

Chronicle on Cuba
SUMMARY OF NEWS ITEMS REPORTED ON CUBA
January-December, 2003

This web resource highlights the most significant news items on Cuba listed in FOCAL's monthly Chronicle on Cuba throughout 2003, and groups these according to a wide range of key topics. Web links to important documents and statements are also included.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

AFRICA

Angola

Bilateral cooperation between Angola and the Socialist Republic of Cuba will be under analysis in Luanda, Cuban deputy Defence Minister, Julio Casas Ragueiro, said in the Angolan capital. The Cuban deputy minister said so on his arrival at the capital city, where he was received by Education minister Burity da Silva, chairman of the Angola-Cuba Joint Commission. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Angolan Education Minister Buruti da Silva stated in Havana his country's interest to re-establish cooperation with Cuba and highlighted the education and the development of professionals as one of the main areas. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Angola and Cuba signed a statement of intent defining the areas of future cooperation between interior ministries of both countries. According to Angolan Interior Minister Osvaldo Serra Van Dunem, training trainers is one of the areas that will receive special attention. This government official was talking at the end of his working three-day visit to this Latin American nation. "We would like to take advantage of Cuba's scientific potential and know-how to train our trainers," he pointed out. (July, Foreign Affairs)

In Luanda, Angola and Cuba signed cooperation agreements on agriculture, trade, science and technology, Cuban Minister of High Education told the press. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Botswana

Cuban ambassador in Botswana Ana Vilma Vallejera announced that another contingent of Cuban doctors and other health specialists will soon be sent to Botswana to help in the struggle against AIDS. Valejera highlighted that most of this specialized staff will go to the City of Francistown. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Cape Verde

Basilio Mosso Ramos, State and Health Ministry from the Cabo Verde Republic, praised Cuban collaboration in the training of youngsters from that African country in medicine. "Trabajadores Weekly Edition" reported that Mosso Ramos considers the graduation of 43 students from Cabo Verde who studied medicine in Cuban universities of great significance. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Cape Verde Foreign Affairs Minister Dr. Maria de Fatima Lima da Veiga considers the cooperation with Cuba is very positive and that such collaboration has had an important impact on education, public health and agriculture. At the opening of the 13th Inter-Governmental Joint Commission between the two

countries, the official predicted more promising results in sports, environment, tourism and assistance to youth. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Equatorial Guinea

Equatorial Guinea's Minister of Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Pastor Micha Ondó Bile, arrived in Cuba at the head of a delegation that will attend the 5th Session of the Joint Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technological Collaboration. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Eritrea

Government officials from Eritrea have arrived in Havana seeking further bilateral cooperation, particularly in the health sector. The Second Eritrea-Cuba Mixed Commission for Economic and Scientific Cooperation began gathering in the Cuban capital, with the Eritrean delegation headed by that country's foreign minister, Ali Said Abdella. The delegation, which also includes Eritrean Health Minister Saleh Meki, will also hold talks with Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, Education Minister Rolando Ortega and Foreign Trade Minister Luis Padrón. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Ethiopia

Ethiopian Foreign Affairs Minister, Seyoum Mesfin, concluded a four-day stay in Cuba. Mesfin met with Cuban officials to evaluate and strengthen bilateral relations. The two countries will enhance bilateral projects in industry, construction, trade, education, investment, health, agriculture and engineering sectors. (January, Foreign Relations)

Gambia

Foreign ministers of Gambia, Baboucara Blaise Ismaila, and of Cuba, Felipe Pérez Roque, signed cooperation agreements to increase bilateral exchanges. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Ghana

Dr. Kweku Afriyie, Ghana's Minister of Health, appealed to the Cuban government to use Ghana as a centre for researching and manufacturing of vaccines for the treatment of tropical diseases. "Because disease pattern differs from country to country and sometimes getting a particular type of vaccine demands the combination of different types of vaccines, the big manufacturing companies in Europe are no more interested in researching into this area," he noted. Dr. Afriyie said since Cuba was very strong in the manufacture of vaccines, "we will, therefore, ask for your assistance in this area by making our country the centre for the research for the benefit of the Sub Region". (February, Foreign Affairs)

The Cuban Medical Brigade (CMB) in Ghana, comprising 189 health professionals spread throughout the country, held its fourth national scientific workshop in Accra. It was part of efforts, to strengthen the relationship between them and their Ghanaian counterparts. The Cubans offer various services in areas such as surgery, gynaecology, pediatrics and cardiology. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Guinea

President Lansana Conte of Guinea has returned from a 10-day private visit to Cuba, during which he was widely believed to have received medical treatment. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Kenya

The Cuban Ambassador to Kenya, Mr. Pedro Luis, says his country is committed to building and strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries. Speaking when he paid a courtesy call on the Taita Taveta district commissioner Mr. Chege Mwangi, the ambassador said the two countries shared many things in common citing Kenya's freedom fighters who he lauded for inspiring Cubans' struggle for their independence. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Lesotho

Bethuel Pakalitha Mosilini, first minister of the Lesotho kingdom is on an official visit to Cuba, invited by Fidel Castro. Granma Daily News reports the distinguished visitor and the delegation he presides is to take ahead a wide agenda that foresees official talks with the highest Cuban authorities and visits to historical, economic and scientific places. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Mali

Fidel Castro held conversations with President from Mali Amadou Toumani Touré. Both leaders and their corresponding delegations met at the Revolution Palace. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Niger

Aichatou Mindaoudou, Niger Foreign Affairs Minister, met with his Cuban counterpart during a visit to the island. Mindaoudou will also meet with officials from the Cuban ministries of Public Health and Foreign Trade. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Nigeria

Arrangements are in top gear to have the Nigerian contingent for the 8th All Africa Games to embark on a training tour of Cuba. The training tour, which has been designed to expose the athletes to modern facilities and the technical assistance of Cuban experts in various sports, is to involve coaches and athletes in all sports that Nigeria will compete for medals at the games. (January, Foreign Relations)

Pedro Sáez Montejo, member of the State Council and of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, traveled to Nigeria, to attend the swearing in ceremony of the elected president of that African country, his Excellency, Olusegun Obasanjo. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Seychelles

Cooperation in health between Cuba and Seychelles has received a major boost following the announcement that the number of doctors from the Caribbean island working in Seychelles will be increased. This came out at the end of the 9th session of the Seychelles-Cuba Joint Commission held in Havana. The Minister for Health, Mr Patrick Pillay, led the Seychelles delegation to the talks. For its part, the Cuban delegation was headed by Marta Lomas Morales, Minister for Foreign Investment and Cooperation. (October, Foreign Affairs)

South Africa

South African Foreign Minister Nkosazana C. Dlamini-Zuma concluded her visit to Cuba, after being decorated with the Friendship Medal and meeting top officials. Dlamini-Zuma met with her Cuban counterpart, Felipe Pérez Roque. Both ministers expressed their willingness to strengthen historic ties between the two peoples. (January, Foreign Relations)

Cuban doctors have lodged complaints of gross human rights violations with the Human Rights Commission in regard to the government-to-government agreement between Cuba and South Africa. One of the alleged human rights violations includes the dismissal of seven Limpopo doctors, which was to be opposed in the Johannesburg labour court as a result of an application to the department of health to honour their contracts. (February, Foreign Affairs)

A Cuban doctor faces dismissal from his job at a South African hospital because he resigned from his country's communist party. Dr Mario Menchero, an orthopaedic surgeon at Grey's Hospital in Pietermaritzburg, was told at a meeting of Cuban doctors that he would be dismissed because he had given up his membership of the Cuban Communist Party. Menchero has been in South Africa since 1998 as part of an employment agreement between the South African Health Department and the Cuban government to relieve the shortage of doctors at state hospitals. (February, Foreign Affairs)

A Cuban doctor working in South Africa alleges he was evicted, thrown into prison and unfairly dismissed last year by the Eastern Cape Health Department because he converted to Islam. Paediatrician Dr Juan Elutil Yings came to South Africa five years ago under the government-to-government agreement between Cuba and South Africa. Yings, who worked at the Tayler Bequest Hospital in Mount Frere until his dismissal, said his trouble started when he converted to Islam two years ago. "I was visited by the Cuban co-ordinator, who saw a picture of Mecca, the holy place for Muslims, and Arabic scripture in my house. He commented negatively on my new religious status." Soon after this visit he received a letter, dated May 22, from the Eastern Cape Health Department, which gave him nine days to assume duties at the remote Tafalofefe Hospital, 50km from Butterworth. Yings allegedly objected to the decision. A letter from the Mount Fletcher District Office vouching for the doctor's good conduct and expressing the community's anger at losing Yings, was apparently ignored. He was told to move or be deported. In August, home affairs officials arrested him "in front of my two-year-old daughter and my wife", and put him in an Umtata prison. His work permit, which was still valid at the time was allegedly cancelled and he was charged with contravening the Aliens Control Act. During his period in prison, his wife and daughter were evicted from their home on the hospital premises. Numerous requests to Health Minister Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang and the Eastern Cape Cuban representative have proved futile. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Four Cuban tutors have arrived in the Eastern Cape as part of a capacity building programme to assist teachers in mathematics, science and technology teaching, according to the South Africa government news agency, BuaNews. The provincial education department spokesman Professor Danie Breytenbach told the agency that they formed part of a contingent of 24 Cuban tutors who are to be deployed in seven provinces. The exchange programme forms part of an agreement between South Africa and Cuba to upgrade the technical skills of local teachers. (May, Foreign Affairs)

South African Foreign Affairs Deputy Minister Aziz Pahad and Fernando Remírez de Estenoz, Cuba's first deputy foreign affairs minister, jointly chaired the second consultative meeting between the two countries in Havana, the South African government said. The forum was established after South Africa and Cuba signed a declaration of intent in March 2000, with the aim of discussing bilateral, multilateral, and regional issues of a political nature. Mamoepa said the meeting enabled South Africa and Cuba to improve co-operation. (June, Foreign Affairs)

A controversy has erupted over a decision by South African health authorities to employ 50 Cuban engineers and technicians to service medical equipment in South Africa. "The Freedom Front (FF) rejects the government's justification given for the recruitment of Cuban engineers to work in South Africa," FF

spokesperson on labour issues Pieter Groenewald said. "This recruitment takes place while many South African engineers cannot find work because of affirmative action and have to find work overseas." (June, Foreign Affairs)

Ministers of Work from Cuba and South Africa, Alfredo Morales and Membathisi M. S. Madladlana are going through working sessions to evaluate common fields of interests. Madladlana is on a brief visit to Havana. (July, Foreign Affairs)

The future of seven Cuban doctors who want to withdraw from the bilateral Cuba/South Africa agreement has yet to be decided by the medical profession's watchdog organization after it failed to take a decision early this month. The doctors accuse Limpopo's health authorities and Cuban embassy officials of wanting to disqualify them from working in the country after they gained permanent residence or married local women. They want to opt out of the agreement and freely practice medicine in South Africa. The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) considered the matter but did not reach a decision, said HPCSA spokesperson Phephela Makgoke. (August, Foreign Affairs)

The South African Property Owners' Association (SAPOA) has added its voice to the growing discontent over the housing department decision to bring 38 Cuban architects and engineers to SA to train local people to build their own homes in townships and rural areas. Brian Kirchmann, CEO of Sapo and manager at the Property Council of SA, has questioned why professionals were being brought to SA when the country already had enough professionals prepared to do the work. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban doctors in South Africa who opted out of government-to-government contracts are baffled by the apparent lack of teeth of court rulings. The Cuban Embassy in Pretoria has now been told the work permits of those doctors who opted out have become "null and void". Yet, provincial health employers and local regulatory authorities that tried to sack these doctors have suffered defeats in the labour court. In court victories in Pietermaritzburg, Cape Town and Johannesburg courts, the doctors' employers were ordered to inform the registrar of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) that the doctors remain employed at their hospitals, as there is a need for their services. (October, Foreign Affairs)

South Africa and Cuba hailed what was described as the fruits of their friendship, vowing to cement their cooperation in a host of areas. "I think we are reaching a stage where we can say our relations have a firm base," said South African Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma in Pretoria. "We need, in the coming years, to build on that foundation." The minister was speaking at the conclusion of the third session of the South African-Cuban joint bilateral commission. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Sudan

The first Joint Commission Cuba-Sudan was concluded with the signing of five bilateral agreements between the two countries. Yousif Suleiman Takana, the Sudanese Minister for International Cooperation, said the meeting was the beginning of a new era in relations between the two countries. During his visit to the island the Sudanese diplomat held talks with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque and the Deputy Ministers of Public Health, Education, Agriculture, the Sugar Industry, Trade and Sports. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Tanzania

Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez held talks with his visiting Tanzanian counterpart, Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, in Havana, in a bid to seek ways of strengthening relations. Perez highlighted the ties linking both countries and thanked the Tanzanian government for its solidarity position in international for a. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Uganda

Tom Butime, Ugandan Minister of State for Foreign Relations, arrived in Cuba leading the delegation that will participate in the 7th session of the Joint Commission between both nations. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Zambia

Eighty-seven Cuban doctors are expected to arrive in Zambia this year, disclosed Cuban embassy charge d'affaires Carmelina Rodriguez. Rodriguez said the long awaited doctors would finally be in the country as the Cuban and Zambian governments had now finalised everything. She said the Zambian government had committed itself to meeting the conditions required for the Cuban doctors to work in Zambia. "The Zambian government also agreed to pay for the air tickets for them to come," Rodriguez said. (January, Foreign Relations)

Zimbabwe

Seventy four Cuban doctors and medical specialists arrived in Zimbabwe on a two-year program which will see them deployed in provincial and district hospitals. The medical professionals, who included 50 general practitioners and specialists in urology, dentistry, gynecology and pediatrics are expected to ease the critical shortages of doctors and specialists in the country. (February, Foreign Affairs)

ARAB COUNTRIES

Algeria

President Abdelaziz Buteflika, expressed Algeria's solidarity with Cuba "no matter what" in a message addressed to Fidel Castro on the occasion of Cuba's independence day. (January, Foreign Relations)

A Cuban plane carrying medicine, medical staff and equipment arrived in the Algerian capital to aid in the disaster sparked by the earthquake that struck the North African nation. The aid was the first to arrive from a Latin American nation, and includes a large medical team, most notably trauma specialists. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Algerian Foreign Minister Mohamed Cherif Abbas has arrived in the Cuban capital to begin an official visit to the island. The African official was met at Havana's José Martí International Airport by retired General Rafael Moracén Limonta and other high-ranking Cuban representatives. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Iran

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Euro-American Affairs Ali Ahani arrived in Havana for a three-day official visit at the invitation of the Cuban deputy foreign minister for the Middle East and Africa affairs. Ahani is to confer with Cuban officials on expansion of mutual cooperation during his visit to the country. Prior to Ahani's visit to Cuba, Iran's Ambassador to Havana Ahmad Edrisiyan conferred with the Cuban Education Minister on expansion of educational cooperation between the two countries. (January, Foreign Relations)

Iran's President Mohamad Khatami held separate talks with some world leaders including Fidel Castro during the Non Aligned Summit in Kuala Lumpur. In the meeting with his Cuban counterpart, President Khatami said the purpose of US anticipated war on Iraq is to secure its access to the energy resources of the region. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Deputy foreign ministers of Iran and Cuba discussed the ways of improving the bilateral ties as well as the latest developments on the international stage. According to the Press and Information Department of the Foreign Ministry, the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for the Euro-American Affairs Ali Ahani voiced Iran's readiness to improve bilateral cooperation with Cuba on regional and international issues, including the Iraqi crisis. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Ambassador to Iran Jose Ramon Rodriguez in a meeting with Secretary General of Iran's Anti-Narcotics Headquarters (IANH) Ali Hashemi called for sharing Iran's experience in combating drug trafficking and drug abuse by the youth. Iran has shouldered many in this field and has valuable experience, Rodriguez said adding: "Cuba is interested to stem the increasing trend of drug abuse among its youth." (May, Foreign Affairs)

Iran and Cuba signed a memorandum of understanding on expansion of bilateral athletic cooperation. Iranian ambassador to Havana, Ahmad Edrisian, and head of Cuban Sports Organization, Humberto Rodriguez Gonzalez, reached the agreement. (July, Foreign Affairs)

The ninth Iran-Cuba joint economic commission meeting will be held in Teheran, Ministry of Agriculture Jihad announced. According to the Public Relations Department of the ministry, Iran's Minister of Agriculture Jihad Mahmoud Hojjati and his Cuban counterpart will take part in the three-day meeting. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Minister Ricardo Cabrisas conferred with Iranian Majlis Speaker Mehdi Karroubi on matters of mutual interest. A report released by Majlis public relations department said that in the meeting, Karroubi, referred to the revolutionary background of both countries, their culture of seeking for independence and peace, and called on the two countries to use their full potentials to bolster bilateral relations. Turning to international developments and regional crises, he noted that closer ties between independent countries will contribute to safeguarding peace and global stability. Karroubi underlined Iran's readiness to boost cooperation with Cuba within international fora such as the UN and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Lebanon

Public Works and Transport Minister Najib Mikati received Cuban Ambassador Enrique Román Hernández for talks on a draft agreement between the two countries on marine transport. A statement issued by the minister's office said that Lebanon and Cuba had much in common. "Lebanon is the Middle East's sea gate, while Cuba is the sea gate for Central and South America," Hernández said. (February, Foreign Affairs)

The second session of the Cuban-Lebanese Joint Commission for Economic, Commercial and Technological Collaboration ended in Beirut with the signature of bilateral agreements, among them those related to cooperation to combat the illegal traffic of drugs and psychotropic substances. The session, which was presided over by Ramon Ripoll, vice-minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration (Minvec), and Basil Fulayhan, Lebanese economy minister, marked the end of several days of interviews between the Cuban delegation and state and Lebanese private bodies and institutions. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Libya

Fidel Castro has awarded the medal of friendship to Colonel of Staff Dr al Mutasim Bilah Muammar al Qathafi, the son of Muammar al Qathafi, the Libyan Leader. The decoration ceremony was attended by Raúl Castro, General Commander of the Armed Forces and Defense Minister, as well as high officers of the Cuban armed forces. (January, Foreign Relations)

Saudi Arabia

Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, travelled to Saudi Arabia in response to an official invitation extended by his Saudi counterpart, Prince Saud Al-Faisal. Subsequently, the Cuban delegation will proceed toward Manama, capital of the Kingdom of Bahrain. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Syria

Syrian Minister of Housing and Building, Mr. Hussam Al- assuad, and Cuban Ambassador to Syria Mr. Claudio Ramos Borrego, have signed a cooperation agreement in the field of works of housing and building. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Syrian Health Minister, Dr. Mohammad Iyad Al-Shatti and Cuba's Ambassador to Damascus, Claudio Ramos signed in Damascus the Executive program of the cooperation agreement between Syria and Cuba in field of health. Both sides acknowledged the deep-rooted relations between Syria and Cuba in all fields. (July, Foreign Affairs)

