

**FOCAL's SUMMARY OF NEWS ITEMS
REPORTED ON CUBA
January-December 2006**

*This resource is a compilation of news items on Cuba listed in FOCAL's monthly
Chronicle on Cuba throughout 2006*

EXILE COMMUNITY

ACTIVITIES AND STATEMENTS

(See Domestic Affairs/Political Issues/Cuban government/ Succession process)

January 15: Fallout from the Florida International University spy scandal is spreading throughout segments of Miami's Cuban-American community, sparking concerns that the affair is fostering a climate of fear among exiles who favor dialogue with communist Cuba. Already, several of those people have refused to comment publicly about their concerns, and others have expressed alarm that the arrest of FIU employees Carlos Alvarez and his wife, Elsa Prieto Alvarez, could prompt pro-dialogue exiles to be less willing to voice views. "This opens the door to a witch hunt," said Bernardo Benes, who helped bring about an era of rapprochement in the late 1970s when the Fidel Castro regime allowed exiles to return for family visits. "Only those who are doing something illegal should be worried about the U.S. government's actions," said Jaime Suchlicki, director of the Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies at the University of Miami, which gets federal grants and has no contact with Cuban government institutions. Ninoska Pérez-Castellón, president of the Cuban Liberty Council and a popular Spanish-language personality on conservative Radio Mambí, said there was no witch hunt, just a deep concern among the anti-Castro right that others in Miami might also be spying for Cuba. "The last five years, there have been 21 Cuban spies convicted," she said. She added that among them was Ana Belén Montes, of Puerto Rican descent, who worked at the Pentagon and was convicted of spying for Cuba. "These two were at a well-known public university, [allegedly] serving as agents for Castro," Pérez Castellón said, referring to the Alvarezes. "Where is the witch hunt?" (*The Miami Herald*, 15/1/06)

February 9: The Democracy Movement has called for picketing in front of the Bahamas Consulate General to protest the brutal treatment of Cuban migrants by Bahamian authorities and the beating, arrests and confiscation of their cameras and videos, against TV reporters from Univision and Telemundo. The pickets demand a thorough investigation on the side of the Bahamian Government of the events that took place on February 7 in Nassau, as well as the documented and well known abuses against Haitian, Cubans and others detained in the Bahamas due to immigration reasons. On February 7, an official of the Defense Forces of the Carmichael Road Detention Center in Bahamas noticed that one of the Cuban detainees had a cellular phone, resulting in a vicious and forceful search. The Cuban

detainees were mistreated and beaten. All their properties were broken or confiscated. (*Puente Informativo*, 9/2/06)

February 15: Representatives of the Spiritual Leaders Working Group, Monsignor Agustín Román, Rev. Martín Añorga and Rev. Onell Soto got together to ask the Cuban people to not cooperate with government-organized mobs that harass human rights activists on the island. Dozens of religious leaders of the exile community joined to draft a document titled, "Contra el terror, el civismo" (Against terror, civility). In the document, they manifest their support for those neighbours in Cuba who have shown their solidarity with activists that have been attacked by government-organized mobs. (*Puente Informativo*, 15/2/06)

February 17: Miami-based organizations that promote armed struggle against Fidel Castro's regime announced the creation of an aid committee to help an "insurrection in Cuba". The appeal is part of a statement calling for the firm support of organizations and individuals to accelerate the dismantling of the regime via an uprising from within the island. The signatories to the proposal are Movimiento de Recuperación Revolucionaria (MRR), Congreso Nacional Cubano, Comandos F-4, Comando Nazario Sargén, Fundación Caribe, Junta Militar, Municipio Bayamo and Cubanos Combatientes No Afiliados. (*El Miami Herald*, 18/2/06)

March 29: Some 20 demonstrators angered by a ceremony honoring a Cuban defector stormed into Puerto Rico's statehouse, breaking tables, windows and a glass case covering the US territory's constitution. The demonstrators were angered by a tribute lawmakers were paying to Julio Labatut, a Cuban dissident and a renowned florist honored for his charitable works and entrepreneurship in Puerto Rico. Some alleged Labatut was involved in the unsolved 1979 killing of Carlos Muniz Varela, an activist for Puerto Rico's independence with close links to the Cuban government. Labatut, who was part of a group of Cuban exiles that encouraged Cuban athletes competing in Puerto Rico in the early 1990s to defect from Cuba, said he was insulted by the protest. (*The New York Times*, 30/3/06)

March 29: Cuban journalist and exile Raúl Rivero, his wife Blanca Reyes, and the NGOs People in Need and Reporters Without Borders commemorated in Madrid the 2003 crackdown on dissidents and paid tribute to the Cuban independent journalists who remain in jail. Two photo exhibitions were inaugurated with the presence of Rivero and Reyes, one of them dedicated to the Ladies in White, a group of women who demand the release of their beloved ones who remain in jail since 2003. "I walked together with them along the streets of Havana", Reyes said. Rivero, who was also sent to jail in 2003, was later released due to health conditions and allowed to leave the island. (*EFE*, 29/3/06)

April 3: A Cuban exiles' delegation called on the French government in Paris not to allow "the worst violators" to join the UN Human Rights Council, in reference to Cuba and the new entity that will come into force next June. A high-ranking foreign affairs officer at the French foreign ministry, whose name was not disclosed, met with the activists. Members from MAR for Cuba, Plantados Hasta la Libertad and relatives of political prisoners participated in the meeting. (*CubaEncuentro*, 4/4/06)

April 3: A radical pro-Castro group prevented Raúl Rivero from giving a conference in Seville. The Cuban poet and journalist, who was going to talk about the absence of freedom of expression on the island, was received by a score of young people calling him "terrorist" and other insulting names. There was no physical aggression, but "the

climate was of increasing violence every minute", said Rivero. In Rivero's opinion, the incidents were "perfectly organized". He also pointed out the presence of representatives from the Cuban Consulate, similar to what happened when he attended the International Festival of Poetry in Granada and a group of extremists awaited him where he was going to read his poems with banners calling him a "worm"--, a term used by pro-Castro groups to call those who flee the island. (*EI Mundo*, 4/4/06)

April 4: The Embassy of Cuba in Spain denied that officials from that diplomatic mission or any consular office took part in the boycott of an event in which Cuban poet Raúl Rivero was going to speak. Rivero was released from prison last year thanks to the mediation of the current Spanish government. The University of Seville "strongly condemned" the group of protesters "alien to the University Community" who prevented Rivero from giving his conference. (*Europa Press*, 4/4/06)

April 6: The Cuban Border Guard opened fire on a boat carrying three men believed to be Cuban-American migrant smugglers -- killing one and wounding another -- in an incident the US State Department called a "deeply disturbing matter." The two captured survivors were identified as Rosendo Salgado Castro and Rafael Mesa Fariñas, who hold US passports. Salgado was shot in the leg, according to a knowledgeable official in Havana who asked to remain anonymous because he was not authorized to speak about the case. "I read that garbage. I don't think it happened like that," Leydi Crespo, the daughter of Salgado's former companion, said from her Miami home. "They decided to shoot at them, just like they did to those Brothers to the Rescue planes. If he was trafficking people or not, you don't shoot them." Crespo and her mother, Ana Del Toro, said they have no idea what Salgado was doing near Cuba, and have no knowledge of him being involved in migrant smuggling. Salgado, 41, is an out-of-work truck driver who arrived in Miami in 1995 after a stint at the refugee camps at Guantánamo Bay Naval Base. Ninoska Perez Castellon, spokeswoman for the Miami-based Cuban Liberty Council, blamed the communist government, accusing it of tolerating illegal migrant smuggling. "The Cuban government has the authority to let them go in and out," she said. "For anybody to believe that all those people are coming in and out without the government getting a cut is ridiculous." The men face a precarious legal situation, because the Cuban government does not recognize dual citizenship. If the men were born in Cuba -- and Salgado certainly was -- the government there will treat them as Cuban citizens, experts said. "The bottom line is they are subject to the laws of Cuba. The Cubans will use this as an incentive to have others not engage in the same efforts," said attorney Mario Cano, who has represented accused smugglers in Miami. (*The Miami Herald*, AP, 7/4/06)

