleezza Rice, representatives of anti-Castro organizations and Cuban-American legislators also denounced attempts by some Latin American nations and members of the US business community to establish closer ties with Cuba. (*AP*, 6/6/05)

September 15: A former political prisoner in Cuba, who says he was repeatedly tortured with drugs and electric shocks, sued Fidel Castro's government for \$50 million in damages in a case aimed partly at exposing what Castro opponents call his brutality toward dissidents. Nilo Jerez said in court papers that the torture in the early 1970s made him sterile and continues to

cause "distress, anxiety, fear and apprehension." "It is time to have justice," Jerez told reporters outside the Miami-Dade County Courthouse after filing the lawsuit. (*AP*, 15/9/05)

September 19: A US federal judge has dismissed a wrongful death suit filed against Cuba and Fidel Castro by the sister of a man executed in 2003 for his role in a ferry hijacking. US District Judge Patricia Seitz acknowledged in her ruling that the sister, Yordanis Montoya Isaac, had presented a "sympathetic case." But Seitz said she could award no damages because neither Montoya nor her brother, Jorge Luis Martinez Isaac, were US nationals when the execution took place. Montoya had sought more than \$75,000 in damages from Cuba for the April 11, 2003, execution of her brother in the hijacking earlier that month of the Baragua, a 45-foot Cuban ferry carrying 50 passengers. (*The Gainesville Sun*, 19/9/05)

November 22: The election of US Senator Jon Corzine, a Democrat, to the governor's office in New Jersey has created a rare open seat in the US Senate, and Hispanic groups are agitating for the post to go to US Representative Bob Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat born to Cuban parents. The pro-Menendez campaign is making waves in Miami, where the 51-year-old politician is a familiar face at fundraisers and a reliable bulwark in Congress against efforts to water down the economic embargo against Cuba. Across party lines, Menendez enjoys close ties with South Florida's three Republican Cuban-American Congress members -- attending the May funeral of Rafael Díaz-Balart, patriarch of one of the nation's leading Cuban-American political families. If appointed, Menendez would be the second Cuban-American -- and third Hispanic -- US senator. Republican Mel Martinez, the other Cuban-American, was elected from Florida in 2004. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/11/05)