ASIA

Armenia

Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs Felipe Pérez Roque began an official visit to Erevan, where he will analyze bilateral affairs with his Armenian counterpart, Vardan Oskanian. They expect to sign an economic-trade cooperation agreement after official talks between both foreign ministers, diplomatic sources told the press. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Armenian and Cuban Foreign Ministers Vardan Oskanyan and Felipe Perez Roque signed in Yerevan an intergovernmental agreement on trade-economic cooperation between Armenia and Cuba. (March, Foreign Affairs)

The Armenian Parliament ratified the Armenian-Cuban Agreement on Cooperation in the Sphere of Health Care and Medicine. According to Armenia's Health Care Minister Norayr Davidyan, the agreement provides both sides with a legal basis for effective cooperation. It envisages mutual visits by expert delegations, exchange of statistical information, the establishment of a bilateral coordinating commission, medical care for Armenians in Cuba and vice versa and for both Armenians and Cubans during their stays in third countries. (December Foreign Affairs)

China

Cuba and China signed in Havana an agreement on economic and technical cooperation, under which China provides a 6-million-US dollar grant to help with Cuba's education. Chinese Foreign Trade Minister Shi Guangsheng and Cuban State Minister Ricardo Cabrisas signed the agreement at the end of a joint economic and commercial session between the two countries. Chinese and Cuban firms also signed contracts on China's purchase of Cuban nickel and sugar, and a letter of intention on Chinese investment in Cuba. (January, Foreign Relations)

Fidel Castro has met with Xu Guangchun, Chinese president of the Department of Film, Radio and Television. During talks with the Chinese official and his accompanying delegation, the Cuban leader pointed to the fundamental role of the mass media in the "Battle of Ideas", an ideological campaign launched by the Cuban Government. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Chinese President Jiang Zemin started talks with Fidel Castro, exchanging views on bilateral relations and international and regional issues of common concern. Before the talks, Jiang presided over a welcoming ceremony at the Great Hall of the People for Castro, and they held close-door talks after the ceremony. Castro, who paid a state visit to China in 1995 at Jiang's invitation, arrived in Beijing on a four-day state visit to China. President Jiang said China is willing to make further efforts to develop friendly relations with the Cuban people. President Jiang made the remark during his talks with Fidel Castro. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Visiting a China transformed by capitalist-style economic development, Fidel Castro said he hardly recognized the country that is one of his ailing nation's few remaining communist allies. Castro said China's advances left him amazed. "I can't really be sure just now what kind of China I am visiting, because the first time I visited, your country appeared one way and now when I visit it appears another way," Castro said in a meeting with the head of China's legislature, Li Peng. "Your country undergoes great changes," Castro said. He praised China's economic progress, though he also added that he felt Cuba's situation was still "excellent." (February, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro arrived in Shanghai accompanied by Chinese President Jiang Zemin. Jiang and Castro arrived in Nanjing, capital of east China's Jiangsu Province, earlier. They paid a visit to the Panda Electronic Group there and later left for Shanghai. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro visited the Pudong New District in Shanghai, accompanied by Chinese President Jiang Zemin. During the visit, Castro spoke highly of China's great achievements in reform and opening-up, expressing his wish to enhance bilateral economic and trade cooperation. (March, Foreign Affairs)

For peace and against fascism is the main slogan of the 6th edition of the Overseas Chinese Festival, opening in Havana. The program includes the presentation of a mural in a space on Zanja, Manrique and Campanario streets, neighboring China Town, that will be called Shanghai Park. A Mahjong (typical game) competition will take place at the Min Chih Tang Society, while in the Arts and Traditions House a collective exhibition with paintings and sculptures will be presented. Another highpoint will be the ceremony to grant the Poster Award to Frank Diaz Donikian, winner of the contest for the 7th Overseas Chinese Festival, on the culinary knowledge of the Asian country. The international conference, with Chinese emigration as the main theme, will start at the Aldama Palace, in Old Havana, with the participation of delegates from seven countries. The Meeting of Entrepreneurs titled Experiences and Perspectives will session during the second day of the Festival. The closing of the celebration in Havana's China Town coincides with the anniversary of the first arrival to Cuba, from Canton, of the "Coolies" in 1847. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Li Changchun, member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, arrived in Havana for an official good-will visit at the invitation of the Cuban Communist Party (CCP). Li was greeted at the airport by Jose Ramon Balaguer, member of the Political Bureau, and head of the International Department of the CCP Central Committee. Cuba is the first leg of Li's current tour, which will also take him to Argentina and New Zealand. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro and Li Changchun, member of the standing committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China, highlighted the excellent relations between both nations during official talks at the Palace of the Revolution. The Chinese delegation was previously received by Carlos Lage, vice president of the Council of State, who affirmed that links between the two nations are becoming steadily stronger and broader based, covering spheres of great importance to the island. (July, Foreign Affairs)

The Olympic committees of China and Cuba have expressed their will to strengthen the sports cooperation on the way of the Beijing 2008 Olympiad. This was mentioned during a meeting between the head of the Cuban Olympic Committee, José R. Fernández, and the Undersecretary General of the Chinese Olympic Committee, Wang Jun, who arrived in the Cuban capital. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba and China will enlarge collaboration in medical fields, biotechnology and the exchange of professionals, Chinese Vice-minister for Health, Zhu Quinsheng, confirmed after concluding a visit to the island. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Philippines

Cuba has been invited to participate in the ministerial meetings of the East Asia-Latin America forum, which is to take place in Manila, Cuban official press reported. The invitation was handed over to Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez, by Assistant Secretary for American Affairs of the Foreign Ministry of Philippines, Cristina Ortega, who arrived in Havana for a working visit. (August, Foreign Affairs)

India

Cuban Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas met with the visiting Foreign Affairs Secretary of India, Shashank. Speaking with reporters following the meeting, Shashank said his country believes that bilateral relations between Havana and New Delhi are very important. (February, Foreign Affairs)

A statue in remembrance of Mother Teresa of Calcutta was placed in the garden bearing her name at the Saint Francis of Assisi Convent, in the municipality of Old Havana. The Ambassador of India, Dr. B. Balakrishnan, unveiled the sculpture. (May, Foreign Affairs)

India's State Minister for International Affairs Shri Digvijay Singh is in Havana invited by his Cuban counterpart Felipe Pérez Roque. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro has accepted an invitation to visit India, but the date has not been set, the Indian foreign ministry said. India's junior foreign minister Digvijay Singh invited Castro during a visit to Havana. "He has accepted the invitation. Dates are being worked out through diplomatic channels," foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna told reporters. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Japan

Japan donated 1.03m dollars to the Cuban AIDS Prevention and Control Programme through the UN Development Programme's Fiduciary Fund for Human Safety. In statements to the press following the document-signing ceremony, Cuban Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation Vice Minister, Raul Taladrid, highlighted Japan's participation with Cuba in joint programmes in other countries. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro wants to visit Japan on his way home from a summit of developing nations in Malaysia, a Japanese foreign ministry official said. Tokyo and Havana have diplomatic relations, but if the visit comes about it will be only the second trip to Japan by the Cuban leader following a stopover in December 1995. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Japan has made important donations to assist a variety of Cuban community development projects. Japan's ambassador in Havana, Mutsuo Mabuchi, signed a series of documents for assistance to community projects worth 403,394 dollars. The signing ceremony was held in Havana's Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation Ministry. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro arrived in Tokyo for a three-day unofficial visit to meet with government officials, senior lawmakers and Japanese business representatives. It is the second time for the 76-year-old Cuban leader to visit Japan, following his first visit in December 1995. Castro attended a dinner hosted by a group of Japanese companies doing business with Cuba. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro had been scheduled to leave Japan but was delayed by bad weather. After relaxing an extra day in the western city of Hiroshima, he departed for Cuba on an evening flight via Tokyo's Narita International Airport, said Foreign Ministry spokesman Tetsuya Otsuru. After being feted in Hanoi by students chanting "Viva Fidel!", applauded in Kuala Lumpur by sheiks and kings, then rewarded with an aid package from Beijing, his three-day visit to Japan was relatively low-key. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba and Japan called to strengthen their bilateral links when opening the 5th Inter Chancellery Political Talks at the Foreign Affairs Ministry (MINREX). Conversations are headed by MINREX vice Minister Jose Guerra Menchero and Japanese Chancellery general director for Latin America Ken Shimanouchi. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas decorated Japanese politician Hiroshi Mitsuzuka, a former member of the Japanese House of Representatives, with the Order of Solidarity granted by the Cuban Council of State. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Laos

Laos' Vice President Choummaly Sayasone confirmed that the traditional relations of friendship and solidarity with Cuba, its leaders and its people continue closer than ever. In a meeting with the Cuban ambassador to this capital Maria Aida Nogales, soon to conclude her over four year mission in Laos, the vice president expressed his wishes of success to Cubans in their effort to strengthen their socialist system. (March, Foreign Affairs)

The 10th Session of the Inter-Governmental Joint Commission for Economic and Scientific-Technical Collaboration has come to a close in Havana. The meeting was designed to strengthen economic links between Cuba and the Republic of Laos. Cuba's representative at the talks, Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas, said that both countries are very interested in increasing and deepening relations. The Laotian delegation was headed by First Deputy Minister Somsavat Lengsavad. Among the topics of discussion were bilateral relations in the areas of medicine, biotechnology, the pharmaceutical industry, sugar production, agriculture and education. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Malaysia

Cuban and Malaysian delegations concluded a five-day working session in Kuala Lumpur after evaluating current bilateral commercial relations and their prospects. Cuban Communications Deputy Minister Magali Gonzalez headed the Cuban delegation, which also included the Vice President of the Cuban National Bank Benigno Regueira and representatives of commercial, financial and educational entities. (November, Foreign Affairs)

North Korea

The international department of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea hosted a friendly meeting at Pyongyang Koryo Hotel on the occasion of the New Year. Invited to the meeting were Esteban Lobaina Romero, Cuban Ambassador to the DPRK, and staff members of the Cuban embassy. (January, Foreign Relations)

Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army Kim Jong-il, sent a message of greetings to Fidel Castro Ruz upon his re-election as president of the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba. "Your re-election as president of the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba is an expression of the steadfast will and faith of the revolutionary Cuban people to defend and accomplish the socialist cause to the last under your leadership," the message said. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Korean leader Kim Jong-il sent a message of greetings to Fidel Castro on the occasion of his 77th birthday. The message wished him "great success in his responsible work for accomplishing the cause of socialism and good health". (August, Foreign Affairs)

Singapore

The special envoy of Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, Michael P. C. Cheok, expressed the intention of favoring an exchange with Cuba on biotechnology, when highlighting the Island's scientific development. Cheok expressed this interest to Cuban Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas, to whom he talked about a number of mutual international interests. (January, Foreign Relations)

Viet Nam

The Vietnamese Orion Hanel electronic company completed the delivery of 500 computers and 100 printers to be donated to Cuba by the Vietnamese government in a ceremony held in Hanoi. The Vice-director of the enterprise Tran Ngoc Hang gave the Cuban Ambassador to Vietnam, Fredesmán Turró, 480 computers completing a 500 lot and 80 of the 100 printers to be donated to the island. (February, Foreign Affairs)

A tired-looking Fidel Castro received a red carpet welcome in Vietnam before plunging into a long series of meetings with his communist allies. The aging revolutionary, who flew into Hanoi after a long journey including refuelling stopovers in France and China, was welcomed by Vietnam's troika of senior leaders, honor guards and a brass band. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro hailed communist Vietnam as a nation of fierce fighters who stood up to powerful invaders, proving to the world they're capable of achieving greatness. Castro was greeted at the Polytechnic University of Hanoi by hundreds of students. Earlier, a tired-looking Castro climbed a set of black marble steps in a suit and black sneakers to pay respects to fellow communist revolutionary Ho Chi Minh. (February, Foreign Affairs)

The President of the Vietnamese National Parliament, Nguyen Van An, begins an official visit to Havana. Invited by his Cuban counterpart Ricardo Alarcón, the Vietnamese legislative leader is leading a high-level delegation from Hanoi. The Vietnamese legislative delegation will be made up of ministers, deputies and businesspeople. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro met Vietnam's National Assembly Chairman Nguyen Van An, the local daily Granma reported. They held a dialogue in a "friendly" atmosphere in line with the "solid and profound relations" between the communist parties, governments and peoples of their countries, said Granma. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Viet Nam and Cuba will draw up a cooperation programme on state budget auditing and public assets management following a memorandum of understanding signed in Havana by Cuba's Minister of Auditing and Control, Lina Pedraza Rodriguez and visiting Vietnamese Auditor General, Do Binh Duong. Under the programme, the two auditing sectors will exchange high-level visits, technical assistance, publications and documents. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Vietnam and Cuba signed an extended Agreement on Friendship and Cooperation in Hanoi under the signatures of leaders of the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations (VUFO), the Vietnam-Cuba Friendship Association, the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP) and the Cuba-Vietnam Friendship Association. The original agreement was signed in 1997 and was first renewed in 2000. This signing will extend the agreement until 2006. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Viet Nam's Foreign Ministry has signed with its Cuban counterpart an agreement on bilateral cooperation and exchange of technical consultancy on document archiving. The signing took place during Deputy Foreign Minister Nguyen Cong Phung's visit to Cuba, which was part of the two ministries' annual political consultancy programme. (October, Foreign Affairs)

CANADA

[See also, Domestic Affairs/ Dissidents/ Repression/ Crackdown on Dissidents; Economy/ Foreign Investment and Trade; and Terrorism/ Camp "Delta"]

Business

Cuba has opened its doors to a Canadian businessman interested in doing business with Cuban fashion models. According to the June issue of Cigar Aficionado journal, businessman Dean Bornstein recently opened an office in Havana to represent more than 75 Cuban supermodels through a subsidiary of his Toronto-based company. (June, Economy)

The Investment Dealers Association of Canada (IDA) is probing several people in connection with the stock manipulation investigation surrounding Visa Gold Explorations Inc, a small company that hunts for sunken treasure off the coast of Cuba. Separately, Brant Securities Ltd. suspended trader Derek Reid, one of the people named in police search warrants related to Visa Gold, said Keith McMeekin, president of the Toronto brokerage firm. The IDA said it had already been investigating Mr. Reid for unrelated matters. And Paul Bourque, the IDA's senior vice-president of member regulation, said that would now be expanded to look at any involvement Mr. Reid may have had in the new controversy surrounding Visa Gold, (June, Economy)

Sherritt International Corp. said it earned \$33.6 million, 18 cents per share, in the April-June period, compared with \$24.5 million, 15 cents per share, in the year-ago quarter. During the quarter, Sherritt - which earlier this year divested its Canadian metallurgical coal business and rolled Fording Inc.'s thermal coal operations into the Sherritt Coal Partnership II managed by Luscar Ltd. - "agreed to participate in the Cuban government's initiative to consolidate the telecommunications industry in Cuba." Negotiations continue and the company said it "may effectively dispose of its interest in the Cuban cellular telecommunications business." It also said that "as a result of working capital, financing and operating factors," it has lost management control of its Cuban soybean processing business, now accounted for as an investment. Sherritt added that it "has been one of the largest foreign investors in Cuba for over a decade and continues to have a co-operative and mutually beneficial relationship with the state." (August, Economy)

A recent air transportation agreement reached between Cuba and Canada has made Air Canada the second airline company from that country to fly to Cuba after Air Transat. The new air connection will offer different itineraries including flights from Calgary, Halifax, Ontario, Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. Air Canada's destinations will include Havana, the Varadero Beach Resort and Holguín. (August, Economy)

Cuba is seeking to merge the three firms in its telecommunications sector, according to Canada's Sherritt International Inc. Sherritt said that it "agreed to participate in the Cuban government's initiative to consolidate the telecommunications industry (...) Negotiations continue in respect to a possible arrangement pursuant to which Sherritt may effectively dispose of its interests in the Cuban cellular telecommunications business." The state-run telecommunications company is in merger talks with a telecom venture in which Sherritt has an interest and with another venture involving Telecom Italia SpA aimed at developing a wireless service for the local population, foreign suppliers said. Fixed-line operator Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba SA (Etecsa) and state-owned Celulares del Caribe (C-Com), with only a few thousand subscribers, are also involved in the negotiations, suppliers and diplomatic sources said. Communist-run Cuba's telecommunications are among the least developed in Latin America and the Caribbean. The government reported at the close of 2002 that there were 650,000 fixed-line phones, or 5.8

phones per 100 residents. The island's 11.3 million people have almost no access to mobile phones. Cell phones are available to tourists and other foreign visitors. (August, Economy)

Cuban cargo interests are backing a new triangular containership service between the Caribbean island, the Mediterranean and Canada. Melfi Lines will operate three ships averaging 900-teu capacity on a fortnightly service from the beginning of September. The Panamanian-registered carrier, which is owned by Cuban trading house Cimex Enterprises, is setting up its own operation following the demise last year of a direct service to Europe run by Coral Container Lines. (August, Economy)

Canada is planning to undertake several joint projects with Cuba to combat desertification and drought. According to Leonard Good, president of the Canadian company Global Environment Facility (GEF), he plans to visit the Sabana-Camagüey Project, located east of the Cuban capital. The Canadian business executive is in Cuba to take part in sessions of the 6th Conference of United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought and to verify some joint projects between his country and the island. Speaking with reporters in Havana, Leonard Good said that some of the projects are already in the second stage of development and are proving very successful. (August, Economy)

Canada's Sherritt International Corp. sold its 40 percent indirect stake in a Cuban telephone operation for \$43 million to a Cuban government agency. A Sherritt representative said in a statement it had sold its stake in Teléfonos Celulares de Cuba, S.A. (Cubacel) to Telefónica Antillana S.A. and would receive 80 percent of the selling price. The remaining 20 percent would go to the private holder of the minority interest in Cubacel. A payment of \$10 million has already been made with the balance of the \$43 million to be paid quarterly until August 2007. Sherritt's sale proceeds are about equal to its \$45.1 million net book value of the Cubacel investment. (September, Economy)

- **Nickel**

State-owned Cubaníquel is looking at expanding its "Che Guevara" plant to 50,000t/y nickel plus cobalt compared to last year's 31,500t, the company's director Angel Roberto Hernández told local business weekly Opciones. Hernández said the Pedro Sotto Alba plant could also be expanded to 50,000t from 2002's 33,000t of the metal. That plant is a 50:50 joint venture with Canadian company Sherritt International. (January, Economy)

The most likely expansion for Canadian Sherritt International Corp. in the near term may be nickel and cobalt mining assets in Cuba, said Ian Delaney, Sherritt's chairman. Nickel supply is tightening internationally, he said, because virtually no new mines have gone into production in the past decade and as a result "we are very bullish on the nickel-cobalt world." Sherritt-owned mines in Cuba currently produce 33,000 tonnes of nickel annually and he said he would like to see the output increase to 80,000 tonnes. Cuban nickel is mined from so-called laterite deposits, which are close to the Earth's surface and relatively inexpensive to mine. "If we were to look around for a place to expand in the world (...) the cheapest new nickel would be in Cuba," he said. (May, Economy)