April 6: Cuban poet and journalist Raul Rivero, the highest-profile political prisoner of the Castro regime's Spring 2003 crackdown on dissent, said the verses collected in his new book were a means of figuratively freeing himself from jail. Released last year for health reasons and currently residing in Spain, he talked with the press about "Vidas y oficios. Los poemas de la cárcel" (Lives and Occupations: Poems from Prison). "It is a book of meditation, written to escape from jail, to get out of that hostile, tense environment I was in," he said. Dreams, escapes or "sweetened rejections" are some of the themes treated in "Lives and Occupations," which Rivero wrote between the spring of 2003 and the winter of 2004, and in which he recreates places "to live awhile and be able to come back later," the author said. Written in a cell where he could "only take six steps in one direction," this book of verse contains scarcely any direct references to his prison surroundings, reflecting the interior world

of the poet rather than offering the testimony of a man behind bars. This restorative "escape from reality" finds its counterpoint in the "critical, humorous and ironic" vision that the author gives of himself in the work. He says that it is his "best weapon" against falling into "vanities - the great defect," according to Rivero, of Fidel Castro, whom he considers "a conceited person in love with himself." "Castro's fake superiority and cheap boasting does the country much harm," Rivero said, adding that "in Cuba it's a national catastrophe if a boxer loses" because of the need for greatness and success throughout a society that "is unaware that the revolution failed." (*EFE*, 6/4/06)

April 10: A federal civil suit alleging human rights violations by the Cuban government has been dismissed because the four Cuban plaintiffs lacked jurisdiction. US District Judge Alan S. Gold in Miami ruled the people who sued had not sufficiently established allegiance to the US, which would have allowed review by American courts. The nine-page decision said the plaintiffs did not qualify to sue under the Alien Tort Claims Act, which allows foreign nationals to bring civil suits against their governments in the US in the absence of sovereign immunity under other federal laws. The four plaintiffs — two imprisoned Cuban citizens and two of their relatives now living in the US — won a clerk's default judgment in US District Court in 2004 because the Cuban government did not respond to the suit, its standard approach to US lawsuits. The ruling is flawed, but the plaintiffs are unsure if they will appeal, their lawyer Paul Orfanedes, director of litigation for Washington-based Judicial Watch, said. The Cubans claimed the Cuban government, the Cuban military and several top government officials, including Fidel Castro and his brother Raul, committed crimes against humanity by imprisoning and torturing people who oppose Castro's rule. (*Miami Daily Business Review*, 11/4/06)

April 19: A Cuban exile arrested for stashing more than 1,000 guns in his suburban Upland, California home told federal authorities the weapons were for a quasi-military group bent on overthrowing Fidel Castro, but police officials said that may be a cover story for his black-market gun ring. Federal agents found hundreds of additional firearms as well as hand grenades during a follow-up search of the upscale San Bernardino County home of Robert Ferro, a retired Army Special Forces officer, adding to the 875 guns confiscated on April 14. Ferro told federal investigators that he was a member of the anti-Castro group Alpha 66, "a militant group who collectively desire to overthrow Fidel Castro and liberate the country of Cuba," according to an affidavit filed in federal court by Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Special Agent Keith Krolczyk. (*Los Angeles Times*, 20/4/06)

April 20: A Cuban exile arrested in California with a huge cache of weapons is not a member of the militant group Alpha 66 as he claims, Alpha 66 leader Ernesto Diaz said. Robert Ferro, 61, was arrested after authorities raided his Upland home in Southern California and found more than 1,000 weapons, including assault rifles, machine guns and live grenades. Ferro told investigators that he was a member of Alpha 66 "a militant group who collectively desire to overthrow Fidel Castro and liberate the country of Cuba," according to an affidavit filed in federal court by the bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Diaz disputed Ferro's account. "He is not a member of Alpha 66, nor does Alpha 66 have any knowledge of who this person is," Diaz said. Diaz said he suspects that Ferro could be part of a Cuban government plot to discredit Alpha 66. "I don't discount the possibility that it's a campaign from the Cuban government to compromise Alpha 66," Diaz said. "At these moments, Alpha is being respectful of US laws, and our training camps are within the guidelines of US laws." "We don't have records of Robert Ferro; we know

nothing of that person," said Mario Estevez, press secretary of Alpha 66 in Miami. "We have 50,000 members, maybe more, and most of our members are in Cuba. Robert Ferro is not a member of our organization," Estevez said. (*The Miami Herald*, EFE, 20/4/06)

May 3: Sylvia Iriondo, president of the exile group Mothers and Women Against Repression and for Cuba, said in Brussels that "the European Union policy of dialogue with Cuba has been a great failure, since it has only served to strengthen the Castro regime and continue the repression." "The more the measures are eased, the more the repression increases in Cuba," Iriondo said. Iriondo, who visited the European Parliament at the invitation of Transnational Radical Party Eurodeputy Marco Panella, was accompanied by Angel de Fana, a former political prisoner, Manuel Vazquez Portal, one of the 75 dissidents jailed in the spring of 2003, and Blanca Gonzalez, the mother of jailed journalist Normando Hernandez. (EFE, 3/5/06)

May 16: Young Cuban Americans gathered around a telephone at Princeton University in April to hear Rolando Rodriguez Lobaina talk fervently from his home in Cuba, about growing discontent among the island's youths and their yearning for freedom. Three days later, Cuban authorities arrested the dissident leader. They held him until May 12. Rodriguez was released after Raices de Esperanza, the Cuban-American youth group that he addressed at Princeton, mounted an international campaign to denounce the Cuban government for oppressing political discourse and to demand that he be freed from prison. Rodriguez, director of the Center for Alternative Studies for the Cuban Youth Movement for Democracy, delivered an impassioned speech to Raices in a conference call with his brother, Nestor, in late April. "Freedom of expression, freedom of association, free access to sources of information, the right to investigate, to doubt, that is simply enough to motivate our struggle," Rodriguez told about 100 Raices members. (*The Miami Herald*, 17/5/06)

May 27: Cuba's daily newspaper Granma observed the passing of Dr. Eduardo Bernabé Ordaz, chronicling his climb from shoeshine boy to guerrilla fighter and then head of the Psychiatric Hospital of Havana for some 40 years. The obituary, however, omitted mention of allegations that political dissidents were given electroshocks as a form of torture at Ordaz's hospital, better known as Mazorra. "He was a tool in the bloody machine to destroy people's minds," said former political prisoner Jorge Alejandro Ferrer, 60, of Southwest Dade. "I was tortured in this place where they were supposed to cure people. My life was destroyed in that place." In published reports over the years, Ordaz acknowledged holding dissidents but for legitimate reasons. But Armando Lago, co-author of the 1991 book, "The Politics of Psychiatry in Revolutionary Cuba", said Ordaz had signed an agreement with Cuba's State Security department giving it control over "punishment pavilions" at Mazorra. "Dissidents held there would get electroshock between their legs. When the families came to complain, he'd say, 'I have no control over what goes on over there,'" Lago said. Witnesses, including Ferrer, said Ordaz also used patients as household help. Although there was no proven therapeutic value to the hospital orchestra or sports teams, life for the true mental patients was probably pleasant, Lago said. The torture, he alleged, was reserved for the 5 percent of patients who were political dissidents. (*The Miami Herald*, 27/5/06)

June 5: In a special session of the Organization of American States in Santo Domingo, the president of MAR por Cuba, Sylvia Iriondo, described the situation on the island where for more than 47 years the people have not had the option of electing their leaders. The activist called on the OAS member states to support the

democratic aspirations of the Cuban people, and denounced the situation of more than 330 political prisoners on the island who suffer in subhuman conditions. (*MartiNoticias*, 5/6/06)

June 7: Six years after the government raid to seize Elian Gonzalez and return him to his father, supporters of the Cuban boy continue to press their claims that federal agents used excessive force in seizing him. Oral arguments were heard before the 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals in an amended lawsuit against the government. The suit was filed by more than 90 people who say they were injured by a type of tear gas used by immigration agents who removed then-6-year-old Elian from his relatives' Miami home on April 22, 2000. An earlier lawsuit against former Attorney General Janet Reno was rejected by the federal appeals court in Atlanta on the grounds that she had immunity from damages. This suit, based on similar facts, only names the United States and has nearly twice as many plaintiffs as the previous one. The plaintiffs include supporters of Elian who were outside the home and neighbors who were sleeping at the time of the raid. Among them is Donato Dalrymple, who was on a fishing trip with his cousin on Thanksgiving 1999 when they found and rescued Elian, who had survived a shipwreck that killed his mother and others fleeing Cuba. (*AP*, 7/6/06)

June 9: The group Cuba Democracia Ya! condemned the "inaction" of European institutions with regards to the situation in Cuba, by continually "delaying" their actions while the acts of repudiation and violence against peaceful opposition increase on the island. (*Europa Press*, 9/6/06)

June 14: A small group of Cuban-Americans dressed in black gathered outside the Broward Center for the Performing Arts, holding posters picturing independent journalists held in Cuban jails, some serving sentences of more than 20 years. The group was demonstrating during an interview with Ricardo Alarcon, president of Cuba's National Assembly, by the organizers of the annual convention of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists in Fort Lauderdale. One large poster featured Guillermo Fariñas, a Cuban journalist who has been on a hunger strike for the right to Internet access. The Cuban-Americans holding posters outside the center said they were not protesting, but wanted to educate visiting journalists about limited access to information in Cuba, and persecution of those who express dissenting views. Most Cubans don't have computers, and only a few government jobs carry full Internet privileges. (*Sun Sentinel*, 14/6/06)