Not all the employees of the René Ramos Latour nickel processing plant, operating as a joint venture with Canadian Sherritt International Corp., are being properly looked after and are, therefore, quitting their jobs. Service workers do not receive US\$ bonuses; are not fitted with adequate work clothing; and, according to management sources, cannot use the company's bus shuttle service to commute to and from work because of fuel shortage. (May, Economy)

Canadian Sherritt International said it is looking at developing more near-surface nickel laterite deposits in Cuba, where it is already a large investor in oil and gas, agriculture and tourism. Dennis Maschmeyer, Sherritt's chief executive and president, told a conference in Toronto the company's plans to expand its Moa laterite nickel and cobalt project in Cuba looked more attractive with the prospect for both metals "extremely positive". Maschmeyer said consumption for stainless steel production was rising, led by China, which has left nickel supplies tight and pushed prices higher. (June, Economy)

- **Tourism**

More than 400,000 Canadians travelled to Cuba in 2001, up from 109,000 in 1994. "People come for sunshine and beaches," said Ibrahim Ferradaz Garcia, the minister of tourism for Cuba, "but many other Caribbean nations have great beaches." Garcia, in Ottawa to promote tourism, said he wants to diversify the reasons to visit Cuba. Garcia said he hopes that Cuban architecture, music, history, eco-tourism and scuba diving will also lure Canadians, and that it will become a popular spot for conventions. (January, Economy)

Canadian Occidental Hotels and Resorts has opened its first hotel in Cuba - the Hotel Occidental Miramar in Havana. The recently built, five-star hotel is located on 5th Avenue, adjacent to the financial district, in close proximity to Havana's convention centre and about 10 minutes from the Old Historic City. The Hotel Occidental Miramar will be featured in selected Canadian tour operator programs offering two-centre holidays, which combine a beach vacation with a stay in Havana. (June, Economy)

Air Canada has been cleared to fly scheduled service to Cuba, adding to its already existing chartered flights. A release from Canadian Transport Minister David Collenette said the airline will fly from Calgary, Halifax, London, Moncton, Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto to destinations in Cuba including Havana, Varadero, Holguín and one other city not yet chosen. But an Air Canada spokeswoman said a final decision hasn't been made on destinations. Renee Smith-Valade said the airline already offers charter vacations to Cuba, but this new designation will allow the company to introduce scheduled service. (July, Economy)

Canada continues to be the main supplier of tourists to Cuba -- with more than 270,000 Canadian vacationers visiting the island between January and the end of May this year. Speaking with reporters in Santiago de Cuba, Ibrahim Ferradaz, Cuba's Minister of Tourism, noted that during "high season," there are more than 100 flights from 17 Canadian cities arriving in Cuba every week. Ibrahim Ferradaz said that Italians are Cuba's second largest tourist market, followed closely by vacationers from Germany, France, Great Britain, Spain and Mexico. (August, Economy)

Canadian WestJet Airlines Ltd. will expand its presence in the charter market this winter after reaching a deal to transport up to 80,000 passengers to Caribbean destinations for Transat A.T. Inc. The companies said the aircraft will serve Caribbean destinations in Cuba, Mexico and the Dominican Republic. The deal - worth about \$29-million in revenue for Calgary-based WestJet -- is much larger than previous deals between the two companies. (August, Economy)

Air Canada has introduced three-times-a-week direct flights to Havana, the company announced. The new flights on 120-passenger capacity A-319 jets will be added to the Montreal-based airline's regular charter offerings. Ruth Zafrany, Cuba supervisor for Air Canada Vacations, the airline's tour operator, said her compatriots had always found the Caribbean island an extremely attractive tourist destination. More Canadians visit Cuba than citizens of any other country. Between January and October, 363,945 Canadians traveled to the communist-ruled island. (December, Economy)

Jonathan Watts, president of the Canada-Cuba Sports & Culture Festivals, says his organization's idea of tourism has nothing to do with "selling a destination". "What we do -he says- is to promote Cuban culture". The organization, which organizes travels and exchanges, closed 2003 with positive results. Aside from the interest of Canadian groups, more than a few Americans have requested the organization's services to attend cultural events on the island. (December, Economy)

Cooperation

Canada renewed an agreement with Cuba on bilateral co-operation in sport, allowing the two countries to exchange information and develop a joint program of sport activities. Secretary of State for Amateur Sport, Paul DeVillers, signed the agreement with Humberto Rodriguez Gonzalez, president of Cuba's National Institute of Sport, Physical Education and Recreation in Havana, Cuba. The first memorandum of understanding on sport was signed by the two countries in 1976. "It is important to continue the dialogue

and relationship of sharing between our countries to promote participation in sport and to ensure that there is a level playing field for athletes to pursue excellence in a safe and fair sport environment," DeVillers said in a statement. The memorandum of understanding between the two countries will focus on issues such as anti-doping, sport medicine and research and development-level sport. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Assessment of the Delta Junior windmill, designed by Canadian experts and manufactured by the Dutch firm Dutch Industries Limited, is one of the projects currently implemented in Cuba to ensure potable water supply. As an energy source, wind power stands out for allowing electricity production without fuel costs, as well as water extraction for land irrigation and human and animal consumption. (March, Economy)

Cuba and Canada agreed to share seized profits from the illegal drug trade. This is the first such deal Havana has signed, officials said. "The agreement shows the will of both countries to increase cooperation in fighting against drug trafficking," said Rafael Dausa, the Cuban foreign ministry official in charge of North American affairs. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Over 2000 Canadian young people have visited Cuba in solidarity brigades organized by the Canadian ARO Cooperation over the last decade. According to Colette Lavergne, president of ARO, most of the brigadistas from Canada are from 13 to 18 years of age. Lavergne told reporters that ARO works with the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), organizing brigades so that members of the group can work during their summer vacations or school breaks. While many of the brigadistas come from the Canadian province of Quebec, she said that participants come from all over Canada. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Members of the 11th Canadian Solidarity with Cuba Brigade have met with family members of the five Cuban prisoners being held in the United States. The members of the 11th Canadian Brigade are carrying out volunteer work in citrus plantations in the province of Pinar del Río, located to the west of the Cuban capital. During their stay, the brigadistas -- many of whom are Latinos who reside in Canada -- have been touring schools and hospitals as well as places of social and cultural interest. (August, Domestic Affairs)

As part of a program funded by the Canadian International Development Agency, in partnership with Victoria-based Lifecycles and the Cuban Association of Agriculture and Forestry Technicians, David Goodman and Linden Huizinga will be heading to Cuba to help promote and teach urban agriculture in Havana. In Cuba, Goodman will focus on nutrition and educating children, while Huizinga will show Cubans how to develop international partnerships with individuals and ecotourism groups. "It's just an amazing opportunity to be able to learn from them and how they look at food security and how they look at urban farming and how it fits into their culture and then bring that back here," Huizinga said. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Members on both sides of the Canadian Senate snapped to attention and burst into prolonged applause when Speaker Dan Hays recognized Che Guevara's daughter -- a Cuban pediatrician -- among the visitors in the gallery. It wasn't the woman's vocation that stirred the senators so dramatically but her name: Guevara. Aleida Guevara March, acknowledged the applause and stood patiently as several senators came to meet her and pose for pictures in the Senate foyer. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba introduced a Canadian studies program comprised of history, culture and other spheres of Canadian life at Las Tunas University. Paul Gibbard, Political Program Manager of the Canadian Embassy to Havana, said that both nations have common interests, illustrated through more than a century of official relations. The diplomat recalled the fact that no other nation sends so many tourists to the Island, and announced an increase of 20 percent of tourists for 2004. Gibbard praised the mutually profitable investments made by Canadian companies in oil and nickel in Cuba. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Ciénaga de Zapata is one of the natural areas of Cuba with a strong Canadian connection forged by World Wildlife Fund Canada, an organization that has helped fund and co-ordinate local conservation efforts across Cuba for the past 15 years. With the help of the Canadian International Development Agency and some support from the Canadian business community, WWF Canada has offered conservation expertise

and helped provide what local biologists need most: funds to help advance long-term protection. An ironic benefit of the long-standing US embargo is that rampant tourism and habitat destruction have been curbed. But there are still forces that threaten Cuba's natural areas. In some cases, burgeoning tourism is a culprit, but often it's indiscriminate agriculture and forestry that are contributing to habitat destruction. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Diplomatic Activities and Statements

Fidel Castro touched down at Vancouver's airport to refuel his plane while flying back from Asia. "He was there for a few hours for rest and to refuel," said Nadia Scipio del Campo, a Department of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman in Ottawa. It wasn't an official visit and Castro did not meet with any Canadian politicians, she said. (March, Foreign Affairs)

On his way back to Cuba from Japan, Fidel Castro made a surprise visit to Vancouver to refuel his plane, but ended up answering questions from reporters. Asked about the possibility of meeting Canadian Prime Minister, Jean Chretien, Castro answered: "I should have talked to him, really. But I began working as soon as I arrived here and I fell asleep. Possibly, I can talk to him before I go. I will try to because we really agreed upon talking. I am glad you have just reminded me. I will try to see if I can at least say hello to him on the phone." Talking about Canadian activities at the UN in relation with the Security Council resolutions on Iraq, Castro added: It seems to me that Canada has been working on a compromise, but I would not be able to give you a definitive answer. It seems to me it is possible that something is in the works, though as far as I know, some people don't agree with such a formula because they believe it will bring closer the dangers of war." (March, Foreign Affairs)

Canadian authorities expressed concern on the crackdown on Cuban dissidents. "Canada will be raising our concerns with the Cuban government regarding the crackdown on dissidents," said foreign ministry spokeswoman Nadia Scipio. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Canada said it had protested to Havana over a crackdown on leading dissidents. Cuban authorities are seeking life sentences for 12 of the 78 dissidents, rights activists and journalists arrested and charged with collaborating with the United States. "Canada has raised serious concerns with the Cuban authorities regarding the recent crackdown on several dissidents," said foreign ministry spokesman Patrick Riel. "Many of those arrested are well-known as defenders of freedom of expression and, of course, we are closely monitoring the situation." (April, Economy)

Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham summoned Cuba's ambassador to Canada to his office to express "extreme concern" over a dramatic crackdown on peaceful dissent by Fidel Castro's regime. Mr. Graham presented the ambassador with a protest letter addressed to Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque. "The Canadian government is extremely concerned about this potential curtailment of human rights and freedom of expression in Cuba, and is deeply disturbed by the severity of the sentences," said the letter. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien said he was disturbed by a Cuban crackdown on dissidents but insisted his policy of engaging in dialogue with Havana was producing positive results. "I know there is a problem of human rights in that country -- sometimes it's better, sometimes it's bad - and we're protesting. But it's better to be engaged because that's putting pressure (on Havana)," Chretien told a news conference, saying there was "not a great democracy" in Cuba. "I believe it's better to be engaged and talking than to ignore the problem (...) I know that if you don't do anything it could be much worse", he added. "He (Castro) is trying to talk to other nations and when he has problems of that nature it makes life more difficult. If we ignore that, he will not mind at all. And I know he's preoccupied, he's not happy when we're talking to him about it (the crackdown)," said Chretien. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Canada will ask the Organization of American States to consider taking non-economic measures against Cuba in response to a crackdown on peaceful dissent, Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham said. In a

telephone interview, Mr. Graham said the OAS should follow the lead of the 15-member European Union, which said it would cut back political and cultural contacts with the government of Fidel Castro due to the crackdown. Mr. Graham said he would steer clear of proposing economic sanctions, in line with Canada's long-standing opposition to the US trade embargo against Cuba. "Cutting out high-level meetings is a good way of sending a signal," Mr. Graham said. "Economic sanctions punish the people. We want measures to punish the elite." (June, Foreign Affairs)

For the last century, Cuban-Canadian relations have flourished in various branches and the two countries currently maintain more complex and deeper links, Michael Small, the Canadian ambassador to Cuba confirmed to the press. He added that both nations have worked together during the last 100 years and he hoped they would carry out even more joint work in the years following the centenary, celebrated with a full program of activities. The diplomat and Eusebio Leal, City of Havana historian, inaugurated a photography exhibition at the Fototeca de Cuba displaying the principal activities that have taken place between the two countries. Leal recalled that in 1903 the first commercial office of the Republic of Cuba was opened in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. The city historian commented on a 16th century voyage through the Caribbean Sea by Admiral Samuel de Champlain and the many valuable maps he made. Also mentioned was famous soldier and sailor Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville, who died in Havana in 1706; both men were the precursors of modern Canada. Leal paid tribute to William Ryan, the Canadian revolutionary who rose to the rank of brigadier general in Cuba's 10-year War of Independence. Ryan was captured and shot by the Spanish in 1873 in Santiago de Cuba. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Canada expressed concern at US President George W. Bush's announcement of more measures against Communist Cuba, and hoped that many Canadian firms doing business with the island would not be affected. "There are many Canadian companies active in Cuba with investments there, with employees there," Industry Minister Allan Rock told reporters when asked about Bush's comments. "My concern would be -- working with the minister of foreign affairs -- that nothing occur which would impede their ability to carry out business and serve the interests of their shareholders," he said. "I think it's important for us to do what we can to protect the interests of Canadian investors in Cuba (...) we have the perfect right to do that. We have our own independent foreign policy," said Rock. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Basic Industry Minister Marcos Portal highlighted the friendly relations Canada has maintained with Cuba even in the most difficult moments, proving the feelings of both peoples and "the friendship ties that no one could break." During the celebration of Canada's Day at the 21st Havana International Fair (FIHAV 2003), the minister said the very important connections between both nations' businesses are working very well. Canadian Ambassador to Cuba Alexandra Baugaliskis stated that her country has been sending tourists to Cuba for seven years, and they have enjoyed a high level of quality, loyalty and commitment. Although with a lower number of enterprises represented in this 21st fair, Canada continues as second trade partner of the Island, with a 100-year-old exchange history. Baugaliskis highlighted continuous faithfulness in trade negotiations with Cuba, shown in investments and the common interest for "a better future for all Cubans." As something new this year, the Canadian Pavillion opened the photographic exhibit: Cuba-Canada: A look at 100 years of relations, which records the close commercial ties between the two nations, as well as those in culture and sports. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Helms-Burton Law

A US federal judge has granted a motion for a retrial for Canadian salesman James Sabzali, convicted last April for violating the US embargo against Cuba, because of prosecutorial misconduct. In a 31-page ruling, Justice Mary McLaughlin wrote she was "very concerned" by "inflammatory language (. . .) strewn throughout the (prosecutor's closing) argument." Declaring that "it is never proper to throw around such inflammatory language in a criminal trial," McLaughlin wrote that a prosecutor's "repeated" charges of defence lying served to "stir up the jury" and had "no place in the argument of an Assistant United States Attorney." The US Justice Department undertook a five-year investigation that resulted in a three-week trial. (June, Foreign Affairs)

A Canadian travel company facing a demand for \$10,000 US from a 75-year-old American grandmother, fined by the US government for taking a cycling trip in Cuba, has found itself in the middle of a political drama playing out in Washington, D.C. "I'm not quite sure what action I should be taking," Lewie Gonsalves, owner of Toronto-based Worldwide Adventures, said. "To me this is idiotic." In January 2000, Joan Slote, of San Diego, a gold-medallist at the senior Olympics, booked a cycling trip to Cuba through Worldwide. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Migration

A Cuban stowaway who endured -40 temperatures in the wheel well of an airliner has been allowed to stay in Canada. Víctor Alvarez Molina was detained after the jet landed in Montreal in December, 2002. He was later freed pending the immigration hearing. The Immigration and Refugee Board ruled yesterday there are sufficient grounds to allow him to stay in Canada, saying his life would be in danger if he were to return to Cuba. He served in the Cuban military. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Carmen Delia Llano Ochoa, a Cuban mother resident in Canada, is protesting outside the Cuban Consulate in Montreal against Cuban officials' refusal to grant an exit permit to her son. According to Carmen Delia, the Canadian Embassy in Havana granted her son a resident visa to join her. The visa expires in February. Other supporters sensitive to the case have joined Carmen Delia. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Non-Governmental Organisations

A cold war has broken out at a librarians' conference in downtown Toronto as accusations fly that pro-Castro elements within the American Library Association are trying to silence debate over Cuba's crackdown on independent libraries. The ALA has "secretly manoeuvred to have only pro-Cuban voices" on a discussion panel, said Robert Kent, a co-founder of the Friends of Cuban Libraries and a librarian with the New York Public Library. He also stated that "the extremists within the ALA are going to try to pack the meeting to exclude people who might be critical of the Cuban government." (June, Foreign Affairs)

CARIBBEAN

Antigua & Barbuda

Antigua & Barbuda's non-resident ambassador to Cuba Colin Murdoch left the island over the weekend at the head of a delegation from Antigua & Barbuda on an official visit to Cuba. The delegation is expected to hold bilateral consultations with the Cuban authorities on a number of co-operation projects, which are ongoing between both countries. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Association of Caribbean States

Cuba and the Association of Caribbean States have signed an agreement to organize future trade forums. Cuba's Foreign Trade Minister Raúl de la Nuez and Norman Girvan, General Secretary of the Association of Caribbean States, signed the accord in Havana. The agreement outlines the responsibilities and tasks to be fulfilled by both sides during the 13th Meeting of the Special Committee on Trade Development and Foreign Relations of the Association of Caribbean States. Santiago de Cuba was chosen as the site for the meeting, which will be held in June. It was also announced that the Expo-Caribe Fair will take place at the same time in the eastern Cuban city. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque maintained that encouraging signs surround the future of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), while emphasizing that the 4th Summit of Heads of States and Government should relaunch the forum. In statements to the press, Perez Roque asserted that the ACS

Foreign Affairs ministers meeting taking place in Panama has great importance, as it will complete preparations for the Summit scheduled for February 2004. A new Secretary General will be elected, he explained, and the final touches put on air transport collaboration proposals and the protocol to declare the Caribbean a sustainable tourism zone. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Bahamas

Prime Minister Perry Christie urged United States President George Bush to "appreciate" the Bahamas' relationship with Cuba. Mr. Christie's call came during a breakfast meeting of Caribbean leaders at New York's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel hosted by Mr. Bush. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, begins an official visit to Bahamas. The Nassau Guardian newspaper highlights the visit noting that Perez Roque met with government officials and local business people. (November, Foreign Affairs)

The Cuban Foreign Affairs Ministry delivered a note during the visit by Minister Felipe Pérez Roque to Bahamas. The note highlights the interchange with Bahamians authorities on health, education, tourism, agriculture, drugs, and illegal migration. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Barbados