June 22: A former board member of the Cuban American National Foundation said he and other CANF leaders created a paramilitary group to carry out destabilizing acts in Cuba and do away with Fidel Castro. Jose Antonio Llama, known as Toñín, told the press that the arsenal to carry out these plans included a cargo helicopter, 10 ultralight radio-controlled planes, seven vessels and abundant explosive materials. The plans failed after Llama and four other exiles were arrested in Puerto Rico in 1997 on charges of conspiracy to assassinate Castro during the Ibero-American Summit on Margarita Island, Venezuela. A jury acquitted them after a federal judge threw out one of the defendants' self-incriminating statements. Llama, a close associate of the late CANF leader Jorge Mas Canosa, left the group's board in 1999. CANF spokesman Alfredo Mesa -- speaking for members and leaders -- told the press: ``In this case, we consider that it is extremely irresponsible for a press organization to echo what clearly represents an extortion and defamation attempt." The Cuban government has long claimed CANF planned armed attacks on the island,

but up until now, none of its claims have been documented. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 22/6/06)

June 29: The Spanish Socialist Party invited the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) and other Latin American parties to a seminar on the future of the region. The Cuban Communist Party, Venezuela's Movimiento Quinta República, and Ecuador's Movimiento al Socialismo, all in power, were not invited to the seminar. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 29/6/06)

July 25: A coalition of US-based Cuban exile groups launched a campaign to urge their compatriots in the Island "not to cooperate with the dictatorship." According to the organizations, the campaign aims to provide support for civic resistance movements in Cuba and was organized in response to calls from political prisoners and dissidents in the Island. The initiative was launched by the organizations Plantados (made up of former Cuban political prisoners who refused all rehabilitation plans and insisted on their status as political prisoners), MAR Por Cuba and Cuban Democratic Directorate. (*AP, El Nuevo Herald*, 26/7/06)

August 11: Investigators from the Southern Florida special antiterrorist unit interviewed the former-director of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) who weeks ago revealed his involvement in alleged plans to use military action to eliminate Fidel Castro. Sources indicated that the cross-examination of José Antonio Llama, A.K.A. "Toñín", is part of an inquiry launched by the South Florida Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF), following the activist's confession regarding the creation and financing of a secret paramilitary arm of the Foundation in 1992. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 11/8/06)

August 15: About 50 Cuban migrants are being detained indefinitely at the US Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, according to an exile group in Miami. Federal officials confirmed the number. One migrant has been held for nearly two years; another, age 10, has diabetes. The Cubans were picked up at sea at various times trying to reach the United States, according to the exile group, Democracy Movement. Normally they would have been returned to Cuba. But after interviews aboard US Coast Guard cutters it was determined that those migrants appeared to meet the standard of having a well-founded fear of persecution if repatriated and, therefore, were diverted to Guantanamo, the exile group said. The exile group said Cubans can be held at the base until the United States can find a third country that will take them. Ramon Raul Sanchez, who heads Democracy Movement, said at least one Cuban has been held at the base nearly two years, and recently staged a hunger protest over US immigration policy. A State Department spokesman referred CNN's questions to Homeland Security, which did not immediately respond. (*CNN*, 15/8/06)

August 16: The Comandos F-4, a paramilitary group of Cuban exiles based in Miami, said the only way to achieve change in Cuba was through arms. Now that it has been proved beyond reasonable doubt that Fidel Castro is still alive, and that even though he has handed over command to his brother Raúl the state appears able to function in the same way as before, Miami-based exiles have begun venting their disappointment and demanding urgent action. The US, however, appears to be urging caution and is exceedingly unlikely to endorse any adventurism. The Comandos F-4, described as a "terrorist" organisation by Cuba, said it had training camps in Paraguay and, interestingly, Venezuela and was ready to "support militarily" its compatriots on the island. "Fidel Castro has not left us any other option, given that his reaction to all peaceful action has been to send people to

prison" Rodolfo Frometa, the commander-in-chief of the group, said. (*Latinnews Daily*, 17/8/06)

August 20: A pair of Cuban-American opponents to Fidel Castro's rule hope a database they are compiling will provide an accurate record of how many have been killed by the regime. Maria Werlau, 46, a former banker living in Chatham, New Jersey, and Armando Lago, 66, a half-paralyzed economist in Coral Gables, Florida, say their eight-year-old Cuba Archive project has already compiled 9,000 reports of people killed during Castro's 47 years running Cuba. The reports, many of which they say have been confirmed, involve more than 5,000 killed by firing squad, mostly in the immediate years following Castro's 1959 rise to power. Werlau and Lago say roughly 2,000 others died in prison, some executed, some perishing in accidents never explained. On top of that, there's an estimated 77,000 people who have died trying to flee Cuba, according to Castro critics. Werlau and Lago also hope to include the roughly 3,000 people who died in the violence before the 1959 revolution, including those killed by the forces of dictator Fulgencio Batista. (*AP*, 20/8/06)

September 4: About 10 women from Women for Human Rights International wanted their one-mile walk to Bayshore Drive to resemble the weekly walks of Las Damas de Blanco. Every Sunday, since 2003, Las Damas de Blanco have attended Mass at the Santa Rita church in Havana's Miramar neighborhood. After the service they walk peacefully through the streets, flowers in hand, displaying photos of loved ones languishing in Cuban prisons for dissenting with the country's totalitarian regime. During Sunday's "Walk for Dignity & Freedom," in Coconut Grove, Women For Human Rights International joined Las Damas de Blanco, or The Ladies in White, in calling for provisional Cuban President Raul Castro's unconditional release of the country's political prisoners. Women For Human Rights International was founded in Miami in 1988 to fight for social justice around the world. Like Las Damas de Blanco, the group hopes national and international communities will urge the Cuban government to grant amnesty to political prisoners. Organizers hope Sunday's walk will be the first of many solidarity walks to be held at least once a month, said Marivi Prado, president of Women for Human Rights International. The next walk will begin in downtown Miami, at a date yet to be announced. (*The Miami Herald*, 4/9/06)

September 11: Several Cuban-American business leaders are seeking to boost the Cuban entrepreneurial spirit with small business startup loans that they believe could help stimulate the island's economy, but the plan first has to overcome restrictions enforced by the US and Cuban governments. The idea is to give microloans to people who want to start businesses such as selling food in the street. But the plan is a long shot, said Carlos Saladrigas, co-chairman of The Cuba Study Group, a nonpartisan Washington-based organization that has pledged \$10 million in seed money. The Cuban government prohibits most private enterprise, while US law sets strict limits on sending money to the communist nation. Officials with the US State and Treasury Departments had no immediate comment on the proposal. And despite Fidel Castro's recent hand-off of power to his brother Raul, there is little sign of any major changes in Cuba's economic policies. ``But we believe we have to take risks and seize opportunities, and we believe change is under way in Cuba," Saladrigas said. ``Raul Castro is not a spring chicken, and collective leadership always harbors the seeds of reform." (*Sun Sentinel*, 11/9/06)

September 13: A Miami exile leader announced plans for a symbolic demonstration in the waters off Cuba. The reason: to get the group's call for democracy on the

island heard by the 116 foreign leaders attending a summit in Havana. "We are asking for free elections in Cuba, not a succession of power from brother to brother as if Cuba were a dynasty," said Ramón Saúl Sánchez, head of the Democracy Movement. The group is staging its "maritime demonstration" to attract the attention of leaders from mostly developing nations attending this week's 14th annual summit of the Nonaligned Movement, which ends on September 16. At a press conference, Sánchez said the group's yacht, the 39-foot Democracia, will leave from Key West's Municipal Marina after midnight on September 15 and head toward the 12-mile limit of what Cuba considers its territorial waters. The Democracia will ferry electoral ballots, fly a white flag, display giant posters of Cuba's political prisoners and drop white roses on the water. Mirrors will be flashed toward the island. About 20 people will be onboard. (*The Miami Herald*, 12/9/06)

September 13: Huber Matos, a leader of the Cuban Revolution who later spent 20 years as a political prisoner of the Castro regime, hailed Costa Rican President Oscar Arias for urging an end to the US embargo to give a boost to democratization in Cuba. Matos said in a letter released in Miami that Arias's "formula (...) very probably does not interest the Castro (brothers)," but it is a way to "bring about a change on the island." In a commentary published last month in the Costa Rican daily *La Nación*, Arias said that the lifting of Washington's four-decade-old economic embargo as well as the closing of the US Navy base at Guantanamo could bring about a democratic transition in Communist Cuba. Matos, 80, said that Arias's message seeks to support the democratic aspirations of the Cubans on the island and, in that sense, the lifting of the embargo is an opportunity that could "lead to the changing of the economic system," which would imply "a change in the political system." (*EFE*, 13/9/06)