Eight additional Barbadian young people will join the 127 students of this Caribbean island studying university degrees in Cuba this year, as part of a free scholarship program granted by Havana. Clement Payne Movement (CPM) President, David Commissioning, stated that these students can choose to study medicine, architecture, veterinary medicine, agronomy or psychology. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Belize

The President of the National Assembly of the People's Power, Ricardo Alarcón, returned to Havana after a brief visit to Belize where he attended the establishment of a new legislature in that country. (April, Foreign Affairs)

CARICOM

The foreign ministers of the 15-nation Caribbean Community (CARICOM) want Cuba to grant clemency to the 75 dissidents who were recently convicted of attempting to undermine the socialist government and to improve its human rights performance, CARICOM said in a statement. While saying that governments have the right to respond to threats against the state or to the criminal act of hijacking, the ministers "expressed their concern at the conduct of the recent trials" and said they were "deeply disturbed at the severity of the sentences imposed" on the dissidents and upon three hijackers. "Ministers therefore strongly appealed to the Government of Cuba to show clemency towards those recently imprisoned," the ministers said at their meeting on the Caribbean island of St. Vincent. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Delegates from 10 area countries are meeting in Havana for the Cultural Regional Committee of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). This is the first time a reunion of this nature takes place in a Spanish speaking nation that is not member of the organization. The 28 ministers of culture, and representatives of Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados governments, among others, will debate results of the recent CARICOM Human Resources Council that analyzed the Cuban case. A workshop between Canada and CARICOM was also organized. Cultural centers from the Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica, members of Cariforum, will also report their results. Preparations for Carifesta, the most important event in culture and economy in the area, will also be reviewed. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro has sent a message regretting the fact that he was unable to confer with "my brothers of the Caribbean Community (Caricom) at their annual summit now taking place in Jamaica". "I was unable to meet with my brothers of the Caribbean Community on this occasion. And believe me, I deeply regret it," states the letter read by Cuban Minister of Government Ricardo Cabrisas at the first session of the summit. After congratulating the regional group for its 30 years of achievements, the Cuban revolution leader asserted that "no other group of countries in the Western Hemisphere has achieved the Caricom results in political, economic and social agreements," an official statement published in Havana said. (July, Foreign Affairs)

A Cuban official delegation, headed by Minister of Government Ricardo Cabrisas, arrived in St. Lucia. The Cuban minister is attending CARICOM's 3rd Special Meeting of the Council for Development, Economy and Trade and the 9th Special Meeting of Heads of State. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Jamaican Prime Minister P.J. Patterson described 31 years of diplomatic relations between Cuba and four CARICOM states as "more than just an historical milestone in the evolution of intra-Caribbean relations". The occasion is being observed across the region as 'CARICOM-Cuba Day'. According to Patterson, "it commemorates the importance of cordial and productive relations with one's neighbours and of the benefits of working towards the goals of peace, security, prosperity and unity within our Caribbean family and beyond." It was Patterson who last December had proposed to his CARICOM colleagues that December 8 each year should be celebrated as "CARICOM-Cuba Day", also urging the group to formalise a CARICOM-Cuba summit to be held every three years. (*IPS*, 8/12/03)

Grenada

With Cuban collaboration, Grenada has opened a 270-bed hospital that will allow patients to undergo complicated operations, such as double bypass surgery, previously unavailable on the island. The four-story building has five operating theaters, a recovery room, an intensive care unit and a medical and surgical ward. (January, Foreign Relations)

Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque said that relations between Cuba and Grenada have historic implications. Following a meeting in Havana with his Grenadian counterpart, Elvin Nimrod, the Cuba's top diplomat told reporters in the Cuban capital that collaboration and mutual respect constitute the basis of relations between Havana and St. Georges. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Trinidad & Tobago

Trinidad and Tobago's Foreign Minister, Knowlson Gift met in Havana with Cuban Public Health Minister, Damodar Peña, to study a plan to increase health cooperation between the two nations. (March, Foreign Affairs)

More than 70 Cuban doctors are expected to arrive in Trinidad within the next two months to take up appointments at the nation's hospitals, Health Minister Colm Imbert told the press. Imbert, who returned to Trinidad after a four-day visit to Cuba with the ministry's recruiting personnel, said: "The interviewing team headed by Dr. Rampersad Parasram, acting Chief Medical Officer, has already interviewed a number of doctors who are eligible for employment in Trinidad. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Trinidad and Tobago Foreign Minister Knowlson Gift is heading a trade mission of Trinidad and Tobago companies, which will call for the strengthening of relations with Cuba. (June, Foreign Affairs)

A group of 36 Cuban doctors and nurses have arrived in Trinidad and Tobago and will treat patients at hospitals across the twin islands. Upon their arrival in Port of Spain, the Cuban medical personnel were assigned to hospitals in Arima, Chaguanas, Sangre Grande, Princes Town and Couva. According to Trinidad and Tobago's Health Ministry Human Resources Director, Ashford Sankar, all the Cuban doctors have been

accredited in the country and are ready to go to work. With a population of 3.3 million inhabitants, Trinidad and Tobago will have a contingent of Cuban nurses working in a number of area hospitals, to help alleviate the serious shortage of medical personnel. (September, Foreign Affairs)

The Minister of Health of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Colm Imbert, expressed his satisfaction with cooperation in the area of health between his country and Cuba and with the well adjustment of the Cuban medical staff in Trinidad and Tobago. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Doctors in Trinidad and Tobago blasted Cuban medical personnel working in the country, charging that they were placing the health of citizens at risk. "The Medical Professionals Association of Trinidad and Tobago continues to be concerned about the substandard level of care that is being forced upon the unsuspecting public of Trinidad and Tobago with the introduction of Cuban medical personnel into the public health system," MPATT chief Dr. Colin Furlonge said in a statement. (October, Foreign Affairs)

EUROPE

Austria

Austrian and Cuban Justice ministers Dieter Bohmdorfer and Roberto Diaz, respectively, will sign a cooperation memorandum in this sector to strengthen links between both nations. Bohmdorfer and his delegation met with Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage, Attorney General of the Republic Juan Escalona, and Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon. The visitor also met Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Belgium

Steve Stevaert, vice-president of the Belgian Flemish government, continues his visit to Cuba, signing an agreement of understanding at the Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration Ministry. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Belgian Foreign Minister Louis Michel rejected any implementation of EU sanctions against Cuba, calling instead for more political dialogue between Europe and the communist island. "I am not in favor of sanctions (...) not for Cuba or any other country," Michel stressed. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Bulgaria

The Lord Mayor of Sofia and former prime minister of Bulgaria, Stefan Sofianski, arrived in Havana for a seven-day visit, accompanied by a delegation of 11 officials and 70 business people. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Czech Republic

The Cuban Embassy in Prague has lodged a complaint with the Czech Foreign Ministry in which it sharply protests against the course of a demonstration outside the embassy building, it informed CTK today. In its statement to the press, the embassy blames Czech authorities of not having ensured the peace and for not preventing the gross behaviour of the demonstrators. Foreign Ministry press department director Karel Boruvka told CTK today that the meeting was duly announced and that the police ensured the calm course. (September, Foreign Affairs)

The Czech Foreign Ministry has completely rejected a note in which the Cuban embassy protested against the course of a recent demonstration outside its building in Prague, ministry spokesman Karel Boruvka told the press. According to Boruvka, the ministry does not agree with the claim that Vienna conventions on

diplomatic relations were violated. "We still insist that the demonstration was duly reported, that the police knew it would be held and ensured its problem-free course," Boruvka said. He added that the Cubans had reported no incident to the police. (October, Foreign Affairs)

European Union

[See also, Domestic Affairs/ Dissidents/ Crackdown on Dissidents]

Cuba has formally filed its request to join the Cotonu Agreement -- a cooperation accord between the European Union and the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Group. According to Cuban diplomats in Brussels, official letters were given to the Council of Ministers of the ACP Group and the European Union. Countries that form part of the Cotonu Agreement receive preferential treatment from their former European colonial powers. (January, Foreign Relations)

The signing of an agreement between representatives from Cuba and the European Commission (EC) to establish an European Union (EU) office in Havana was confirmed by Cuban Embassy adviser to Belgium, Vilma Reyes. Reyes said that EC Foreign Affairs director, Guy Legras, and Cuban Ambassador to the EU, Rodrigo Malmierca, were present in Brussels for the signing of the document. Malmierca recently explained that the EU office will be led by a charge d'affaires, who arrive in Cuba in early February. (January, Foreign Relations)

European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Assistance, Poul Nielson, will not travel to Havana in February as it had been scheduled, but in March. Sources said that Nielsen has postponed his trip for a "few weeks" for "personal reasons." (February, Foreign Affairs)

The European Union's head office said it plans to ask the EU's 15 national governments by July to accept Cuba's request to join the bloc's trade and aid pact with African, Caribbean and Pacific nations. EU Development Commissioner Poul Nielson made the announcement five days before heading to Havana to open an EU office in the Cuban capital as part of intensifying contacts with the government of Fidel Castro. Nielson said the European Commission would accept the eligibility of Cuba's request and pass it to EU governments in June or July. EU officials said it was unclear if governments would approve the deal. (March, Foreign Affairs)

The European Union opened a new office in Cuba in an attempt to deepen relations with the communist island. The 15-member EU is Cuba's largest trade partner, accounting for 80 percent of Cuba's imports in 2001. "We are opening a new relationship," EU Development Commissioner Poul Nielson said. Nielson said that in Cuba the EU planned to put into practice a wide range of projects, from social programs to modernizing the economy. Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, who met with Nielson, said he hoped the EU mission would usher in "a new era based on respectful dialogue." EU officials have said it is unclear if the governments would approve the deal. Britain, Sweden and others are expected to press Havana on human rights before approving Cuba's membership. (March, Foreign Affairs)

The island's leading opposition groups asked the European Union not to include Cuba in an agreement offering trade advantages and help to developing nations until the nation improves its civil rights record. The government opponents made their request in a declaration delivered to visiting EU Development Commissioner Poul Nielson, in Havana to open a new EU mission. "In the opinion of those signing this declaration, it is evident that the current Cuban government has not satisfied a minimum of the proposals," said the document. Those who signed it included veteran human rights activist Elizardo Sanchez; Vladimiro Roca, a former military pilot-turned-dissident and son of a late revered Communist Party leader, and Marta Beatriz Roque, a dissident economist who heads an umbrella group of opposition organizations. (March, Foreign Affairs)

The EU Commissioner for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid discussed with Cuban dissidents the probable accession of Cuba to the Cotonou Agreement, finding divided positions on the matter. "We support the Cotonou Agreement because it would be the only binding accord signed by the

Cuban government in the last 44 years which speaks loud and clear of democratization and respect for human rights," said Manuel Cuesta Morúa, moderator of the Moderate Opposition's Round Table. Oswaldo Payá asked Nielson not to make "any decisions without first having a broader dialogue with all the sectors of the Cuban society." "We don't think it is appropriate that a decision be made if the Cuban government does not express publicly its willingness to observe human rights and democratic requirements," he added. (March, Foreign Affairs)

A European Union commissioner supported Cuba's inclusion in the Cotonou Agreement, a pact with developing nations, saying it could help improve the communist-run country's human rights record and guide it toward democracy. "I see Cuban accession to (the agreement) as a step in taking the EU-Cuban discussions on all issues, including human rights and democracy, to a new level," Development Commissioner Poul Nielson said. "It was confirmed to me this week that Cuba also sees it this way. This is an important point." (March, Foreign Affairs)

The European Union condemned a crackdown against political dissidents in Cuba, joining calls from international human rights groups for their immediate release. "The European Union is deeply concerned at the arrests of dozens of independent journalists and opposition members by the Cuban authorities," a statement said. The statement was issued in Greece, which holds the current presidency of the EU. "The European Union condemns those arrests and demands that those persons, whom it considers prisoners of conscience, be released without delay," it said. "Violations of fundamental civil and political rights will be monitored very closely by the European Union and they will continue to influence the Union's relations with Cuba." (March, Foreign Affairs)

The European Union has condemned a crackdown by Cuba on dissidents that has strained relations with the bloc and could jeopardise EU aid. EU foreign ministers sounded their warning at the end of a meeting in Luxembourg. It followed the jailing of 75 dissidents and the execution of three men who hijacked a ferry in a bid to reach the United States. The EU Council of Foreign Ministers said it "condemned the recent actions of the Cuban authorities, notably the executions, the large-scale arrests of dissidents, the unfair trials and the arbitrary and excessive sentences imposed." "These latest developments which mark a further deterioration in the human rights situation in Cuba will affect the EU's relationship with Cuba and the prospects for increased cooperation. The Council will keep the situation under close review," it added. (April, Foreign Affairs)

The European Commission has decided to postpone "indefinitely" the presentation of its analysis to the Group of Fifteen regarding the request from Havana to join the Cotonou Agreement. After examining the latest events in Cuba, the recommendations that the EU was scheduled to present to the Fifteen in June on the possible accession of Cuba to the Cotonou Agreement "have been cancelled for the moment", announced EU spokesman Gerassimos Thomas. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba has formally withdrawn its application to join the European Union's Cotonou trade accord as strained relations continue after a recent political crackdown by the communist government of Fidel Castro. In a front-page notice of Granma, the state-run daily newspaper, Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Relations said it was withdrawing its Cotonou application - a decision made last Friday - because the European Commission decided to postpone indefinitely its review of Cuba's request to join. The Cotonou accord is a programme that offers former European colonies favoured trade and development aid. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Ambassador to the European Union, Rodrigo Malmierca, affirmed that his country would continue its relation with the bloc on the basis of political dialogue of mutual respect, notwithstanding the fact that Cuba withdrew its request to join the Cotonou Agreement. He also added that Cuba does not intend to interrupt any of the cooperation programs that both parties carry out jointly. (June, Foreign Affairs)

The European Union has decided to impose several diplomatic sanctions against Cuba, because of its violation of fundamental freedoms and breaking the moratorium on the death penalty. The measures are a last-minute initiative from Greece in the twilight period of its six-month period as the EU's Presidency

holder. The Greek Presidency made a short but sharp statement, saying that the EU will re-examine its relations with Cuba and several sanctions, like limiting high-level visits to Cuba. "The EU, deeply concerned about the continuing flagrant violation of human rights and of fundamental freedoms of members of the Cuban opposition and of independent journalists, being deprived of their freedom for having expressed freely their opinion, calls once again the Cuban authorities to release immediately all political prisoners", said the statement. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba rejected European diplomatic sanctions over political repression on the island and said the European Union was bowing to pressure from the United States, Cuba's archenemy. "It is sad but there is no question that the European Union has been unable to formulate its own policy on Cuba," Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque told reporters. "It has given in under pressure to the aggressive US policy against Cuba," he said at a ceremony launching Havana's candidacy to hold the 2012 Olympic Games. The Cuban Foreign Ministry accused the European Union of being superficial in its analysis of recent events in Cuba. Pérez Roque said that the European Union had over-reacted to events on the island and had failed to properly assess "the realities and complexities of the situation," including the increased hostility and the present dangers for Cuba's independence." (June, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro accused the European Union of joining Washington in ganging up on Cuba after the EU cut back diplomatic and political ties in response to a crackdown on dissidents. "We must all remain calm, because a gang, a mafia, has joined the Yankee imperialists (...) disgracefully serving the Nazi-fascist government of the United States," he told some 7,000 people in a rally in a working-class suburb of Havana. While Castro did not name the EU, the comments clearly referred to the EU's decision to put diplomatic sanctions on Cuba. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Speaking about the sanctions imposed by the European Union on Cuba, Diego Ojeda, spokesman for European External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten, denied that the EU had been influenced by Washington and said that the Commission was just as critical of the United States for using the death penalty. "The decision-making process is completely autonomous," he said. "When we sense a marked deterioration of the situation, we react accordingly." On Castro's language, Ojeda said: "Those words speak for themselves." (June, Foreign Affairs)

The Castro government, usually at odds with its longtime political foe the United States, turned its ire on the EU. "Cuba calmly but firmly issues a warning to the European embassies and to local US government mercenaries (dissidents) that it will not tolerate provocations or blackmail," Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said, referring to the EU sanctions. "European embassies should be conscious of the fact that they will be failing to meet their obligations under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations if they allow themselves to be used for subversion against Cuba," Perez Roque said in his statement, broadcast live to the nation. "It's too much", said the Cuban foreign minister Felipe Perez Roque. "After exhausting its patience and capacity for dialogue and tolerance, Cuba feels obliged to reply to what it considers to be the European Union's hypocritical and opportunist behaviour", the foreign minister added. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro has slammed the EU's decision to scale back its diplomatic ties with Cuba as "grossly insolent", calling the leaders of Spain and Italy "fascists and bandits" for spearheading the anti-Cuba measures. Castro appeared on Cuban television to blast the EU's unanimous decision to review its common relationship with Cuba because of flagrant human rights violations. Castro singled out Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar calling him "a little Fuhrer with a mustache and Nazi-fascist ideology." "They (Spain and Italy) deserve these protest marches," Castro said during the four-hour television special dedicated to the EU conflict. Castro hinted that the Spanish embassy has been acting in collusion with US interests and ordered a review of Cuba's 1996 treaty with Spain concerning the Spanish Cultural Center -- which he described as "Cuban property" -- because the center "has been used for everything except Spanish culture. "If their mission as diplomats in Cuba is simply to maintain relations with mercenaries in the pay of the United States, then they are not wanted here," Castro said " "El Comandante", in the late night television address characterized by his poor diction which at times made it difficult to understand his words clearly, said of (dictator Francisco) Franco: "Franco himself was more astute, cautious, operated and kept an absolute tenacity with respect to Cuba." (June, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro said that the European Union (EU) would have the responsibility for an eventual US bombing of Cuba, because it undersigned a declaration condemning the government of the Caribbean island. "I want the record to show that if such a thing occurs [US military attack], those principally guilty will be those who have underwritten this document", the president declared in a special live broadcast on national radio and television. (June, Foreign Affairs)

EU spokesman, Diego de Ojeda, declined to specifically address Cuba's charges, instead repeating the bloc's current stance toward the island. "Our main objective is to integrate Cuba back into the community of democratic and market economy nations, of which Cuba is an exception in her neighborhood," De Ojeda said. "In the best interest of both Cuba and ourselves and Cuban citizens, we need Cuba to at the very least respect a minimum standard of the most basic human rights." (June, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro said that Europe should keep its mouth closed, because the mute do not speak, alluding to what he defined as the European Union's (EU) double morality regarding Cuba. The president spoke at the closing of the third Culture and Development Congress that took place in Havana, with the attendance of 800 delegates from 50 countries and 17 international organizations. Castro warned that massive demonstrations outside the Spanish and Italian embassies were just the beginning of what he called a "proper response" to a European Union declaration against his government. "The declaration, the sanction, the punishment by the European Union make it necessary for us to initiate a proper response," Castro said in his speech. (June, Foreign Affairs)