September 19: Some Cuban exiles, upset about the firing of two *El Nuevo Herald* reporters and a freelancer who received thousands of dollars in US government pay as correspondents for Radio and TV Martí, protested the dismissals and launched an Internet campaign. "We reject the efforts of The Miami Herald to silence our voice in Cuba," Remedios Díaz-Oliver of the Cuban Liberty Council said at a news conference. "These journalists were professional and ethical." Also a website urged visitors to sign an online petition and download a letter addressed to Gary B. Pruitt, president and chief executive of McClatchy Co., parent company of The Miami Herald and *El Nuevo Herald*. The letter requests that a panel be established to determine whether the Miami Herald Media Co. should have fired the three journalists. (*The Miami Herald*, 20/9/06)

October 12: High officials from the incumbent Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) met with representatives of the People's Party, made up of Cuban exiles. According to an ARENA press release, the Cubans talked with the president of El Salvador, Elías Antonio Saca, who is also ARENA's leader. The communiqué indicates that the Cubans later met with members of the National Executive Council (COENA), the highest body within ARENA, the ruling party in El Salvador since 1989. (*ACAN-EFE*, 12/10/06)

October 28: In December 2001, Cuban officials abruptly summoned Alberto Rodríguez to a meeting at the Ministry of Transport and told him he was being sent to work at a shipyard on Curacao. Over the next three years, Rodríguez claims he and dozens of other men were held as virtual slaves, forced to work long hours for pennies a day in dangerous conditions. Rodríguez, who escaped in October 2004, and two other Cubans who were sent to the shipyard say they suffered serious

injuries, were not permitted to move freely in Curacao and were forced to watch videotapes of hours-long speeches of Fidel Castro "extolling the virtues of the Revolution." "They humiliated us. They exploited us," Rodriguez said in an interview. Now, Rodriguez and the others have filed a federal lawsuit in Miami seeking unspecified damages from the Curacao Drydock Co. for what they claim was a conspiracy in which Cuba provided low-cost, forced labor in return for hard currency desperately sought by the communist Havana government. "Curacao Drydock Co. knew that the Cuban laborers that the Cuban government provided to it were not free individuals but subjects of the Cuban totalitarian regime, who were compelled to perform the will of the Cuban state," said their lawsuit, filed by Miami attorney John Andres Thornton. (*AP*, 28/10/06)

November 15: Cuban exile leader Marcelino Miyares was elected first vice-president of the Christian Democrat Organization of America (ODCA), during that organization's XVIII Congress held in Santiago de Chile. Miyares is the current president of the Christian Democratic Party of Cuba, with headquarters in Miami. The Congress approved the change of status of observer members to permanent members for the Cuban dissident groups Christian Liberation Movement (MCL), Cuban Democratic Project (PRODECU) and the Cuban Democratic Directorate. (*EER*, 15/11/06)

November 20: Hugo Cancio, President and CEO of Fuego Entertainment, Inc., a public media and entertainment company, announced that he will establish an exploratory group called the US-Cuban Investment Committee for assisting the reconstruction of his native country, Cuba, and in the process, play a key-role in its transformation to a free-economy. "Mixed with the exotic aroma of coffee and tobacco leaves, the Cuban people can almost begin to feel the winds of freedom (...) freedom from its failed political and economic system, and freedom from over 45 years of an economic embargo imposed by the US government," stated Mr. Cancio. "Cuba is already experiencing a soft and passive transition in its government ... one that will have no choice but to open its arms to the world. I want to be there and help Cuba rebuild itself, brick by brick, if necessary. It's not only a genuine desire, it's my obligation." For now, the US-Cuban Investment Committee will have 10 members who are leading professionals in business and finance and convene twice a month. Eventually, the committee will explore the possibility of pooling together its own private investment fund to provide financial capital for Cuba's economic growth. (*Business Wire*, 20/11/06)

November 30: A new report by the Cuban Democratic Directorate shows the number of acts of civil disobedience on the island is on the rise, revealing growing discontent with the quality of life in Cuba. From candlelight vigils to hunger strikes and even a mountain hike, Fidel Castro opponents logged more than 3,300 acts of civil disobedience in Cuba last year, nearly twice the number of the year before, according to a report. As Castro's government continues a campaign of reprisals against dissidents that began with a wave of arrests three years ago, members of the opposition movement say more people are speaking up and joining up. "Repression generates rebellion," said Janisset Rivero, executive director of the Cuban Democratic Directorate, an exile organization that published Steps to Freedom, the report to be released at the University of Miami. (*The Miami Herald*, 30/11/06)

December 4: An umbrella group of influential Cuban exile organizations joined the growing chorus of Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits calling for the United States to ease restrictions on travel and remittances to Cuba. About two dozen exile organizations, speaking in unison under the umbrella group *Consenso Cubano*, or Cuban Consensus, released a report calling for the Bush administration to ease travel restrictions. The groups say US policies that restrict Cubans from visiting family members and that limit remittances and other humanitarian aid ``violate fundamental rights of Cubans, damage the Cuban family, and constitute ethical contradictions." The announcement underscores a growing rift between hard-line exile leaders who want to preserve the sanctions, and more moderate Cuban Americans in Miami and dissidents in Cuba who feel that increasing interaction can help promote a peaceful transition to democracy. (*The Miami Herald*, 4/12/06)

December 8: The residents of a town near Havana have been honoured by a European human rights groups for defending an opposition activist when Cuba's secret police went to his home to take him away, a Cuban exile organization announced. The Miami-based Cuban Democratic Directorate said the citizens of the municipality of Madruga received the Pedro Luis Boitel Freedom Prize. The directorate said the prize was awarded "to the town of Madruga because on the 2nd of November hundreds of people took to the streets when the political police showed up at the home of human rights activist Eddy Hernandez Arencibia." Hungarian Ambassador to the United States Andras Simonyi presented the prize in a ceremony at the offices of the directorate and Jose Manuel Lopez Montero, a Madruga resident who recently arrived in Miami, accepted the award on behalf of the town. The Pedro Luis Boitel Freedom Award was created by Romanian physicist Gabriel Andreescu in 2001, with the support of eight Central and Eastern European human rights groups, to honor dissidents in Cuba. It takes its name from Pedro Luis Boitel, a Cuban political prisoner who died while on a hunger strike in 1972. (*EFE*, 8/12/06)

GENERAL

January 8: Cuban film maker, artist and illustrator Constante "Rapi" Diego passed away in Mexico City at the age of 56, following a protracted battle with skin cancer. His only son, 28-year-old Ismael, was allowed to travel from Havana to be with him in the final hours. Born in Havana from a family with a long intellectual pedigree, "Rapi" began studying Art History and Industrial Design which he later gave up to pursue his artistic passion for drawing and the illustration of children's books. His father was the renowned poet Eliseo Diego (1920-1994), who also died in Mexico. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 9/1/06)

January 9: Ofelia Fox, once known as the first lady of the Tropicana nightclub in Havana, where Hollywood stars mingled and performers like Nat King Cole ruled the stage, died in Burbank. She was 82. The cause was cancer and complications of diabetes, said Rosa Sanchez, her companion of more than 40 years. In her memoir, "Tropicana Nights: The Life and Times of the Legendary Cuban Nightclub," written with Rosa Lowinger and published last fall, Ms. Fox recounted life at the casino and dance club owned by Martin Fox, whom she married in 1952. After Fidel Castro took possession of the club, Ms. Fox and her husband fled to Miami. Ms. Fox's husband, Martin, suffered a stroke and died in the mid-1960's. Born Ofelia Suarez in Havana, the youngest of four, she published several books of poetry while she lived in Cuba.