European Union Commission President Romano Prodi said that the EU's sanctions against Cuba were "absolutely inevitable" because of the communist government's recent behavior. Commenting to reporters in the southern Italian city of Lecce, Prodi justified the EU's measures, which were fiercely criticized by the Cuban government, and said "there was no way to avoid them." (June, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro's government took its first major step in its anti-Europe campaign, taking control of the Spanish Embassy's cultural center. In 1995, Spain and Cuba agreed to establish a Spanish Cultural Center in the Cuban capital. The center, which opened in 1997, has been run until now by the Spanish International Cooperation Agency. Castro announced that he would give instructions to rescind the agreement and turn the Spanish Cultural Center into one that would bear the name of poet Federico Garcia Lorca, who was killed by fascists during the Spanish Civil War. (June, Foreign Affairs)

European Union foreign ministers said recent anti-European demonstrations in Havana were "unacceptable" and reiterated their demand that Cuba end its brutal crackdown on democratic protesters. The 15 ministers said they had continuing "grave concerns about the serious deterioration of the human rights situation" in Cuba, adding recent protests against the EU, led by Fidel Castro, did not help. "The behavior of the Cuban authorities toward the EU, its member states and acceding states (were) unacceptable," the ministers said in a statement. They added that they would "continue to monitor" the situation in Cuba, and especially how Cuban opposition leaders and supporters were being treated. Beyond saying that they had started a "review of relations" with Cuba, the foreign ministers did not discuss whether the EU should impose economic or further political sanctions against Castro. (June, Foreign Affairs)

The European Union's top foreign affairs representative said that the situation in Cuba was dramatic and becoming downright "grotesque." "Unfortunately, there's not much we can do," Spain's Javier Solana told reporters, referring to possible EU measures to end the crisis in Europe's relations with the Caribbean island. According to Solana, "there would have to be profound changes in Cuba, a country that is becoming very difficult to understand, even for people who can see the bigger picture." Regarding changes that might be adopted in the upcoming review of the EU's common policy toward Cuba, Solana has said that it "would be difficult to make it harsher," vowing to reject any decision "which could imply actions affecting the Cuban people." (June, Foreign Affairs)

Several members of the European Parliament (MEP) are calling on EU leaders to pursue a yet tougher course against Fidel Castro's regime. In a letter to the three EU presidents (of the Parliament, Council and

Commission) and to the EU's chief for foreign affairs, Javier Solana, a group of MEPs headed by Portuguese conservative MEP, José Ribeiro e Castro have asked the EU to step up contacts with Cuban dissidents. As a show of solidarity with the Cuban opposition MEPs have asked leaders to contact, Oswaldo Payá, a leading dissident in Havana and invite him to meet with the leaders at the highest level. This would also allow Mr Payá to personally inform Europeans about the current situation on the island. (June, Foreign Affairs)

The European Union heads of state or government have condemned as "totally unacceptable" the recent behaviour of Cuban authorities regarding the EU and expressed concern over "the violation of fundamental freedoms in Cuba." The 25 EU heads of state or government thus support the position adopted by their foreign ministers, ratifying at the same time the punitive measures and diplomatic sanctions announced on June 5. (June, Foreign Affairs)

The European Commission considers Cuba's ratification of the lengthy sentences imposed on dissidents a sign that Cuban leaders do not understand the damage that suppression of free speech does to the island's international image. A spokesman for the European Commission said the court action constitutes "a confirmation that the Cuban regime has still not understood that [its behavior] is very harmful to its international image and its relations with the European Union." (June, Foreign Affairs)

The fifteen EU foreign affairs ministers have begun the revision of their common position on Cuba. They have already decided to participate in a UN meeting on desertification that will be held in Havana. (July, Foreign Affairs)

The Cuban National Association of Writers and Artists (UNEAC) condemned the EU attempt to restrict cultural exchange between its member countries and Cuba. The denunciation took place during a gala concert at the Amadeo Roldán Theatre in Havana in remembrance of the 214th anniversary of the storming of the Bastille. Cuban Minister of Culture Abel Prieto was in attendance. (July, Foreign Affairs)

The EU Council diplomatic representatives approved a document harshly condemning human rights violations in Cuba. The document that will be submitted to the Ministers, says that respect for human rights has deteriorated in Cuba since December and economic reforms remain conspicuous by their absence. But it says also that the EU intends to continue dialogue with Havana - because it is the most constructive way to achieve political, economic and civil rights reforms - and that it is willing to provide aid, where possible via non-governmental organisations, to promote democratisation and improve living standards for ordinary Cubans. (July, Foreign Affairs)

The foreign ministers of the European Union approved a document that denounces human rights violations in Cuba but at the same time calls for continued "constructive engagement" with the communist-ruled island. The document outlines detailed cases from this year that highlight the "serious" deterioration of basic human rights under the Fidel Castro regime. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro responded to European Union criticism of human rights abuses in Cuba by rejecting EU aid and closing the door on political contacts. "Cuba does not need the aid of the European Union to survive," Castro said in a speech to 10,000 supporters marking the 50th anniversary of the assault he led on the Santiago army garrison that launched his revolution. "The government of Cuba, out of a basic sense of dignity, relinquishes any aid or remnant of humanitarian aid that may be offered by the European Commission and the governments of the European Union," Castro said. He accused the EU of kowtowing to pressure from the United States to censure Cuba and called Europe the "Trojan horse of a superpower." "They are full of hatred against Cuba," he told the crowd. "They don't forgive that we have demonstrated that socialism is (...) a thousand times more humane than the rotten system which they have adopted." (July, Foreign Affairs)

The European Union has said it will continue to offer aid to Cuba, despite Fidel Castro's denunciation of the EU as the United States' "Trojan horse". In a statement, the EU's executive arm said it regretted Mr

Castro's remarks but intended to continue offering its support in the absence of an official Cuban request not to do so. (July, Foreign Affairs)

The Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs dispatched a letter to the European Commission and the embassies of the fifteen in Havana, confirming the Cuban rejection of further EU humanitarian aid. In 2003, Brussels was planning to put Euro 5.5 million into development projects in Cuba, with the total value of each EU member state's projected contribution adding to this figure. (July, Foreign Affairs)

The Cuban government has officially confirmed that it is turning its back on EU aid. In a letter sent to Member States' embassies in Havana and to the European Commission, it says the Cuban government has decided to reject official development aid sent to Cuba by the EU, noting that the practical implications of the decision will be detailed in time by the Cuban foreign investment ministry. The Cuban decision is in reaction to "unacceptable conditions" policy of the European Union, notes the letter, which confirms the statements made by Fidel Castro. (August, Exile Community)

Fidel Castro launched a new tirade against all those who have criticized his government's human rights record, telling them to "go wash out their mouths, have a good gargle" for besmirching his country's good name. "Go ahead and offer a million dollars, or 20 million, to the first person who can show there has ever been a single man tortured or an extrajudicial execution in the 44 years of revolution," Castro told over 1500 nursing school graduates. "What are they going to tell us?" he asked and made an obvious swipe at the European Union. "These are the shameless ones who have killed, executed, started wars, shed so much blood, defended their colonial or imperial interests and condemned millions of human beings to poverty and under-development," Castro said in his three-hour Havana harangue, "They want to tell us off? Better they should go wash out their mouths, have a good gargle, and use whatever they've got handy to sterilize their mouths before they utter the name of Cuba, the most exemplary country there ever has been." (August, Foreign Affairs)

According to the spokesman of the European Union's Executive, Erick Maner, the EU is awaiting for clarification from the Cuban government as to how it intends to implement its decision to reject EU's assistance. The spokesman said the European Commission "regrets" the decision adopted by the Cuban government. (August, Foreign Affairs)

The European Union development assistance that Cuba now refuses to accept was always more a "publicity stunt that real humanitarian aid," Fidel Castro told Paraguayans in his latest caustic tirade against his former Old World friends. "Europe is guilty of a naive and ridiculous farce," he said in a five-hour berating of the governments that dared to criticize Cuba's human rights record, that he delivered in Paraguay. He told a packed soccer stadium that "Often we spend three years discussing (aid projects) with them, so that they can travel first-class in their airlines and stay at five-star hotels, and when they get here it just goes on and on." (August, Foreign Affairs)

The European Union said it had seen no movement by Cuba to meet EU worries over human rights violations. The EU, Cuba's main trade partner, source of tourists and foreign investment, was angered by the island's execution of three men who hijacked a boat to try to make it to the United States and the jailing of 75 dissidents for up to 28 years. "We have to say that the Cuban government has not taken a single positive step to meet the goals that Europe has set and in fact the situation of human rights has worsened yet further," said Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini. Frattini, whose country holds the rotating EU presidency, complained to the European Parliament that Cuba had to reinstate a moratorium on the death penalty and called on the government of Fidel Castro to release political prisoners. (September, Foreign Affairs)

The European Parliament condemned the "persistent and flagrant" violation of human rights in Cuba and called for the release of jailed opposition activists. EU legislators approved a 14-point resolution after a debate on relations between the European Union and Cuba, which have been severely strained following the latest wave of repression and arrests by Fidel Castro's regime. The parliament expressed regret for "the

lack of economic and social reforms in Cuba." The resolution also called for "the immediate release" of all jailed Cuban opponents and independent journalists, and reminded authorities in the island nation that "no law can restrict the right to freedom of expression." The document established that, since the EU last evaluated its position toward Cuba in 2002, "not only have no positive steps been taken by the Cuban government, but the human rights situation has drastically deteriorated." The European Parliament expressed regret at Cuba's decision to turn down the EU's offer for humanitarian aid, and reiterated that "the European Union's commitment and willingness to lend assistance to the Cuban people remain unchanged." Parliament asked for last year's Sakharov Prize winner Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas and Cuban opposition leader to be invited as soon as possible for an official visit to the EU. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro lumped Western Europe with his archenemy the United States vowing that "both of them together will not be able to defeat the Cuban revolution." In a speech launching the new school year, the aging autocrat declared: "The name of Cuba will go down in history because of what it has done and is doing for humanity in the fields of education, culture and health." He said these contributions continue even though the island is suffering from an embargo imposed "by the world's only superpower and is essentially being blockaded by Europe." "Both powers together can't defeat the Cuban revolution," Castro insisted. "Among other reasons, because together they don't have and never will have the human capital and moral values required to accomplish what socialist Cuba has," the world's longest-ruling leader insisted. (September, Foreign Affairs)

The dispute between Cuba and the European Union (EU), which brought about the cancellation of cooperation programs and the disengagement of the EU, has given way to a silent diplomatic "war". "Neither a visa request nor discussions on a development project can be conducted without a direct bilateral contact", regretted Sven Kühn von Burgsdorff, representative of the European Commission in Cuba. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro has lashed out against American and European Union policies toward his island state. "Only a country such as this can sing the truths of the United States and Europe, and tell them they are getting a bad humanitarian image," Castro said. The Cuban leader spoke during a closing address Sunday to a Congress of The Committees of the Defence of the Revolution in Havana. "We don't need you in order to live, creators of poverty, of exploitation and misery," Castro added in remarks reported by the state press agency. The foreign press were not invited to hear Castro's reported three-hour speech at Havana's Karl Marx theatre, which was attended by some 1,500 delegates from across Cuba. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba has been "totally exonerated" of any responsibility for the war of words and snubs that led to a breakdown in its formerly cozy relations with the European Union, a senior Cuban official has said. Deputy Foreign Minister Angel Dalmau accused the Europeans of using a "double standard" when it criticized the Cuban regime for imprisoning 75 peaceful dissidents and independent journalists and executing three young men who staged a failed hijacking. Speaking at the opening of a seminar on European studies, Dalmau said "the European attitude cannot be justified" by unsupported claims that its own ideas of what constitutes human rights and democracy are universally valid for all. The thrust of his arguments was based on a kind of political relativism: that under the guise of "human rights" Europe was seeking to "impose its own notions and standards on all other human beings, without regard for their differences". He argued that Brussels has neither the right nor the authority to subject the rest of the world to its opinions nor to use them as a stick to beat "the political system that the vast majority of Cubans have decided we want for ourselves". (September, Foreign Affairs)

The president of the Cuban National Assembly (Parliament), Ricardo Alarcón, criticized the EU position on the US-Cuba conflict. Alarcón, who was participating in debates of the 11th International Conference on European Studies, regretted what he considers "a change" on the EU position towards Cuba. "The Torricelli Act has now become more a European law than a US one", emphasized Alarcón, during a special speech to Cuban and foreigners attending a European Studies Conference. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba said it wanted better relations with the European Union, but insisted that as long as the EU did not review its anti-Cuba stand, relations would not reach the levels they once had. That was the core of the message delivered by Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, during the last day of debates of the 11th International Conference of European Studies, a week-long event that gathered over 50 academics and experts from 15 countries here in Havana. "Our hope is that there is rectification, a serious discussion that could lead relations along a path of respect and cooperation. We want to have relations with Europe, we are not pleased not to have them, but we also have moral values, we have principles, we have the right to be respected," said Pérez Roque, noting that Cuba "honestly believe(s) that, in the current situation, the governments of the European Union have not acted with enough maturity, good will, and open-mindedness that this situation required". (October, Foreign Affairs)

The European Commission has asked the Cuban government to consider the new batch of signatures submitted in support of the Varela Project -- a "legal" initiative within the Cuban constitutional framework -- said to the media Chris Patten, commissioner in charge of foreign relations. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Arco Progresista, a coalition of moderate Cuban dissident groups, described as "positive" Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque's declarations aimed at "overcoming" the differences between Cuba and the European Union. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Although relations between Cuba and the European Union (EU) are in crisis, the European bloc is still willing to engage in political dialogue and discuss aid and cooperation, said the EU business attaché in the island, Sven Kühn von Burgsdorff. At a time when relations between EU authorities and the socialist government of Fidel Castro have hit rock bottom, what it is necessary is to seek common ground, said the diplomat. "We are working on that, but it takes two to tango -- or to dance salsa," said Kühn von Burgsdorff in an interview. Kühn von Burgsdorff heads the office of the European Commission -- the EU executive branch -- in Havana, which was inaugurated in mid-March by the bloc's Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Paul Neilson. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Relations between Cuba and the European Union are "frozen", Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister said. In Pérez Roque's opinion, the attitude that Havana has perceived in Latin America "stresses even more the isolation of the European Union's (EU) policy towards Cuba. Cuba does not feel isolated; Cuba feels that it has the support of the European peoples." Pérez Roque believes that - encouraged by the governments of Spain, the United Kingdom, and Italy - the EU has "given in" to US policy, but noted that his country would like to maintain normal relations with the 15-nation bloc. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Four months after Brussels imposed sanctions to condemn the sentencing of 75 political dissidents to long prison terms EU-Cuban relations continue "frozen," Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said. Meeting with journalists at a reception organized by Havana's Apostolic Nunciature, the foreign minister stressed that there was no solution in sight for the diplomatic fallout as long as EU ambassadors insist on mingling with dissidents during their receptions. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Once again the European Commission has condemned through its External Relations Commissioner, Chris Patten, "the ill-treatment of dissidents by Cuban authorities." "The European Union firmly objects to the continued imprisonments and Cuba's break of the moratorium on the death penalty," said Patten in the European Parliament. (November, Foreign Affairs)

The European Union (EU) has announced that it will not enter into political dialogue with Cuba in December, as it has done for the past two years, and that it has no intention of revising its common position on the island. In an interview with the press, an official said that the basis for meeting simply was not there. Such meetings have been held annually since 2001. The next one was due to take place in the Cuban capital, Havana, next month but a recent crackdown on dissidence on the island followed by diplomatic sanctions from the EU have soured relations. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba has told European diplomats not to bother sending Christmas presents this year. That's how much relations have soured since the Europeans waged a "cocktail war" over human-rights issues on the island, diplomats said. Fidel Castro's government has closed its doors to European diplomats in Havana, in retaliation for European criticism of Castro's crackdown on dissent. According to diplomats, the EU complained to Cuba that the lack of access keeps its embassies from functioning properly as provided for in the Vienna Convention. The freeze-out is hindering consular matters, leaving visiting European tourists at risk, and also causing problems for businessmen, the Europeans complained. A Cuban official replied that the EU was meddling in Cuba's internal affairs, one diplomatic source said. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba's Foreign Ministry has told some European diplomats there's no need for Christmas gift-giving this year. The most recent rebuke is yet another sign of how badly relations have deteriorated between the island and the EU, Cuba's top trading partner. In diplomatic circles it's widely known as the "cocktail war," where some European diplomats are routinely frozen out of official Cuban functions. "They communicated to us that given the circumstances we should abstain from sending Christmas gifts to Cuban officials," a European diplomat said. "Anything we send will be returned," a diplomat from another embassy added. (December, Foreign Affairs)

It is reported that Cuba and the European Union had contacts aimed at reestablishing normal relations. The sources say that Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque had a meeting with ambassadors from Belgium, Portugal and Greece. These countries have not officially invited Cuban dissidents to their national celebrations. Sources say that the minister proposed to the EU ambassadors a number of changes on Cuba's position towards human rights, if dissidents are not invited to official activities in European embassies. The changes that Cuba might initiate include the signing of a UN convention on economic and social rights, an indefinite moratorium of the death penalty, and allowing European diplomats to visit the jails where political prisoners are been kept. (December, Foreign Affairs)

France

A new phase in the cooperation between Cuba and France began with the signing of a cooperation agreement between the two nations at the end of the 12th session of the bilateral Mixed Commission. The agreement was signed by Cuban Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation Minister, Marta Lomas, and French Minister-Delegate in charge of Cooperation and Francophone Affairs Pierre, Andre Wiltzer. (February, Foreign Affairs)

The French Foreign Affairs Ministry's spokesperson released a statement by the French government concerning the arrests of dissidents in Cuba. "Apparently," says the communiqué, "this operation is targeting many independent journalists, opposition members, intellectuals, (who are being) arrested because of their personal opinions. France demands details from the Cuban authorities regarding this matter. That wave of arrests would be at odds with the freedoms and democratic pluralism, (and) principles that France and the European Union wish to promote in their relations with the rest of the countries." (March, Foreign Affairs)

In an article published in the weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur*, former French socialist Prime Minister Laurent Fabius criticized France's "silence" in the wake of the human rights violations committed by the government of Fidel Castro, whom he described as a "dictator." (June, Foreign Affairs)

France decided to reassess its cooperation with Cuba given the human rights situation on the island, announced the spokesman for the French Foreign Ministry, Francois Rivesseau. In a press conference in Paris, the spokesman said the decision was taken nationally in the wake of the latest developments in Cuba. (June, Foreign Affairs)

France loaded its Embassy's National Day guest list with dissidents this year. Cuban officials stayed away en masse. The July 14 celebration is usually a notable date on Havana's social calendar, a place for officials -- sometimes even Fidel Castro -- to hobnob with diplomats and foreign businessmen and sip French wines.