In Los Angeles, several of her bilingual plays were staged by the Cuban Cultural Club in Monterrey Park. (*The New York Times*, 11/1/06)

January 23: Cuban writer Justo Vasco died at 62 in the Spanish city of Oviedo, Asturias. The Cuban author was widely regarded by literary critics as one of the most important voices within the black genre in Cuba. (*EFE*, 23/1/06)

March 9: South Florida's Cuban-American community is not as preoccupied with Fidel Castro and communist Cuba as it previously was, according to a new poll being released. Asked what's the most important political issue, 33 percent of respondents said the war in Iraq and terrorism. Twenty-seven percent put Cuba and Castro at the top, while 11 percent said the economy is most important. The poll, conducted in February of 600 Cuban Americans in Miami-Dade, shows the broadening of opinion in the community as younger generations and new arrivals focus on other issues beyond communist Cuba, the pollsters noted. The survey was conducted by two researchers outside of Florida -- Jessica Lavariega Monforti, a political science professor at the University of Texas-Panamerican, and Lisa García Bedolla of the University of California at Irvine. They presented their results at an event organized by Florida International University. The researchers conclude that national security issues will be more important for Cubans and Cuban-American voters in 2008 than US-Cuba policy. "I think what we are looking at is a much more complicated view of this community than we've seen in the past," said Jessica Lavariega Monforti, a political science professor at the University of Texas, Pan American. "You have to engage this community on issues other than Cuba." (*The Miami Herald*, 9/3/06)

March 25: A growing number of exiles choose Cuba to rest in peace. It costs more and takes longer, but more Cubans are fulfilling their wish to return to the island -- even after death. Funeral directors say the number of shipments has doubled in the past year or so as domestic funeral costs rise, more people realize tightened remittances and other restrictions do not apply -- and older generations of Cuban exiles continue to die. There are no records on how many bodies are shipped annually to Cuba, according to the office of Vital Statistics for Florida, the Cuban Interests Section, and the US Treasury Department, which oversees the trade embargo with Cuba. Some Cuban exile leaders and Cuban funeral home operators oppose the practice, contending it aids the Castro government, which collects fees on shipments. "The only purpose it serves is to give Castro money," said Jose Basulto of Brothers to the Rescue, an anti-Castro group that flew missions searching for Cuban rafters. "Does Fidel Castro benefit? Yes," said Joe Garcia, former executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation. "But you know what? Fidel Castro benefits more from other things than a poor guy sending his dead mother back. If my mother asked me to bury her on the moon, I would send her to the moon." Garcia did fault the Cuban government for what it charges for the process. The average cost, excluding airfare and storage of the body: \$2,795 for a body; \$2,000 for ashes. A chunk of the money -- \$1,120 -- goes to the Cuban government. (*The Miami Herald*, 25/3/06)

March 28: Cuban exile Rafael Rojas, who lives in Mexico, won the 34 th Anagrama Essay Awards with the book "Tombs without Peace. Revolution, dissidents and exile of the Cuban intellectuals" (Tumbas sin sosiego. Revolución, disidencia y exilio del intelectual cubano), a brief intellectual history of Cuba. (*Europa Press*, 28/3/06)

May 9: More than a labor of love, new movie "The Lost City" was a labor of life for Cuban-born actor Andy Garcia. Garcia, 50, directed, produced, scored and starred in

the film about pre-communist Cuba that begins playing in theaters around the United States after a limited run in Los Angeles, New York and Miami. The actor, whose movies include "Ocean's Eleven" and "Ocean's Twelve," labored 18 years to raise money and make "Lost City," but he said the seeds of his story go back to when he was 5-1/2 and fled the country and the communist regime under leader Fidel Castro. Garcia's greatest achievement, he said, is that a movie about Cuba and its people exists at all. "There was a story waiting to be told," he said. (*Reuters*, 9/5/06)

June 1: The famous Cuban painter Agustin Fernandez, 78, died in New York from pneumonia. Fernandez was one of the most significant of the exiled Cuban artists in the development of international modernism. Although he has been classified as a surrealist throughout his career, his work draws from a wide realm of visions, inventions and contortions. While not abstract in approach, his work does not represent objective reality, instead depicting unconscious yearnings, obsessions, and fantasies. In 1959 Fernandez moved to Paris, where he would remain for more than 10 years, producing a series of erotic work. In 1968, after moving to Puerto Rico, and destroying much of his earlier work, he began to work in collage, and continued to explore the armor-like metal facades. In 1972 he moved to New York where he lived the rest of his life. "My paintings were more Cuban, more romantic before 1960; in exile they have and become more metaphysical. I don't know if exile influences my work, but it has influenced me. It is not that I left Cuba, it's not being able to return", he said. (*El Nuevo Herald, Art in Context*, 4/6/06)

June 28: A new generation of Cuban-American activists are finding their own way to support Cuba's internal opposition. "I think every college kid has to have a cause," said Candice Balmori, 21, president of Harvard's Cuban American Undergraduate Student Association, or CAUSA. "Everyone has to take up a banner of some sort." That banner was handed to them by older exiles. The young Cuban-Americans, many born in the United States, grew up hearing stories from relatives who longed for their homeland. The youngsters learned to love Cuba, even if they had never visited it. "I think most people who had to leave (...) I think they all left being very proud of their country and loving everything about it," said Joanna González, who grew up in Miami and was one of the founders of Raíces de Esperanza, a national network of young Cuban-American activists. "I heard about it constantly. I heard about absolutely everything, the culture and what happened to the country. You grow up not being able to be a part of that and that's how you become passionate about it," González said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 28/6/06)

July 2: Czech ex-president Vaclav Havel, an advocate of freedom and human rights observance in Cuba, met with Cuban-born US film star Andy Garcia. Asked by the press whether he would return to Cuba if the current totalitarian regime collapsed, Garcia said he has been dreaming about returning to Cuba for all his life. The family of Garcia, now 50, left Cuba shortly after Fidel Castro's takeover, when Andy was a small boy. Before a private dinner with Havel, Garcia said it is impossible to anticipate what will happen in Cuba. It is only necessary to hope and pray for the changes that can be expected one day, to be peaceful. For 47 years it has been hoped that changes will occur soon, Garcia said. He said he is meeting Havel because he highly esteems his activities in support of human rights. There are many people who have been doing much for Cuba. Mr. Havel is one of them, Garcia said. Garcia is staying in the Czech Republic as a guest to the Karlovy Vary international film festival that has presented him with a Crystal Globe for his extraordinary contribution to world cinema. (*CTK*, 2/7/06)

July 15: Manuel Ochoa, the conductor and musical director of the Miami Symphony orchestra he founded in 1989 passed away of heart failure. He was 80 and had been in poor health for most of the year and, regrettably, was no longer able to conduct. Born into a musical family in the Cuban provincial city of Holguín, Manuel Ochoa first conducted professionally at the age of 17 -- a performance of Verdi's opera *Il Trovatore*. He graduated from Havana's prestigious Conservatorio Internacional de Música, where he would later serve as Professor of Conducting Techniques. In Cuba, Ochoa went on to conduct the Orquesta Filarmónica de La Habana, but it was at choral conducting that he first excelled, becoming the island's preeminent choral conductor. He continued his studies in Europe, graduating from the Real Conservatorio de Madrid and learning conducting techniques in Rome and Vienna. One of his achievements was to be an early interpreter of Cuba's first composer, the now revered Baroque master Esteban Salas. (*The Miami Herald*, 16/7/06)

July 21: The executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), Alfredo Mesa, will resign his post to work for a firm that deals with government affairs, although he will continue to fulfill his duties as spokesman for the Cuban exile organization and could sit at its executive board meetings. "The current position of the CANF is very solid, which allows for these changes," pointed out Mesa, 31, who, following the CANF congress, will become vice-president of the global government affairs strategy and management firm Dutko WorldWide. In letter to Mas Santos, Mesa praised the current CANF strategy, focused on supporting the dissident movement, a non-violent political transition in Cuba and the articulation last year of the Cuban Consensus project, which brought approximately 20 exile organizations together under the same program. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 21/7/06)

July 22: The Cuban American National Foundation, the organization that pushed the Cuban exile cause to national prominence, celebrated its 25th anniversary with great fanfare during its annual conference. "This represents a quarter century of victories and sacrifice by so many men and women who worked toward the common goal of liberty in Cuba," said Jorge Mas Santos, current CANF chairman and son of Mas Canosa, who died in 1997. "It reflects on the vision of the founders, who left us their vision to make sure that every Cuban on the island knows that they are not alone." Highlighting the foundation's current focus on providing financial and other support to dissidents still living in Cuba, Mas and his mother Irma Mas Santos announced a \$1 million donation to the foundation to mark the quarter century milestone. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/7/06)

August 7: Damian Fernandez, the Cuban-born director of Florida International University's Cuban Research Institute, cautioned against assuming that all of the original exiles are hard-liners or extremists. The truth is much more nuanced, he said. The first arrivals -- many of whom are now either dead or old and weary -- were driven by "a very deep, affective, emotionally charged crusade against what they perceived to be the evil represented in Fidel and communism," said Fernandez. Their fight was almost a family feud, as many members of the community came from the same left-of-center political current as Castro before he turned communist. There is a paradox in that the Miami exiles are the leading voice demanding Cuba be isolated through US economic and political sanctions and yet are more engaged with the island than any other community in the United States, Fernandez said. "We are perceived as supporting isolation and disengagement. We are engaged on a daily basis; we send money, we call, we travel, we send packages. We're informed." (*Reuters*, 7/8/06)

August 11: A lot more than the treacherous Florida Straits separates Miami's Cuban exiles from their homeland just 90 miles off the southern tip of Florida. But the handover of power by ailing Fidel Castro has many thinking about change on the communist-ruled island and the day, perhaps soon, when barriers between Cubans and staunchly anti-Castro Cuban Americans may finally come tumbling down. "In the long run it's going to be impossible to separate South Florida from Cuba, the links are too strong," said Anthony Maingot, a Caribbean expert and sociology professor at Florida International University. "I have absolutely no doubt that Cubans will go back," said Maingot, predicting many exiles would return to Cuba to live after Castro's long rule comes to an end. But a 2004 poll by Florida International University showed that most exiles -- who may not be welcome back on the island -- would probably never return to Cuba to live. Even if it changed to a democracy, nearly 67 percent said they were unlikely to consider a permanent return. That total was even higher than the 60 percent who said they favored military action, by the US government or Cuban exiles, to overthrow Castro. Cuba and Florida could eventually have "highly integrated economies," said Javier Corrales, an associate professor of political science at Amherst College. "But a lot depends on whether Cuba becomes a hospitable place, politically and economically." If there is a true democratic opening in Cuba, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, an exile and Republican congresswoman from South Florida, said booming tourism and new business and franchise opportunities could lure many Cuban emigres back to stay. (*Reuters*, 11/8/06)

September 20: Prominent Cuban intellectual, Mario Parajón, member of the legendary *Grupo Origenes*, which exerted a profound influence on Cuban intellectual life in the second half of the XXth century, died in Madrid at the age of 77. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 22/9/06)

September 21: Italian filmmaker Angelo Rizzo, author of a recent movie depicting the death of an Italian tourist in 1997 during a wave of terrorist attacks in Havana, blamed the "anti-Cuban mafia" for the burning of two vehicles in front of his house, near Milan. In statements to the Cuban official newspaper Granma, the filmmaker said "the car burnings are related to my film; it's awful." (*ANSA*, 21/9/06)

October 2: Marta Fernandez de Batista, the widow of former Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista, died at her home, her son said. She was 82. She died at her West Palm Beach home, Roberto Batista told the press. She had suffered a heart attack on September 8 and was hospitalized until last week, when she returned home under hospice care, her son said. Her husband was pushed out of power by Fidel Castro's rebels more than 47 years ago, leaving Havana in the middle of the night on January 1, 1959. The former dictator, then 58 years old, fled first to the Dominican Republic, then Portugal, and finally Spain, where he died in 1973. Fulgencio Batista had a home in Daytona Beach and donated an extensive art collection to the city. His wife had lived in Palm Beach County since the 1980s. (*AP*, 4/10/06)

October 7: More than 100 mourners bid farewell to Cuba's last first lady. Marta Fernandez Miranda de Batista was the second wife of ousted Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. She died after a heart attack in September left her homebound. She had also suffered from Alzheimer's. She was 83, according to one of her sons. Marta Batista's death is symbolic for the thousands of Cubans, who like her have never been able to return home. Married to the last president to hold office in Cuba before Fidel Castro rose to power, she was one of the first exiles to flee as a result of the Cuban revolution. A procession of cars followed the hearse a few miles to St.

Juliana's Catholic Church where a Mass was held in her honour. "Many years ago she put into practice her faith," said Father Jose Angel Crucet, one of three priests to conduct the Mass. "She established schools in the fields, and hospitals, and the Saint Barbara sanctuary." The Mass in her honour ended with a song that touched on the themes familiar to so many Cuban exiles. "On the sand, I left my raft," mourners sang. "With you Lord, I seek a new home." (*Sun Sentinel*, 8/10/06)

October 19: Cuban activist Rosa Berre, an advocate of independent journalism in Cuba, passed away in Miami after losing her battle against cancer. She was 64. The protracted disease did not prevent her from devoting all of her energy to the project she had launched in exile to promote the outflow of freedom of expression from the island: the Cubanet news agency, founded in 1994. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 20/10/06)

November 5: While Cuban officials insist that former owners will return to evict residents, a growing number of Cubans in South Florida believe residents should stay in their homes, surveys show. As new generations of Cubans move to Florida motivated more by economics than politics, they're less likely to support calls to dislodge residents still suffering economically under communism. Older émigrés who may have dreamed of recouping their former homes are dying off or have built new lives in Florida, said Fernand Amandi, executive vice president at Coral Gables-based researcher Bendixen & Associates. "You hear a lot of propaganda coming out of Cuba that people in South Florida are going to come back and take away their homes," Amandi said. According to a poll by Bendixen & Associates in South Florida, 67 % of the people who answered the question "should homes in Cuba be returned to former owners", said "no". While 47 % answered "not likely" to the question, would you return to Cuba to live under a democracy? (*Sun Sentinel*, 5/11/06)

November 8: Actor-director Andy Garcia said that he hoped for a revolution of democracy in Cuba as his movie about the communist-run island opened a film festival in the Dominican Republic. Garcia, who starred in his own directing debut, ``The Lost City," was joined by President Leonel Fernandez and Dominican slugger Sammy Sosa at the Dominican Global Film Festival, which is run by the president's think tank, the Global Foundation for Democracy and Development. Asked what he hoped would happen in his native Cuba over the next year, Garcia said, ``I could only have the hope we have all had for 47 years: that the promise of a revolution of democracy will come true. That's what the revolution was about until it was betrayed." (*AP*, 8/11/06)

November 8: In a typically south Florida end to a dispute between a Connecticut sculptor and Miami's often-tempestuous Cuban exiles, a giant head of ailing Fidel Castro was relegated to "the dustbin of history." The clay sculpture of Castro that artist Daniel Edwards originally intended to display in New York's Central Park was dumped in a garbage truck in a mock send-off of the Cuban leader in "Little Havana," the heartland of anti-Castro sentiment. "Fidel Castro is where he belongs," exile and activist Ninoska Perez told about 200 people gathered for the ceremonial trashing of the sculpture, an event promoted on a popular local Spanish-language radio station. "He's gone from the street to the dustbin of history," Perez said. (*Reuters*, 8/11/06)

November 27: José Antonio Llama spends much of his retirement stewing in his art-filled Miami home about one incomplete mission: the death of Fidel Castro. But the 75-year-old Cuban exile is haunted by another obsession: Recovering nearly \$1.5 million that he says his former allies owe him for his purchase of planes, boats, a helicopter and explosives. Llama, who once owned an air-conditioning business,

claims he put up all that money for a secret "war council" that consisted of members of a powerful exile lobbying group, the Cuban American National Foundation. He further alleges they reneged on their spoken promise to share the cost of paramilitary activities against the Cuban government and its communist leader. Llama filed a complaint with Miami police in the hope of sparking a criminal investigation. But police said that Llama should pursue a lawsuit if he wants to resolve his financial dispute. "As far as I know, all of Mr. Llamas, allegations are false," said Francisco "Pepe" Hernández, president of the Cuban American National Foundation. "Let him present his case in a court of law. That is his right." (*The Miami Herald*, 27/11/06)

December 10: Mario Llerena, a Cuban intellectual who was an early representative of Fidel Castro in the United States but who broke with him before he took power because of Mr. Castro's shift toward Communism, died in Miami. He was 93. Mr. Llerena met Mr. Castro in Mexico in the mid-1950s as Mr. Castro was preparing for an invasion of Cuba to overthrow the military dictator Fulgencio Batista. At Mr. Castro's request, Mr. Llerena put into writing the democratic ideals that underpinned the Castro movement in the early days of the uprising. The document, "Nuestra Razón" ("Our Reason"), was published in Mexico. After splitting with Mr. Castro, Mr. Llerena became an important figure among Cuban exiles. In 1978 he published "The Unsuspected Revolution: The Birth and Rise of Castroism," in which he accused Mr. Castro of deceiving many followers when he adopted Communism. He also published several collections of his journalistic essays about the revolution. (*The New York Times*, 12/12/06)

December 12: Former Cuban political prisoner Armando Valladares wrote his own book about life in Cuba as a counterpoint to two controversial children's books in school libraries. Children loading guns, hospitals full of cockroaches and elderly people who live mired in their own filth. This is the real Cuba, according to a new children's book written by Valladares. The prominent poet and author who spent 22 years as one of Fidel Castro's political prisoners was in Miami to introduce his new book, "Los Niños de Cuba". (*The Miami Herald*, 13/12/06)

December 25: Violeta Cano, a pianist and composer who struck a chord with Miami's Cuban exile community, died of organ failure at South Miami's Larkin Hospital. She was 84. "Most of her work was always by ear," said her daughter, Violet Moreno-Manrique. "She was very talented, a natural." Cano starred in a radio show on WFAB La Fabulosa, which was the only Spanish-language station in Miami during the 1960s. Her handprint is in Hialeah's Monument Park as part of a hall of fame formed to honor Cuban culture and artists of Cuban descent. Cano belonged to the Sociedad de Autores y Compositores Cubanos en el Exilio (SACCE), an association of exiled Cuban artists who got together and played for countless social and community events. (*The Miami Herald*, 26/12/06)