In a sign of continued tension between Cuba and the European Union, guests said they saw no Cuban officials at all during the embassy reception, though many were invited. A handful turned up at the front gate before the event to turn in their invitations and then walk away. Instead, an unprecedented number of dissidents turned up. If the situation was politicized, "it was due to the government, not to us," said Vladimiro Roca. "The majority of my colleagues and myself are going to attend this celebration not with an attitude of defiance toward the government but defending our essential right to accept any invitation we receive on civilized terms," said Elizardo Sanchez. (July, Foreign Affairs)

The 214th anniversary of the Taking of the Bastille, National Day of France, was celebrated in Havana by the Cuban government with a function held at Víctor Hugo park. Poet Roberto Fernández Retamar, President of the Casa de las Américas, highlighted the influence of La Marseillaise on Cubans, which inspired Cuban National Anthem. Abel Prieto, Minister of Culture, attended the act. (July, Foreign Affairs) 14/7/03)

While France believes that Cuba is misguided with regards to human rights observance, it also considers that the Cuban issue should "not be addressed with embargoes" but with an open dialogue and cooperation, said in Mexico the French Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin. The French government official said that the situation on the island has given Paris "cause for concern". (July, Foreign Affairs) 18/7/03)

France announced that it has called off two institutional exchange programs with Cuba and that it will relocate the French-Cuban Comparative Law Institute, following the revision of its bilateral cooperation ties with the island on account of its poor human rights record. "We have suspended the customs and law enforcement components of our administrative and judicial collaboration, which started in 2001," explained a French Foreign Ministry spokesperson. Also, a project "that should have been under way with Cuban authorities concerning geographical data and disasters" has been "cancelled" and "the decision has been made to move the offices of the French-Cuban Comparative Law Institute, currently located at a Cuban government-owned building, to a private one." (July, Foreign Affairs)

The government of France expressed concern over the health of jailed Cuban dissident Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello. The French foreign ministry spokesperson, Hervé Ladsous, said that France's embassy in Havana has been instructed to pass France's concerns to Cuban authorities. (August, Foreign Affairs)

France is exploring new "ways" to channel aid to the Cuban population after Fidel Castro cancelled cooperation programs between the two countries. The Cuban decision has "undoubtedly had an adverse effect" on the population and "we are going to search for other means so that the population can benefit" from our aid, said the spokesman of the French Foreign Ministry, Hervé Ladsous. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Germany

Claudia Roth, the German government's human rights spokesman, harshly criticized the arrests of dissidents in Cuba. "The trial flagrantly breaches the most basic elements of the rule of law and human rights. The defense had neither the chance to meet the accused nor to read the charge sheet in advance." (April, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba denied the Germany's commissioner for Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, Claudia Roth, permission to enter the island telling her she would not be welcome. Roth, a member of the Schroeder's coalition partner Green Party, had planned on travelling to Havana to check up on the 75 dissidents and independent journalists who were sentenced to up to 28 years in jail in summary trials earlier this year. (September, Foreign Affairs)

The German government protested against Cuba's refusal to allow Germany's adviser on human rights, Claudia Roth, to visit the island. "The current self-isolation of Cuba is hurting the Cuban population," the foreign ministry said in a statement. It said Cuba's decision not to issue Roth an entry visa "is not in line

with international practice. Neither is it the positive signal hoped for from the Cuban government."
(September, Foreign Affairs)

Greece

The Government of Greece refused Fidel Castro's request to visit Athens during the 2004 Olympic Games, informed the daily "To Wima." "Fidel wants to come, Athens says no", reads the headline quoting a spokesperson from the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to the spokesperson, Athens cannot ignore the political decisions of the European Union, which reduced substantially the level of diplomatic relations with Havana in the wake of the arrest and sentencing of more than 70 Cuban dissidents last April.
(August, Foreign Affairs)

Athens 2004 Olympic Games and increasing bilateral collaboration in sports were discussed by a Greek governmental delegation at the Cuban National Sports, Physical Education and Recreation Institute (INDER) in Havana. Humberto Rodríguez González, President of the INDER met with Petros Tsokas, Councillor of the Greek Vice-minister for Culture and Sports. Tsokas, highlighted that there is a huge interest in Greece in strengthening collaboration with Cuba, regarding boxing, volleyball, athletics, baseball and others, like fencing. (October, Foreign Affairs) 8/10/03)

Italy

Italian Deputy Foreign Minister Mario Baccini regarded as excellent the links between Cuba and his country during his talks with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque in Havana. "We have all the necessary elements to foster common development in both trade and culture", the Italian minister told the press. (March, Foreign Affairs)

The Italian lower house approved a motion calling on the government to halt Italy's economic aid to Cuba if dissidents are not freed and executions are not stopped. The motion - sponsored by the centre-right ruling coalition but partially backed by the left as well - also urged the government to seek a EU-wide common position of pressure on Cuba. The move could be helped by Italy's forthcoming term of EU presidency, scheduled to start in July. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro has slammed the EU's decision to scale back its diplomatic ties with Cuba as "grossly insolent", calling the leaders of Spain and Italy "fascists and bandits" for spearheading the anti-Cuba measures. Castro appeared on Cuban television to blast the EU's unanimous decision to review its common relationship with Cuba because of flagrant human rights violations. Castro singled out Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar calling him "a little Fuhrer with a mustache and Nazi-fascist ideology." "They (Spain and Italy) deserve these protest marches," Castro said during the four-hour television special dedicated to the EU conflict. Castro hinted that the Spanish embassy has been acting in collusion with US interests and ordered a review of Cuba's 1996 treaty with Spain concerning the Spanish Cultural Center -- which he described as "Cuban property" -- because the center "has been used for everything except Spanish culture. "If their mission as diplomats in Cuba is simply to maintain relations with mercenaries in the pay of the United States, then they are not wanted here," Castro said " "El Comandante", in the late night television address characterized by his poor diction which at times made it difficult to understand his words clearly, said of (dictator Francisco) Franco: "Franco himself was more astute, cautious, operated and kept an absolute tenacity with respect to Cuba." (June, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro led hundreds of thousands of people in a march outside the Spanish Embassy to protest what he sees as Europe's alignment with US policies toward the communist island. Surrounded by security men and his closest aides, the 76-year-old Castro led a river of people past the white, colonial Spanish mission. The demonstration lasted about two hours but Castro stayed for only about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, a few kilometres away, Castro's brother and designated successor, Defence Minister General Raul Castro, headed a march outside Italy's Embassy. One sign showed Italian Prime Silvio Berlusconi with strings attached to his hands. "Berlusconi: are you, or are you not a puppet?" it said. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro's accusations and threats are "unacceptable", said a leading member of Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia party. The Vice-President of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Darío Rivolta, said "Cuba has everything to be part of the civilized world, but its dictator Fidel Castro, a serial killer using terror as a political weapon, stands in its way." (June, Foreign Affairs)

The Italian Foreign Ministry summoned Cuban ambassador in Rome, María de los Ángeles Flores, to express its "deep indignation" over Fidel Castro's offensive statements against Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. The Secretary-General at the Italian Foreign Ministry, Giuseppe Baldocci, said that Castro's statements were beyond compare, which the Italian government along with most Italian political forces find unacceptable. Baldocci asked the Cuban Ambassador to remind her superiors "their responsibilities for safeguarding" the Italian diplomatic mission in Havana, their staff and the many Italian citizens who travel to Cuba on business and pleasure trips. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Franco Frattini, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, said that "Castro's statements were threatening, saying that these ambassadors might not enjoy our acceptance anymore." "It is clear that our government must act as well as Europe", added Frattini. (June, Foreign Affairs)

The President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Pierferdinando Casini, described as "shameful" Castro's attack against the governments of Spain and Italy. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini added his voice to the chorus of protest against Fidel Castro following his recent attacks on the European Union. The minister stressed he was in favor of urgent humanitarian aid to Cuba, but opposed to any kind of financial help that would "encourage the regime to continue along its current path". Frattini made his comments ahead of a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Luxembourg which will discuss further action against the Cuban government following its latest crackdown on dissidents. (June, Foreign Affairs)

The Italian Presidency protested on behalf of the EU against the treatment of sick dissidents imprisoned in Cuba. A press release issued by the Italian foreign ministry notes that Italy and the European Union are extremely concerned at the state of health of several dissidents currently imprisoned on the island, particularly the economists Oscar Espinosa Chepe and Martha Beatriz Roque. Cuba's ambassador to Rome, Hugo Ramos Milanés, was summoned to the Italian foreign affairs ministry. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Luxemburg

Luxemburg's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lydie Polfer, is currently in Havana to meet with high-ranking Cuban officials. Polfer met with Cuba's Foreign Trade Minister Raúl de la Nuez and Ricardo Guerrero, Cuba's Deputy Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation. They reviewed bilateral economic and commercial issues. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Portugal

Spain and Portugal criticized the way Cuban authorities have treated diplomatic missions accredited in Havana. However, they are willing to dialogue. These pronouncements are part of the conclusions of the Spanish-Portuguese Summit, which took place in Figueira da Foz, Portugal, under the presidency of the respective heads of states of Spain and Portugal, José María Aznar, and José Manuel Durao. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Russia

Moscow considers Cuba its key partner in Latin America. This was disclosed by Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov when opening the talks with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque. The North Korean crisis should be resolved through diplomacy, by providing security guarantees for the countries of the

region and keeping the Korean peninsula free of nuclear weapons, says a joint communique signed by Ivanov and Pérez Roque following the talks. They also called for an immediate halt in the US-led war on Iraq while warning against the detrimental consequences of the war in the region. In their joint statement, Ivanov and Perez Roque stressed the US and British military action in Iraq must be stopped as soon as possible. The two ministers also called for a fair settlement of the Mideast conflict on the basis of UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and all other related resolutions adopted by the United Nations. They pointed out that the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and statehood within stable and safe borders and the Israelis' right to a terror-free life constituted the foundation for building a peaceful future in the Middle East. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Fernando Remírez began a visit to Russia to strengthen inter-ministerial contacts and bilateral relations between Havana and Moscow. Two official Russian delegations, one from the Foreign Affairs Ministry and the other from the Federation Council -- the Upper Chamber of the Russian parliament -- recently visited Havana. They advocated improved relations between the two countries and called for an end to Washington's hostile policies against the Cuban Revolution. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Fernando Remírez de Estenoz has expressed his optimism about the island's relations with Russia. At the end of an official visit to Moscow, the Cuban official stated that "both sides agree on the need to advance in the development and strengthening of bilateral relations." Cuba's deputy foreign minister told reporters at a news conference in Moscow that there are prospects to develop greater interests and benefits in trade between Cuba and Russia, especially in the areas of tourism, machinery, the construction industry and the scientific-technical sphere. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Within the framework of his trip to Latin America Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov has made a short stop in Cuba. He had a meeting with Cuban First Deputy Foreign Minister Fernando Remírez. The ministers have discussed various international issues during their talk. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Spain

The Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ana Palacio, affirmed that the Spanish government "does not compromise on matters of human rights, neither in Cuba nor anywhere else." At a joint press conference with her Tunisian counterpart, Habib Ben Yahia, the Spanish Minister said that her government's position is "clear," with regards to the recent events in Cuba. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro questioned the verbal attacks coming from Spain after the execution here of three men who hijacked a passenger ferry and the arrest of 75 people involved in conspiracies at the service of the United States. In his extensive talk Fidel Castro cited the names of former Spanish leader Felipe Gonzalez and his successor Jose Maria Aznar, as among those critical of the Cuban government for holding summary trials and the sentences given to dissidents fabricated by the US Interests Section in Havana. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Spanish President José María Aznar once again condemned Fidel Castro's regime that, he said, continues "to crush, imprison, and execute by firing squad" those who do not share his ideas. Aznar's statements were made during a Spanish municipal electoral campaign meeting. (May, Foreign Affairs)

In an interview published by the newspaper *Página 12*, Fidel Castro made reference to statements he made last April 26, when he accused Aznar of encouraging former U.S. President Bill Clinton to launch an all-out war in Yugoslavia in 1999. "I ask Mr. Aznar to admit or deny this," denounced the Cuban president. (May, Foreign Affairs)

The Executive Committee of the Centrist Democrat International (CDI), presided over by Spanish President José María Aznar, approved a resolution demanding the Cuban government to "immediately cease its acts of violence, repression and terror." (June, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro has slammed the EU's decision to scale back its diplomatic ties with Cuba as "grossly insolent", calling the leaders of Spain and Italy "fascists and bandits" for spearheading the anti-Cuba measures. Castro appeared on Cuban television to blast the EU's unanimous decision to review its common relationship with Cuba because of flagrant human rights violations. Castro singled out Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar calling him "a little Fuhrer with a mustache and Nazi-fascist ideology." "They (Spain and Italy) deserve these protest marches," Castro said during the four-hour television special dedicated to the EU conflict. Castro hinted that the Spanish embassy has been acting in collusion with US interests and ordered a review of Cuba's 1996 treaty with Spain concerning the Spanish Cultural Center -- which he described as "Cuban property" -- because the center "has been used for everything except Spanish culture. "If their mission as diplomats in Cuba is simply to maintain relations with mercenaries in the pay of the United States, then they are not wanted here," Castro said "El Comandante", in the late night television address characterized by his poor diction which at times made it difficult to understand his words clearly, said of (dictator Francisco) Franco: "Franco himself was more astute, cautious, operated and kept an absolute tenacity with respect to Cuba." (June, Foreign Affairs)

In response to her Cuban counterpart's allegations, Spanish Foreign Affairs Minister, Ana Palacio, said that the EU's common positions are adopted by "consensus". "I reserve any comment on such opinions since ours is a common position reached by consensus," she added. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro led hundreds of thousands of people in a march outside the Spanish Embassy to protest what he sees as Europe's alignment with US policies toward the communist island. Surrounded by security men and his closest aides, the 76-year-old Castro led a river of people past the white, colonial Spanish mission. The demonstration lasted about two hours but Castro stayed for only about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, a few kilometres away, Castro's brother and designated successor, Defence Minister General Raul Castro, headed a march outside Italy's Embassy. One sign showed Italian Prime Silvio Berlusconi with strings attached to his hands. "Berlusconi: are you, or are you not a puppet?" it said. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Former head of the Spanish government Felipe González said "Fidel is pathetic. Now he's like Franco when he was dying." González also thinks that "the Cuban transition will not be very dramatic." (June, Foreign Affairs)

During a meeting with the press, Spanish Deputy Prime Minister and Economy Minister Rodrigo Rato denied accusations made by the Cuban Government against Spain. "The Cuban government is free to organize demonstrations in front of any embassy, but instead it should guarantee respect for human rights and better conditions for its citizens." He added that Spain "is a friend of Cuba." "What we want to see is a change in position on certain matters that clearly violate the rights of Cuban citizens," he said. (June, Foreign Affairs)

The First Vice-President of the Spanish government, Mariano Rajoy, refused to comment on Cuban government accusations against Spanish premier José M. Aznar saying they "speak for themselves." (June, Foreign Affairs)

Spanish Foreign Minister Ana Palacio reiterated that Madrid would not be drawn into a verbal battle with Fidel Castro over the EU's decision to slap political sanctions on the communist island for rights abuses. "With respect to certain statements (from Cuba) aimed against two states -- Italy and Spain, the position of the (Spanish) government is to not enter into a spiral of verbal abuse," Palacio said upon arriving at an EU meeting of foreign ministers to discuss the bloc's relations with Cuba. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba's Ambassador to Spain, Isabel Allende, has demanded that her country be treated equally and with respect by the European Union. During a news conference at the Cuban Embassy in Madrid, Havana's representative noted that her country's relations with Spain have always been based on mutual respect, non-intervention in the internal affairs of each country and the right of self-determination. The Spanish government is solely responsible for the deterioration of relations with Cuba, the ambassador said, (June, Foreign Affairs)

Spain's Foreign Ministry summoned the Cuban Ambassador to that country, Isabel Allende, to express the discomfort of Spanish authorities over the recent behaviour of the Castro regime. (June, Foreign Affairs)

The Cuban government placed a billboard-sized reproduction of Pablo Picasso's Spanish Civil War mural "Guernica" in front of Spain's embassy in Havana. "Right here a monument to Spanish culture will be erected," reads a banner above the artwork, while on the bottom part - in large block letters - is the word "antifascist." (June, Foreign Affairs)

The government of Fidel Castro has sent a reassuring message to Spanish and Italian businesspeople amid the recent spat with the European Union. The head of Cuban diplomacy, Felipe Pérez Roque, met with about a hundred Spanish businesspeople to assure them that the current state of relations with the Aznar government does not have anything to do with their business relations. These "will not be affected", he added. (June, Foreign Affairs)

The Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ana Palacio, declared that Fidel Castro's regime is "depleted" and would not outlast its founder because of its caudillo-centred nature. Palacio asserted that, therefore, "the Cuban (democratic) transition has already started," "the Cuban Suárez is already on the island" and that Cuba "in the near future" will be integrated to the Western democratic world. (July, Foreign Affairs)

During his speech at the 50th anniversary of the attack on Moncada barracks, Fidel Castro insulted Spanish Prime Minister Jose María Aznar, whom he described as a "character of fascist stock and ideology," for supposedly engineering the EU's censure of Cuba for jailing peaceful dissidents and executing hijackers. The Cuban leader said Spain's education system was equivalent to that of a "banana republic" and "an embarrassment for Europe". (July, Foreign Affairs)

The Popular Party's spokesperson before the Spanish Parliament's Foreign Affairs Commission, Gustavo Arístegui, asserted that Fidel Castro cannot afford to "lecture" the European Union (EU) on matters of "democracy." (July, Foreign Affairs)

The United Left Party's spokesperson before the Spanish Parliament, Felipe Alcaraz, thinks it "makes sense" that Cuban President Fidel Castro blames his Spanish counterpart, José María Aznar, for the current European policy toward the island. He also warned Aznar that if he continues to "put conditions" on the "sovereignty" of the Caribbean State, the Cuban people will "rally even more" around their leader. (July, Foreign Affairs)

During an interview with the Mexican newspaper "Reforma", the Spanish president, José María Aznar, said that "the way things are on the island, the Cuban government is going nowhere. On the contrary, it will have increasingly bigger problems. Isolating itself will only bring more suffering to the Cuban people". (August, Foreign Affairs)

The Spanish Cultural Center in Havana gave a gala farewell party before it is closed by order of Fidel Castro. Senior European diplomats were among the hundreds of people that had to be turned away from the building on Havana's Malecón avenue that has already been emptied of most its furniture and fixtures after Castro gave the staff its marching orders last June. Distinguished figures from Spain that spoke to Cuban audiences at the center include film director Pedro Almodóvar, and writers Manuel Vicent, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán and Almudena Grandés. Outstanding names on the Cuban cultural scene such as writers Roberto Fernández Retamar and Miguel Barnet and musicians Leo Brouwer y Chucho Valdés also made appearances at the center. (August, Foreign Affairs)