RELATIONS WITH THE US GOVERNMENT

(See US-Cuba Relations/ Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba)

January 8: For 15 refugees who completed the treacherous crossing from Cuba to the Florida Keys, the difference between freedom and being returned to their homeland may come down to having landed on the wrong bridge piling. The group remained aboard a US Coast Guard cutter awaiting word on whether they will be admitted to the United States under the government's increasingly controversial "wet foot/dry foot" policy. By a curious twist of fate, the 15 migrants reached the bridge -- which is part of the United States -- but the section of the bridge they touched is no longer connected to land. As a result, US authorities have for now concluded that the migrants may not be covered by the policy's dry-foot component. "We are asking the government not to [repatriate the migrants] because the bridge is a part of the United States," said Ramón Saúl Sánchez, leader of the Democracy Movement, an organization which advocates the interests of Cuban migrants. "If the bridge is not part of the United States, then the Statue of Liberty isn't, either." The migrants, which included four women and two children, left Matanzas Province in Cuba late on January 2 or early next day aboard a homemade raft, said Miguel Angel Guerrero of Hialeah. His cousin, Elizabeth Hernández, 23, her husband and 2 ½-year-old son Michael are among the migrants, Guerrero said. Local advocates are fighting for the group on a number of fronts. Sánchez has started a one-man hunger strike, directed not at the Coast Guard, but at policymakers in Washington in a bid to persuade them to reconsider the "wet foot/dry foot" policy. The hunger strike "will not end until they are released or I am dead," Sánchez said. Under the policy, Cubans who reach US soil generally get to stay, while those intercepted at sea are generally repatriated. (*The Miami Herald*, 8/1/06)

January 9: Cuban-American community activists and politicians lambasted the US government's decision to repatriate 15 Cubans picked up from the base of an abandoned bridge in the Florida Keys. An attorney for the families of the migrants said he planned to file a suit asking a federal judge to allow the group to return. The migrants were sent back to Cuba after US officials concluded that the section of the partially collapsed bridge where they landed did not count as dry land under the government's policy because it was no longer connected to any of the Keys. US Senator Mel Martinez, Republican-Florida, called the government's decision an example of "the complete and utter failure" of the wet-foot, dry-foot policy. "Because they reached an old bridge and not a new bridge, is there a judgment they didn't reach American soil? The semantics used to return these men and women -- who have risked so much to reach freedom and are now returned to an uncertain future -- are an embarrassment," Martinez said in a statement. US Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Republican-Miami, called the decision absurd. "If any crime would have been committed on that bridge, the perpetrators would have been arrested and charged with violating US laws," she said in a statement. (*The New York Times*, 10/1/06)

January 10: When 15 Cubans fleeing their homeland landed on an abandoned bridge in the Florida Keys, they inadvertently found themselves in an uncomfortable legal spotlight. The plight of the immigrants has reopened the bitter debate over the government's immigration policy and angered South Florida's heavily Republican Cuban exile community. "This will have an effect of reducing the numbers of Cuban-American voters that would blindly follow a Republican candidate," Cuban American National Foundation President Pepe Hernandez said. Cuban-American activists said they hoped the latest incident will spark a review of the wet-foot, dry-foot rule, which was established in 1995 as a way to stem a massive wave of Haitians and Cuban immigrants, while still offering a safe harbor for Cubans who reached US shores. Ramon Saul Sanchez, head of the Democracy Movement, a Cuban-American

group, said he began a hunger strike that would not end until George Bush agreed to hear Cuban exiles' views on the wet foot/dry foot policy. US Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart said he is launching a lobbying campaign to convince the Bush administration to change the "wet-foot, dry-foot" rule that is the cornerstone of US-Cuba immigration policy. (*AP, The Miami Herald, The Guardian, 11/1/06*)

January 10: Attorneys for the relatives of Cubans who were repatriated after they reached an abandoned bridge in the Florida Keys filed suit against federal officials. They are asking a judge to clarify what constitutes US soil and to force the Department of Homeland Security to allow the 15 Cubans into the United States. "It's clearly against their own rules," said attorney Wilfredo Allen. "By their own definition, piers, bridges and rocks are US soil. They were wrong and we hope to prove that in court." The federal suit filed in Miami, which names the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies as plaintiffs, was brought by family members of the repatriated Cubans and the Cuban exile group Democracy Movement. (*Sun Sentinel, 11/1/06*)

January 11: Two of the Bush administration's top Cuba policy makers went to Coral Gables for a friendly lunch with South Florida's top exile community leaders -- and wound up on the receiving end of an outpouring of frustration. The visit by the US State Department's Stephen McFarland, director of the Office of Cuban Affairs, and Cuba Transition Coordinator Caleb McCarry came amid an uproar over the repatriation of 15 Cuban migrants this week. The pair used the luncheon organized by Florida International University to promote Bush administration policy -- a tough line against Cuba until the day there are democratic elections there. But exile participants, among them moderates as well as traditional hardliners, used the opportunity for primarily one purpose: to vent. "The Cubans have a dictator, and we have to get rid of him," said Luis De Varona, a board member of the Cuban American National Foundation. "When are you going to wake up to the reality? (...) We need to get rid of Castro. That is the root of all our problems." (*The Miami Herald, 12/1/06*)

January 16: Ramon Saul Sanchez, head of the Democracy Movement, a Cuban-American group, said he would not end his hunger strike until George Bush agreed to hear Cuban exiles' views on the wet foot/dry foot policy. In a statement to the press, Sánchez prohibited that "any person, entity or government institution including the paramedics" remove him from the Monument of the Martyrs of the 2506 Brigade, in Miami, or force him to end the strike. "I humbly ask that my will be respected in this prohibition and determination", the statement reads. "This prohibition will be instantly lifted in the event in which the President of the United States, or whom he designates, proves in writing or gives public Testimony that the United States government is willing to meet with the Commission that represents the Cuban Community". Sanchez has been on hunger strike for over five days. The protest has prompted behind-the-scenes talks between Cuban exile leaders and Governor Jeb Bush's office aimed at finding a way to persuade Sanchez to end his hunger strike. A deal could be announced soon (*NetforCuba, The Miami Herald, 16/1/06*)

January 17: White House spokesman Blair Jones told the press that the Bush administration has agreed to meet with exile leaders to discuss the "wet-foot, dry-foot" policy -- the most controversial aspect of US immigration policy toward Cuba. "The administration has reached out to representatives of the Cuban-American community to express our interest in hearing and understanding their concerns about US migration policy toward Cuba," Jones said. "We have agreed to meet with

appropriate representatives of the community, and we are discussing the date for such a meeting and are committed to holding it as soon as possible." Told of the White House declaration, hunger striker Ramón Saúl Sánchez said he would start eating if the promise becomes official. "I think it's a great step and I am very happy to hear that, and as soon as I see that formalized by their side in a statement or in writing, I will stop the hunger strike," he said. (*The Miami Herald*, 17/1/06)

January 18: Cuban exile activist Ramón Saúl Sánchez gave up his 12-day hunger strike -- a day after the White House promised talks with exile leaders long upset by the US "wet-foot, dry-foot" policy. Sánchez said that the White House statement given to *The Miami Herald* -- coupled with a call from a lawyer involved in the case of 15 repatriated migrants -- was enough to compel him to end the strike. The lawyer, William "Willy" Sánchez, told him the White House would make good on its promise, and said his own sources had confirmed the planning of a meeting. "I feel very happy. I feel that a principle right of citizens to ask the government to be heard has been granted, and the first victory is the government's for having listened to us," Ramón Saúl Sánchez said. A date has not yet been set for the meeting, however. (*The Miami Herald*, 19/1/06)

February 25: The White House and Cuban-American leaders are finalizing the date for a meeting in March to discuss the Cuban migration accords and the controversial wet-foot, dry-foot policy. US Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen said the tentative date for the meeting is March 8. White House spokesman Blair Jones did not confirm a date, but said, "We are committed to holding a meeting as soon as possible." The White House agreed to meet with Cuban-American leaders to discuss US-Cuba migration policy after a well-known Cuban exile activist went on a hunger strike to protest the repatriation of 15 Cuban migrants who had been found by the Coast Guard standing on the pilings of the old Seven Mile Bridge in the Florida Keys. Cuban-American leaders hoped that the Republican Bush administration would revoke, or at least change, the policy to allow the migrants access to lawyers and contact with family members on humanitarian grounds. (*The Miami Herald*, 25/2/06)