The Cuban government took another step in deepening the institutional crisis with Europe by closing the Spanish cultural center in Havana. Spain is the first European country to be sanctioned by Fidel Castro's regime, in what is thought to be a rebuke for criticism of the human rights situation on the island. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Spanish president, José María Aznar, highlighted steps made by Lybia to normalize its presence in the international community. Contrasting Gadafi's attitude with that of Fidel Castro, Aznar criticized Castro's resistance to change. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, speaking in Miami, called for a democratic transition in Cuba that was "led from within" and included Cubans living on the island and in exile. Aznar spoke to representatives of about a dozen Cuban exile groups in Miami as part of his official visit to the United States, during which he visited several Florida cities. Aznar also condemned the death penalty under any circumstance - alluding to the summary executions by Cuban authorities of three ferry hijackers - and gave his support to the dissident Varela Project movement for its efforts to bring about a peaceful transition of government on the communist island. The Spanish leader added that it was important not to fall prey to the provocations of the Castro government, which has stepped up its criticism of Spain and the European Union in recent months. (September, Foreign Affairs)

The Spanish Congress approved a bill deploring the closure of the Spanish Cultural Centre in Havana. Four parties, including the Socialist Party and the Popular Party, are asking Cuba "to respect human rights and to install democracy" in the island. (September, Foreign Affairs)

To commemorate the arrival of Christopher Columbus in America, Spanish Ambassador Jesús Gracia, met at his residency in Havana, with political dissidents and human rights campaigners whose groups were repressed in a brutal crackdown earlier this year. Among the Spanish ambassador's guests were Christian Liberation Movement head Oswaldo Payá; Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo of the Change for Cuba group, and Elizardo Sánchez, a human rights campaigner who has been smeared in the government-controlled press as a "paid informer" Also present were some of wives of some of the 75 independent journalists, peaceful dissidents and rights activists who were rounded up this past spring. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Spanish university rectors were making no secret of their indignation after the government refused to grant a visa to Cuba's Deputy Minister of Education to take part in a professional symposium in Spain. Rodolfo Alarcón had been invited to brief the rectors on Cuba's plans to host an international conclave of university students next year and exchange viewpoints on other matters of professional interest. (October, Foreign Affairs)

According to the vice director of the Spanish Diplomatic Information Office, Manuel Salazar, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not request an interview with Cuban vice minister of Education, Rodolfo Alarcón, as conditional on extending him a visa entry into Spain. Salazar said that the visa was not extended because the Cuban embassy withdrew both Alarcón's passport and his visa application form. However, the Cuban ambassador to Spain, Isabel Allende, reiterated to the press that Spanish authorities made an interview with Alarcón at the Spanish embassy in Havana conditional on extending the visa. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba considers the recent treatment of a Cuban deputy minister by the Spanish Embassy in Havana both impolite and humiliating. In a breach of protocol, the diplomat was told to meet with the Spanish ambassador in order to obtain a visa to travel to Madrid. A Cuban Foreign Affairs Ministry (MINREX) note states that the Spanish Embassy informed the Higher Education Ministry that to receive this visa, it was necessary that the deputy minister meet personally with the ambassador. Deputy Minister Alarcon, who could not attend the activities scheduled in Spain, went to Great Britain where he is meeting with British rectors at the invitation of London Metropolitan University. (October, Foreign Affairs)

While in Brazil, Spanish president José María Aznar Aznar discarded the possibility of expelling Cuba from the Ibero American Summits. But, Aznar asserted that he would work together with Brazilian president Luis Inacio Da Silva to support "the institutionalization of democracy in all country-members of the Summits", during the next Ibero American Summit to be held in Bolivia. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro called his Spanish counterpart, José María Aznar, a "Celestina" for his tour throughout Latin America "recruiting youngsters" for "a war of conquest" against Iraq. "What is the Spanish Celestina doing

recruiting young Latin-Americans for a war of conquest," asked Castro in an over four-hour long speech at the closing ceremony of the 25th Assembly of the Latin American Council on Social Sciences (CLACSO). Celestina is a character in the homonym work by Spanish author Fernando de Rojas (XV century) that represents a go-between who uses all her wiles to seduce others into wrongdoing. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Spain and Portugal criticized the way Cuban authorities have treated diplomatic missions accredited in Havana. However, they are willing to dialogue. These pronouncements are part of the conclusions of the Spanish-Portuguese Summit, which took place in Figueira da Foz, Portugal, under the presidency of the respective heads of states of Spain and Portugal, José María Aznar, and José Manuel Durao. (November, Foreign Affairs)

The Spanish government refused to regularize the situation of a former Cuban high-ranking official who requested protection, informed the digital newspaper Libertad. Although it does not disclose his name, the paper indicates the claimant is a former member of the "Central Commission of Officials", who are directly appointed by the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban immigrants in Spain asked President José María Aznar to adopt "a consistent position" with regards to Cuba and allow them to regularize their situation in that country as political refugees. "We think it is a contradiction that on the one hand the government seems to understand the Cuban people live in a dictatorship and on the other, it turns down almost automatically all requests for political asylum, visa exemption, or regularization by a job offer," indicated a document released in Madrid by the Cuban Centre of Spain and the Spanish-Cuban Foundation. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro received the official delegation from the government of the Principality of Asturias, headed by Justice, Security and Foreign Affairs Advisor Francisco García Villedor. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Switzerland

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has provided up SFr 550,000 (\$405,000) to assist film-makers from poorer countries. The three-year "Open Doors" programme will allow Cuban directors to show their work at the Locarno International Film Festival and bring them face-to-face with European producers to pitch new projects. "The idea is to foster a better understanding of Cuba and to promote cooperation with the Cubans, who are suffering from political isolation and an economic crisis," said SDC spokeswoman Sophie Delessert. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Ukraine

The First Lady of the Ukraine, Liudmila Mikolaivna Kuchma, arrived in Havana. She will complete a full program, including meetings with Government officials and different social sectors, as well as a tour around Pinar del Río and Matanzas provinces. The Ukrainian leader will hold meetings with Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Pérez Roque. She will tour facilities at Tarará, a sanatorium that has assisted 19,000 people since 1990, 16,697 of which were children from the European nation affected by the Chernobyl nuclear accident. (September, Foreign Relations)

United Kingdom

In an unusual move, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office summoned Cuba's Ambassador to that country to express the UK's dismay at the recent arrests of 78 dissidents on the island. This is the first time in at least two and half years that Ambassador José Fernández de Cossio has been called to the visit the British foreign affairs headquarters. "The recent wave of arrests in Cuba is deplorable," said Bill Rammell, minister for Human Rights after the meeting. "These arrests are extremely bad for the image of Cuba, which

has done much to build a society with good social indicators. We will be following the cases closely and are pressing for access to trials." (April, Foreign Affairs)

The UK Government's response to human rights challenges around the world over the last year is set out in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Annual Report on Human Rights, launched by the Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. In the last year the UK Government has taken up human rights concerns, of Cuba, Belarus, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, North Korea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran and Saudi Arabia, amongst many others. (September, Foreign Affairs)

The British Parliament approved a resolution in support of political prisoners in Cuba. "...the Cuban Government continues to hold several hundred political prisoners, whose offences include pro-democracy activism and speaking out against Government policies on issues such as abortion and treatment of the blind". The resolution further notes that among the most prominent cases are human rights activists Dr Oscar Biscet, Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva and Jorge Garcia Perez, all three of whom were arrested after peaceful protests. The note calls upon the Cuban Government to allow peaceful protest on human rights and pro-democracy issues, to release all those held for such activities, and to cease from applying pressure on them or their families; and "urges Her Majesty's Government to place these issues at the core of bilateral talks" (October, Foreign Affairs)

IBERO AMERICAN SUMMITS

Spanish President José María Aznar was asked if Fidel Castro, or any other representative of his government, would attend the next Ibero-American Summit, scheduled for next fall in Bolivia, and whether the event's policies and procedures would be modified to prevent their participation. "We expect rules to be observed, and the summit rules are what they are, and I will not be requesting that they be changed," said Aznar. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Clara Chepe, mother of dissident imprisoned Oscar Espinoza Chepe, has sent a letter to the Ibero-American Heads of State that will meet in Bolivia. In the letter, Clara denounces the ill treatment received by her son in jail, and asks the leaders to vote against Cuba at the 2004 UN Human Rights Commission, in Geneva. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Prominent Cuban dissident Oswaldo Paya made an impassioned appeal to organizers of an Ibero-American summit to speak out on human rights in communist-ruled Cuba. "Silence has been the watchword at all the summits," Paya said in a letter released to the foreign media, even "given the grave human rights situation in Cuba." The letter says that denial of "space" for reading of the message would "extend to the Summit the regime of exclusion that reigns in Cuba." The document recalls that during the 1999 Summit in Havana, Cuban dissident groups issued the "All United" manifesto which proclaimed "the peaceful vocation and the shared principles and values of the majority of non-governmental Cuban organizations." In the document, Paya notes that ever since the Havana conference, he has sent similar missives to every Ibero-American summit, "calling them to solidarity with the Cuban people," and urging them to demand that the island's communist regime "fulfill its commitments to respect human rights and democratize" Cuba. He points out that the majority of the activists who co-signed those documents with him every year are among the 75 peaceful dissidents who were summarily sentenced by Havana to long prison terms in March. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage is en route to Bolivia to attend the XIII Ibero-American Summit in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Lage will preside over the Cuban delegation at the meeting of heads of State from Latin America, Spain and Portugal that will have the challenge of finding solutions to the main social problems of those nations, as identified in the 12 previous summits. A note in Granma daily informed that Chancellor Felipe Pérez Roque, Assistant Chancellor Pedro Nuñez Mosquera, and the Cuban Ambassador to Bolivia Luis Felipe Vázquez are among those accompanying Lage to deal with the central theme of the Summit: Social inclusion, the motor of development, as well as in the bilateral encounters normal for this forum. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban dissidents released a letter addressed to the Ibero-American leaders gathering in Bolivia, reminding them that while they discuss issues with representatives of the Castro regime, scores of prisoners of conscience are languishing in Cuban jails. Two coalitions claiming to represent more than 90 percent of Cuba's internal opposition called for a review of how each of the countries participating in the Ibero-American Summits "fulfills or breaches" resolutions adopted at the annual conclaves. Representatives of the All United Movement and the Assembly for the Promotion of Civil Society provided journalists with the text of the letter. The activists complained about the crackdown earlier this year that landed 75 dissidents, independent journalists and human rights activists in prison for terms averaging 20 years. As a result of these arrests, they said, Cuba has become the world leader in the number of prisoners of conscience relative to the size of its population. And even for those outside of jail, "the life of most of our fellow citizens is characterized by total deprivation of civil and political rights," the letter reads. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba's Vice President Carlos Lage stated that a busy work agenda prevented Fidel Castro from attending the 13th Ibero-American Summit of Heads of States and Governments. When meeting a group of journalists at Tajibos Hotel, venue of the summit of 21 Latin American nations, Spain and Portugal, Lage stated that "everybody knows the Cuban leader's intense dedication, and his personal and conscientious attention to special domestic programs". Lage explained that the president dedicates considerable time to internal social programs and the country's foreign relations, which are led by him. These are the reasons that prevented Fidel Castro from being in Santa Cruz, which "he asked us to pass on to Bolivian President Carlos Mesa", said the vice president. (November, Foreign Affairs)

A group that defends media freedom and imprisoned journalists worldwide has urged heads of state in Latin America, Spain, and Portugal to press the regime of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro to release 75 political dissidents, who earlier in 2003 were arrested and sentenced to up to 28 years in prison. "Reporters Without Borders" said in a statement at the opening of the two-day Ibero-American Summit held in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, that the dissidents were working to "build democracy and the rule of law" in Cuba. Such work corresponded with the final declaration issued at the 2002 Ibero-American summit, said Reporters Without Borders. The imprisoned dissidents include journalists, human rights activists, trade unionists, librarians and political activists. (November, Foreign Affairs)

During a conversation with reporters, Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage expressed his satisfaction for the results of the meeting of Iberoamerican Heads of State and Government. Lage underscored the idea contained in an accord to set up a General Secretariat of these summits. He considered very important to follow standards and avoid bureaucratization. (November, Foreign Affairs)

ISRAEL

The first group of Cuban Jews to visit Jerusalem under Israel's Birthright program traveled to the Western Wall as part of an effort to strengthen ties between Israel and Jewish communities around the world. William Miller, an electronics instructor from Havana, said he got the idea for the visit and sent an e-mail to Birthright to try to set it up. Birthright asked Canadian Jewish groups to help organize the trip. Lorne Klemensberg of the Canada Israel Experience said the Canadian and Cuban Jewish communities have close ties. A Canadian Jewish delegation agreed to sponsor the Cuban delegation. It took the Cuban group a month to get government permission for eight young Cuban Jews to make the trip. Klemensberg said they had to promise to return to Cuba. (August, Foreign Affairs)

LATIN AMERICA

Argentina

Cuban Medical Services International (SERMINCUBA) has begun a program of assistance for small and medium business people in the Argentinean city of Bahía Blanca that will soon be extended throughout the country. The program is based on an agreement signed in Buenos Aires to maintain permanent Cuban health care collaboration, including medical attention in different pathologies and consulting services by Cuban doctors. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Another cargo of 6,7 tons of medicines arrived in Buenos Aires as a donation of Cuba to those damaged by the inundations in the Argentinean city of Santa Fe. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro left for Argentina to attend inauguration of the South American country's president-elect, Nestor Kirchner. (May, Foreign Affairs)

According to government sources, outgoing Argentine President, Eduardo Duhalde, met with his Cuban counterpart, Fidel Castro, in Parliament shortly before handing over power to his successor, Néstor Kirchner. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro said in Buenos Aires that Argentineans gave a strong blow to the symbol of Neoliberal globalization by supporting Nestor Kirchner in the recent elections. "I felt a great satisfaction and jubilation at the election results in our beloved Argentina. The worst side of savage capitalism, the worst of Neoliberal globalization was struck," Fidel Castro told a multitudinous meeting on the steps of Buenos Aires University Law School. "I am not mentioning a name, no one should feel offended, and no one should feel alluded to," added the Cuban president, who arrived in Buenos Aires to participate with 12 other heads of regional nations at Kirchner's Sunday inauguration. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro was decorated with the Medal of the City of Buenos Aires by Major Aníbal Ibarra, who is of a center-left political tendency. Several international news agencies reported that the ceremony took place at a park of the Recoleta neighborhood, where a large crowd formed by members of the solidarity with Cuba in Argentina movement attended. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque has called attention to improved relations between Cuba and Argentina. Speaking with reporters in the Argentinean capital, Pérez Roque said that Fidel's visit to Argentina further enhances the process begun by outgoing Argentinean President Eduardo Duhalde, who separated his administration from the anti-Cuba positions of previous governments. He recalled that during the presidential campaign, newly-inaugurated President Néstor Kirchner supported his predecessor's decision not to lend himself to Washington's manipulations against Cuba at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Vice-President of Argentina, Daniel Scioli, said that the recent visit of Fidel Castro to that nation should not be interpreted as a change of his country's position on human rights. "Today more than ever Argentina favours democracy, freedom of the press, private ownership and above all the defence of human rights," said the Vice-President. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba and Argentina are moving forward in new efforts to expand collaboration and interchange between their universities, students and professors, according to Cuba's Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Eduardo Cruz. In a statement to reporters in Buenos Aires, Cruz highlighted Cuba's desire to increase this relationship, noting that the same intention was reaffirmed recently in Havana by the Argentinean Minister of Education, Daniel Filmus. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Argentina's new ambassador to Cuba, Raúl Taleb, affirmed before his country's Senate Agreements Committee that he believes in "democracy as a life style", and with that in mind he'll conduct his mission in Havana. The diplomat stated he would recommend a vote against Cuba at the UN Human Rights Commission if he observed extreme and undue violations on the island. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Argentina's Foreign Minister, Rafael Bielsa, hosted a reception for the Castro regime's leaders on the occasion of new ambassador Raul Taleb presenting his credentials. Among those attending the Argentinean gala were Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage; Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque; Speaker of Parliament Ricardo Alarcón, and the chairman of Cuba's Central Bank, Francisco Soberón. Bielsa and Pérez pledged to renew bilateral ties and put behind them the dark days of 2001 when Cuban leader Fidel Castro slammed Argentina's then-president Fernando De la Rúa a "U.S. lackey" for voting against Cuba at the U.N. Human Rights Commission. (October, Foreign Affairs)

The wives of jailed Cuban dissidents requested a meeting with Argentine Foreign Minister to inform him about their husbands' "deplorable prison conditions" and to ask him to intercede on their behalf during his visit to the island (October, Foreign Affairs)

Argentinean Foreign Affairs Minister Rafael Bielsa pledged strong ties with Cuba, after an intense day that included the signing of bilateral agreements and the presentation of the new Argentinean ambassador to Cuba. The creation of a bilateral mixed commission, the negotiation of the Cuban debt with Argentina, and the increase of cultural exchanges marked -among other themes- Bielsa's talk with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and several Cuban ministers. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Argentinean Foreign Minister Rafael Bielsa said that his meeting with Fidel Castro in Havana consisted of "six hours of a very deep conversation", in which "historical aspects of today's reality were discussed." Bielsa added that it was "el Comandante Castro who almost exclusively" spoke during the meeting. "I don't think Fidel Castro is too much interested in our opinions," he said. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Argentina will pressure its MERCOSUR partner Uruguay to drop its "intransigent" opposition to the idea of offering Cuba membership in Latin America's oldest free trade bloc, the Argentinean ambassador in Havana has said. "We would be doing a favor to the reality that is Cuba by integrating it into Latin America. The worst thing we could do is isolate it," Argentinean Ambassador to Havana, Raul Taleb, said. He also added that his government would seek to "persuade Uruguay to rise to the circumstances". The new Argentine Ambassador said that his country wants Cuba to join other Latin American countries to negotiate with the United States over a major free trade pact. Taleb said Castro and Kirchner see a strong alliance emerging between Cuba and Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina, countries that have swung left in recent years in a backlash against free-market economic policies advocated by Washington. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Educational agreements signed between Cuba and Argentina are a plus for Latin American integration, moving forward for real human development. "We are convinced that achieving real human development can only happen through Latin American unity," said Argentine Education, Science and Technology Minister Daniel Filmus after signing a memorandum of understanding with the Cuban Education Ministry. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Bolivia

Bolivian Minister of Education, Isaac Maidana, stressed the importance of Cuban collaboration with his country after announcing a contest for 65 new scholarships to study medicine on the island. (January, Foreign Relations)