March 8: In a day that underscored tension between some Cuban exiles in Miami and the Bush administration, Cuban-American leaders met with federal officials in Washington to ask for a new US-Cuba migration policy, while others called the meeting partisan. The Cuban-American group wants the administration to change the controversial wet-foot, dry-foot policy in which Cubans caught at sea are generally returned to the island while those who reach US soil are allowed to stay. At the White House meeting, Republican US Representatives Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Lincoln and Mario Diaz-Balart and several spiritual leaders from Miami's Cuban exile community asked federal officials from the departments of State and Homeland Security to make the policy more humanitarian for Cubans. "The meeting was designed to allow for a serious dialogue, and does not signal any change in policy as it relates to Cuba or any other country's migrants," said White House spokeswoman Maria Tamburri. The meeting came almost two months after the Coast Guard repatriated 15 Cubans found on the old Seven Mile bridge in the Florida Keys -- a move that set off controversy and a 12-day hunger strike by the Democracy Movement's Ramon Saul Sanchez. (*The Miami Herald*, 9/3/06)

March 27: Jorge Mas, chairman of the Miami-based Cuban American National Foundation, sent US President George Bush a letter asking if the administration had changed its position on the Helms-Burton law. The letter criticized US Representative Lincoln Díaz-Balart's statements, saying CANF members "do not consider it beneficial

to alter or suggest altering Helms-Burton now or at any time in the future." It added that the Castro brothers should leave Cuba if they are serious about a transition to democracy. Díaz-Balart issued a statement saying that his views on Helms-Burton had been misrepresented, restating his key conditions and saying that CANF could have saved itself the time by telephoning him for his comments. Díaz-Balart had told *The Miami Herald* in a recent interview that while he supports the law, he would favor lifting some of the sanctions if Havana freed all political prisoners, legalized opposition parties and promised free elections -- regardless of who rules Cuba. (*The Miami Herald*, 28/3/06)

April 10: A fishing boat filled with 43 Haitians, a Jamaican and a Cuban landed at Broward's Hillsboro Beach. The Haitians and Jamaican are likely to be sent home; the Cuban is likely to stay. The stark differences in US immigration policy came into the spotlight again as more than two dozen Haitian leaders and their allies revived protests about what they say is an unfair and even racist policy. "In the case of Haitians, it's very unfortunate that things suggest that they are being discriminated against because of the color of their skin," said Ramón Saúl Sánchez, a Cuban refugee activist. Others were more blunt about the TPS program, calling it "racist." (*The Miami Herald*, 11/4/06)

April 26: Prominent Cuban-American scholars and artists, calling US policy toward Cuba a "political and moral failure," are pressing the Bush administration to open travel to the island. The group, named Emergency Network of Cuban American Scholars and Artists for Change in US-Cuba Policy, or ENCASA, is launching a publicity campaign against the US trade embargo and Cuba travel ban. Current US policy bars American tourists from traveling to Cuba but allows Cuban exiles to visit direct family -- but not aunts, uncles or cousins -- once every three years. ENCASA's bold attack on US Cuba policy comes just weeks before the administration's Cuba commission will recommend to President Bush ways to help speed up a democratic transition in Cuba. It also comes at a time when some scholars and activists have expressed concerns that an escalating atmosphere of intolerance in Miami is curtailing discourse over Cuba. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 26/4/06)

May 12: Cuban exile groups and energy experts deemed as impossible and politically-motivated bills submitted to the US Congress that would allow American companies to negotiate a partnership with Cuba for joint oil exploration of its coasts. Alfredo Mesa, Executive Director of the Cuban-American National Foundation, denounced the bills, claiming that "their only interest in Cuba is economic." "They are not concerned about the abuse of human rights in Cuba," he explained. The initiatives were sponsored by the Republican legislators Jeff Flake and Larry Craig. (*AP*, 15/5/06)

June 17: Nearly 100 protesters gathered in Miami to oppose a ban on traveling to Cuba, the *Miami Herald* reported. The protesters marched outside the office of US Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (Republican-Florida), carrying signs with slogans like "Breaking Up the Family is Compassionate Conservatism?" Ros-Lehtinen supported the travel ban, which was imposed in 2004. It allows only those with immediate family to visit the island once every three years for a maximum of two weeks. Maria de la Torre, 73, has many family members in Cuba -- numerous orphans she raised, and their children -- who she has not been able to see in years. "These are like my own children and grandchildren," said de la Torre. "I love and miss them. But I can't go visit them." (*Washington Times*, 18/6/06)

July 8: The Association of Christian Women in Defense of the Cuban Family held its fourth demonstration against the Bush administration's tightening of travel restrictions to Cuba. Shouting out " Queremos viajar, vamos a viajar !" a group of more than 50 protesters joined together in a demonstration in front of Hialeah's City Hall. The Association of Christian Women in Defense of the Cuban Family is a group of Cuban women, their husbands and other sympathizers who are against the tightened restrictions placed by the Bush administration on travel and remittances to the island. "These are arbitrary laws that separate families, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews; they have no respect for family," a demonstrator said. (*The Miami Herald*, 13/7/06)

August 3: Exile leaders in Miami were calling on the US President to support Cubans living in the US, by easing travel restrictions to Cuba. Ramon Saul Sanchez, leader of the Democracia movement, urged the US to allow Cuban-Americans to travel freely to help Cuba re-define its future. "No one on earth should have the power to tell a citizen of a country that he or she cannot return to his or her homeland," Sanchez said. Sanchez, backed by other exile leaders, spoke at the Versailles restaurant. His concern was echoed by patrons of the restaurant, who believe they should be a part of any New Cuba. "If we had a solution in Cuba where the Castro brothers were out of the picture," Esteban Bobo told CBS4's Art Barron, "those restrictions would have to be eased, because we are a country of law; this is not a kingdom." (*CBS4News*, 3/8/06)

August 5: Some Cuban exiles, seizing on the unprecedented transfer of power in Cuba, called for the US government to do more to encourage a democratic transition on the island. William Sanchez, an attorney for the Cuban-American non-profit Democracy Movement, urged Bush to tell Cuba to set an elections timetable and let Cuban-Americans come to the island to help with a political transition. The Cuban government used such statements by what it calls the "terrorist mafia" in Miami, as well as Bush's call for democratic change on the island, to justify its fears of an invasion. (*Canadian Press*, 5/8/06)

August 6: Fidel Castro's exit from the world stage has the potential to shake up decades of Republican dominance among Cuban-American voters. South Florida's large Cuban-American population has long been one of the party's most loyal constituencies. At least eight in 10 of Florida's nearly half-million Cuban-American voters backed President Bush in 2000, when he won the state by just 537 votes, although a survey after the 2004 election showed a slip. Republican Senator Mel Martinez, a Cuban American, acknowledged that a Castroless Cuba could pose new complications for the GOP. "I think there'll be change and I think there'll be challenges," Martinez said. He added, though, that any changes would be years away, when a democracy is restored in Cuba. "It'll be a lot more complicated to make the case. It won't be just a simple one issue where the Democrats have abdicated the field, really, on foreign policy. I think there'll be more of a challenge because the issues will be more varied." "Republicans have had a lot of bark and no bite, but the bark has been enough," said Joe Garcia, a former executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation and director of the New Democrat Network's Hispanic Strategy Center. "Once Castro is gone, you can bark all you want, but Castro's not there. You've got to develop a more realistic agenda that's in tune with the Cuban-American reality." "Cuban Americans will still be analyzing the positions taken by the parties and candidates after a post-Castro Cuba," said Representative David Rivera (Republican-Miami), a former Republican Party of

Florida strategist who two years ago publicly warned the White House to crack down on Castro or suffer an erosion of support at the polls. (*The New Herald*, 6/8/06)

December 22: A small but growing number of Cubans in South Florida are getting around the US embargo that limits what can be sent to the communist island by sending their Christmas gifts through foreign Internet sites. At least one Canadian Web site, <http://www.Cubamaxstore.com>, allows people to ship items such as beef, jams and even deodorant to relatives in Cuba. While the gifts aren't the i-Pods and Sony Play Stations that Americans crave, they are much appreciated by Cubans who earn an average of \$10 to \$15 a month and often struggle to put enough food on the table. The trend exemplifies the creative ways Cuban families are seeking to stay connected, despite the restrictions on travel and exports imposed by the governments on both sides of the Florida Straits, said Cuban-American activist Ramon Saul Sanchez. "Fortunately, people try to keep in touch with their families. Unfortunately, they have to go through all these measures," he said. Antonio Conte, who left Cuba in the early 1990s and edits an online magazine of articles written by Cuban dissidents, said it was easier than going through one of the few authorized parcel services and safer than returning to the island. "It's better to send food there instead of money. It's not so expensive, and you can help a bit." Conte said. "In Cuba you have your ration card, and you get chicken only once in a while. Only the children and the sick get beef." (*Globe & Mail*, 23/12/06)