A declaration of the Cuban Ministry for Foreign Relations (MINREX) made public by local television, informs that Cuba continues quite concerned about to the increasing instability in Bolivia. The document reads that this situation is the result of a deep and delayed social and economical crisis aggravated to

unsustainable levels, as a result of the application of neoliberal policies imposed by the US to Latin America. (October, Foreign Affairs)

The second Cuban medical brigade arrived in the Bolivian city of Vallegrande to work for two years assisting the inhabitants of that place and its surroundings. Cuban professionals will work in this historical city, that kept for almost three decades the remains of Argentinean guerilla Ernesto Che Guevara and those who fought with him. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage addressed a mass rally at the Tahuachi Stadium in Santacruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. Lage was a speaker at the rally, together with Bolivian activist Evo Morales and Venezuela's president, Hugo Chávez. According to a report, it was an emotional moment of the rally, which closed the Alternative Social Forum to the 13th Ibero American Summit. (November, Foreign Affairs)

The Cuban National Assembly of People's Power issued a statement declaring its "total solidarity with the centennial struggle of the Bolivian people to recover their access to the sea". (December, Foreign Affairs)

Brazil

Fidel Castro met with members of Brazilian President Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva's cabinet. Accompanied by writer and priest Frei Betto, the leader of the Cuban Revolution spoke with Brazilian Minister of Education Cristobal Buarque, whose ministry's priority will be to guarantee access to education for the 19 million children who are not attending school. Fidel Castro also met with Health Minister Humberto Costa and Food Security Minister Jose Gracian, who is in charge of putting into practice the program "Hambre Cero" (Zero Hunger). (January, Foreign Relations)

Fidel Castro has returned home to Havana, following a visit to Brazil where he attended the inauguration of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. (January, Domestic Affairs)

Brazil's new Ambassador to Cuba Tilden Santiago said he is assuming his functions at a very rich moment to improve bilateral relations, established in 1986. In an interview with the press, Santiago said he has two main objectives in Havana: one in the economic, commercial, and financial field, and the other in the political, strongly supporting Cuba's reinsertion in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the whole world. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage and Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque have met with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. The high-ranking Cuban delegation arrived in Brasilia and held talks with Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorin and other government officials. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage had words of praise for his recent official visit to Brazil. In statements to the press Carlos Lage said that the two-day visit ended with a productive, three-hour meeting with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. Speaking with reporters, the Cuban vice president said that "Brazil is a country with great natural resources, great potential, and areas of poverty inherited over years and decades; the government has a great challenge to face such inequalities." Lage said that during the Cuban delegation's meeting with President Lula da Silva, they analyzed not only bilateral relations, but the current international situation and the situation of Latin America. Carlos Lage noted that relations between Havana and Brasilia are excellent and will only get better. And he said that he and other members of the Cuban delegation that recently visited Brazil were extremely satisfied with their stay. (July, Foreign Affairs)

"The Cuban regime had the right to defend itself against a destabilizing attempt encouraged by the US," said Tilden Santiago, Brazilian Ambassador to Havana, in reference to the execution of three individuals who last April hijacked a ferryboat in an effort to reach US shores. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has confirmed that he will visit Cuba at the end of September, responding to an official invitation from his Cuban counterpart, Fidel Castro. According to Brasilia's ambassador to Havana, Tilden Santiago, the Brazilian president will visit Cuba for two days. Lula da Silva and other members of his accompanying delegation will also take advantage of the opportunity to sign bilateral agreements. (July, Foreign Affairs)

The US embargo on Cuba is solely a "political question" Brazilian President Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva said at a conference attended by centre-left leaders from around the globe. "In the same manner that France won't stop agricultural subsidies for political reasons, the United States won't end its embargo on Cuba," said the Brazilian leader after castigating the European Union's heavily-subsidized farm policy. He said the embargo has continued because of "Cuban voters in Miami, in Florida. It is really a political question." (July, Foreign Affairs)

The Brazilian government does not support the 40-year-old US embargo against Cuba and that is why it shows "solidarity" with the island; however, it does not advocate the death penalty or summary trials either, said the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Celso Amorim. "The end of the US embargo against Cuba would do much to advance the issue of democratization" of the island, he added. (July, Foreign Affairs)

In an exclusive interview, Brazilian Sports Minister, Agnelo Santos Queiroz, - the only member of the Communist Party in Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's cabinet - expressed his enthusiasm for a visit to Cuba in September. "We are going to strengthen Cuba-Brazil relations. When Vice President Carlos Lage and Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque visited us a short while ago I spoke to them about a large integration project, because we have many things in common, in order to exchange professionals, coaches and our experiences," commented Queiroz. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba's Deputy Minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, Raúl Taladrid, is in Brazil to meet with authorities there and discuss bilateral cooperation. Raúl Taladrid and his accompanying delegation met with officials at the Palacio de Guanabara, the main governmental administrative office of Río de Janeiro, Brazil's second largest state. Taking part in the meetings were Vice Governor Luiz Paulo Fernandes Conde, as well as the secretaries of economic development and tourism, education, and science and technology. (August, Foreign Affairs)

The Third Meeting of the Working Party for bilateral cooperation between Cuba and Brazil has concluded with agreements on tourism, production of sugarcane by-products and support of local economies. The bilateral cooperation accords signed by Havana and Brasilia include agricultural projects as well as the use of a Cuban vaccine against tick infestation in cattle. Mutual links will target literacy and post-literacy programs for Brazilians, as well as the decentralized collaboration among states and cities from both nations on the environment, health and finances. (September, Foreign Affairs)

A group of Cuban exiles in Brazil and Brazilian citizens made public a letter addressed to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, asking him to meet with members of the internal dissident movement during his scheduled visit to Cuba. (September, Exile Community)

Brazil will ask for "prudence" in the speech that Fidel Castro will give during his Brazilian counterpart Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's visit to Cuba, revealed the newspaper Folha de Sao Paulo. The article indicated that the Brazilian embassy in Havana is handling a request so that Castro avoids giving a long "anti-US" speech during his meeting with Lula. Castro summoned a million people to welcome Lula, prompting a certain concern within the Brazilian diplomatic ranks. (September, Foreign Affairs)

The wife of Cuban writer and poet Raúl Rivero, sentenced to 20 years in prison called on Brazilian President, Luis Ignacio 'Lula' da Silva, to intercede with Castro on behalf of her husband and other political prisoners. Blanca Reyes made the appeal in an interview published by Brazil's daily 'O Globo de Rio de Janeiro'. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Brazil's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Celso Amorim, said that the upcoming trip of President Luis Ignacio 'Lula' da Silva to Cuba is motivated by a policy of "engagement", which is the best way to work with the island, "including on human rights issues". (September, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban dissident leader Oswaldo Payá asked Brazil's president, Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva, to not only meet with government representatives but also with members of the dissident movement. "Brazil should (...) demand the release of political prisoners in the country, who are kept in cages and who live in horrible environments", said Payá. (September, Domestic Affairs)

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva does not plan to meet with Cuban dissidents when he visits the island, though Brazil's Foreign Ministry is studying their requests. "The Brazilian Foreign Ministry is studying" the Cuban dissidents' requests, Ambassador Tilder Santiago said, ruling out a possible meeting of Lula with the opposition during his visit. "We are aware that a meeting was requested. We are waiting to decide how to respond, but Lula has said that he, as president, does not favor such a course," the ambassador told the press. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Wives of 30 imprisoned Cuban dissidents have called on Brazil's president to raise their husbands' cases with Fidel Castro during a visit to the communist-run island this week, some of the women said. "I appeal to his (Lula's) prestige, his humble background and position as a friend of Fidel Castro to intercede with the president and gain the release of my husband and the other 74," Blanca Reyes, wife of jailed independent journalist Raúl Rivero, told the press. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Brazil's leftist president said he will refrain from public comments about Cuban politics during a visit to Havana. President Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva said he was going to Havana strictly as a head of state, not as "Lula, amigo of Fidel." "I don't give opinions about the internal political conditions of other countries," Silva said at a news conference after talks with Mexican President Vicente Fox. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Linked for decades as fellow icons of Latin America's left, Brazil's and Cuba's presidents cemented their relationship as they talked business and ignored Cuba's human-rights record. Dressed in his traditional olive fatigues, Fidel Castro greeted Luis Inacio Lula Da Silva with a hug at Havana's airport. The pair sat down for talks after a formal military ceremony welcoming the Brazilian president. A second round of discussions is scheduled before Silva departs for home. Silva arrived in Havana after attending the United Nations General Assembly in New York, followed by a stop in Mexico for talks with President Vicente Fox. He was accompanied by a delegation of at least 100 people, including about 20 Cabinet members, about 30 lower-ranking functionaries and some 50 Brazilian business people. Despite prodding from Washington and Cuban opposition leaders, Lula did not meet with dissidents during his trip. "I do not give opinions about the internal political conditions of other countries," he told reporters in Mexico before arriving in Havana. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Fidel Castro pledged to emphasize business over politics in their relations and urged executives in both nations to make trade and investment deals. Lula was accompanied by more than 60 Brazilian executives, on a two-day visit to Cuba to discuss doing business with the Communist-run nation. The two leaders presided over a signing ceremony for commercial agreements worth \$200 million, an "exceptional step for Cuba and Brazil," Lula said. Among the most significant was an accord between Cuba's state-run tourism firm, GranCaribe, and private Brazilian companies to build four beach resorts worth about \$114 million. Other projects include using Cuban biotechnology to develop generic drugs in northern Brazilian laboratories and a \$20 million deal to produce fuel grade alcohol in Cuba's outdated sugar mills, said Almir Lima Nascimento, adviser to the Brazilian foreign ministry's department of commercial promotion. Also signed was an agreement to renegotiate Havana's \$40 million debt with Brazil, to be paid back in part with revenue from the island's exports to the Latin American giant. Mario Vilalva, business development director at the Brazilian Foreign Ministry, said that some of the investment agreements are at an advanced phase, while others require further study. One of the works in progress is a \$114 million investment in the construction of four resort hotels with a combined total of 2,500 rooms. In regard to oil, Vilalva said the possibility of Brazil's oil giant Petrobras drilling in

the Gulf of Mexico, where Canada's Sherrit and Spain's Repsol have been operating, was not addressed. (September, Economy)

While on official visit in the island, Brazilian president Luis Inacio "Lula" Da Silva met with Cardinal Jaime Ortega, leader of Cuba's Roman Catholic Church, according to sources in the Brazilian delegation. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Numerous representatives of the Cuban exile community in Paris expressed their disappointment with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva for not addressing human rights during his visit to the island. "I had hoped (Lula) would say something in favor of Cuban prisoners, but he didn't say anything. But I'm glad that the European Union has toughened its stance," Cristina Rivero, daughter of dissident poet and journalist Raul Rivero, told the press. (September, Exile Community)

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva granted an official audience to Havana's Ambassador to Brazil Jorge Lezcano. The diplomat is soon to conclude his mission in the South American nation. Lezcano told the press that Lula's gesture of receiving him amidst his tight agenda including a tour of the Middle East "is an example of the level of the bilateral relations." The Brazilian government had presented the Cuban diplomat with the National Order "Cruz Azul", in a meeting to honor him at the Itamaraty Palace. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Chile

The Chilean government, in retaliation for the Cuban refusal to grant visas for members of parliament who wished to meet with Cuban dissidents, will restrict the number of visas issued to Cuban authorities, said Chilean Foreign Minister Soledad Alvear. (May, Foreign Affairs)

The Chilean Chamber of Deputies passed a proposal requesting President Ricardo Lagos to ask Fidel Castro to fulfill the democratic commitment he subscribed to during the VI Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Santiago, in 1996. The document presented by parliamentarians of the Christian Democratic party, and passed by a vast majority, urges Lagos to seek an explanation from the Cuban government for "refusing to carry out democratic elections" during the next Ibero-American Summit. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Colombia

A joint committee of Cuban and Colombian officials was set to meet in Bogotá to review progress made on cooperation agreements the two countries signed last year in Havana, the Colombian Foreign Ministry said. It said the evaluation would be made by top officials from the foreign ministry and Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation (MINVEC). (June, Foreign Affairs)

The President of the Colombian Senate, Germán Vargas, has ended a successful visit to Cuba. Speaking with reporters in Havana, Vargas said he felt his visit had been very productive. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Costa Rica

Costa Rican President Abel Pacheco denounced that "foreign left-wing leaders (from Cuba and Brazil) have infiltrated" the country and that several of them had taken part in "destabilizing attempts" recently. Meanwhile, the Minister for Public Security, Rogelio Ramos, identified the alleged leftist leaders as Carmen Godínez Cedeño, from Cuba, and Braulio Céspedes Caña, from Brazil, who participated in seminars and a road-blocking demonstration during recent teachers' strike in Costa Rica. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Dominican Republic

Educational institutions in Cuba and the Dominican Republic have signed cooperation agreements providing for the training of teachers and doctors. The Dominican Action for Education and Culture Foundation (APEC) and its counterpart in the central Cuban city of Camagüey signed the agreement in this Eastern province. According to the protocol, which was signed by the rectors of both universities and the president of APEC, the agreement allows for the training of science professors. Courses will be given at the APEC headquarters in Santo Domingo by professors from the University of Camagüey, located some 300 miles east of Havana. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Ecuador

Fidel Castro arrived in Quito to attend the inaugural ceremony of Lucio Gutierrez as the next President of Ecuador. (January, Foreign Relations)

Fidel Castro participated in a breakfast offered by his counterpart Lucio Gutiérrez for public figures attending the Ecuadorian president's inauguration. Peruvian President Alejandro Toledo and Ecuadorian vice president Alfredo Palacios were also present. Shortly afterward, the leader of the Cuban Revolution met at his hotel with several Ecuadorian indigenous leaders including Ecuadorian Confederation of Indigenous Nations president Leonidas Iza, Pachakutik National Coordinator Miguel Llucio, and Ricardo Ulcuango, a deputy from the Pachakutik movement. (January, Foreign Relations)

Fidel Castro returned to Havana, arriving from Quito where he attended the inauguration of Ecuadorian President Lucio Gutiérrez. (January, Foreign Relations)

One hundred twenty five young Ecuadorians have left for Cuba to begin studying medicine. A local TAME charter will bring them to Havana to register in ELAM (the Latin American Medical School) where more than 300 of their countrymen are at various levels of their studies. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Ecuadorian National Sports Secretary Luis Tapia has confirmed that eleven scholarships have been awarded to Ecuadorian indigenous young people to study in Cuba. According to the sports secretary, the young students will specialize in physical education at Havana's International Sports School, where students from a number of Latin American countries are studying. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Ecuadorian Vice President Alfredo Palacio González arrived in the Cuban capital at the invitation of his Cuban counterpart, Carlos Lage. The Ecuadorian official is heading a high-level delegation from his country, that will tour economic, social and cultural places of interest during their stay. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba and Ecuador have signed several important bilateral agreements, including an accord for the development of biotechnology and its medical application. The agreements were signed in the Cuban capital between visiting Ecuadorian Vice President Alfredo Palacio González and his Cuban counterpart, Carlos Lage Dávila. Palacio González said that among the issues discussed with Cuban officials, including Fidel Castro, were topics linked to science and technology, biotechnology, agricultural research and farming and medicine -- from patient care to producing generic medicines. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Ecuador is looking to strengthen its sports program with the help of Cuba, the South American country's physical education and sports secretary said. The Ecuadorian secretary, Col. Luis Tapia, and Cuban Sports Minister Humberto Rodríguez signed a broad, four-year cooperation agreement in the Cuban capital. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Guatemala

A delegation of Cuban legislators is visiting Guatemala. Headed by Tomás Cárdenas, president of Cuba's Permanent Commission on Local Parliaments, the visiting lawmakers are meeting with their Guatemalan counterparts and other high-ranking government officials. Before the Cuban lawmakers leave Guatemala City, they will attend a dinner offered by Guatemalan President Alfonso Portillo and will hold talks with Foreign Minister Edgar Gutiérrez. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque's visit to Guatemala received wide coverage in the Cuban press. A press release on the visit was broadcast by all the local morning radio and TV news shows. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Guatemala inaugurated the 17th International Fair (INTERFER 2003) providing space for commercial exchange among 20 participating countries, including Cuba, which is taking part with 12 enterprises from different sectors. The Cuban presence is promoting exportable products from each of the 12 enterprises attending the exhibition, as well as strengthening trade with Guatemala, Cuban Chamber of Commerce general secretary, Frank Abel Portela, told the press. Our attendance at the fair focuses on increasing commercial ties with Central America and the Caribbean, as well as the Guatemalan Chamber of Commerce and other institutions, Portela stated. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Honduras

The inhabitants of five Tawahka Indian communities who live southeast of the Rio Platano Biosphere, in Honduras, were provided with electricity and television at the end of last year, thanks to a donation by the Cuban government. Fidel Castro sent the tribe five solar panels for generating electricity, three computers, televisions, educational programs and animated videos, as well as some 1,000 children's toys. (January, Foreign Relations)

Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, will visit Honduras to expedite the Caribbean Sea demarcation between the two countries, said Honduran Foreign Minister Guillermo Pérez-Cadalso. The agenda will also include other bilateral affairs like trade, cultural exchange and cooperation programs. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba and Germany are both participants in a South-South cooperation project to conserve the biosphere reserve along the Plátano River in Honduras. The project aims to extend Cuban medical cooperation and improve local healthcare in the zone. (February, Foreign Affairs)

The Cuban doctors' brigades posted in Honduras marked its fifth year after arriving there in the wake of Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Since then, Cuban doctors have treated 3.7 Hondurans living for the most part in remote areas, according to Cuba's Ambassador to Honduras, Alberto González Polanco. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Mexico

A delegation of Mexican legislators is in the Cuban capital to participate in the International Conference on World Balance, organized on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Cuban National Hero José Martí's birth. The visiting delegation is headed by the president of the Executive Board of the Mexican Parliament, Eric Villanueva, who met with Ricardo Alarcón, President of the Cuban Parliament. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Health authorities in the southeastern Mexican state of Chiapas have announced that Cuban medical teams might be coming to the region to offer health care to indigenous communities. A Health Secretariat spokesman told the press that a Cuban Health Ministry delegation had been in the state since last week "touring Indian communities to assess their major health problems." The delegation, made up of four

experts headed by Cuban Deputy Health Minister Gonzalo Estévez, is evaluating health needs to determine the number and type of physicians that would be required in Chiapas. (January, Foreign Relations)

Manuel Andrade Díaz, governor of the Mexican state of Tabasco, and Marta Lomas, Cuban Minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, signed a document by which both countries outline their willingness to cooperate in the areas of health, education, sports, culture, agriculture, sugar production, tourism, radio and television. (February, Foreign Affairs)

High-ranking Mexican government officials will resume their visits to Cuba following a series of incidents last year which strained relations between the two countries, government spokesmen said. Mexican Environment Minister Victor Lichtinger is traveling to the island on a two-day state visit, the spokesmen told the press. Lichtinger's agenda includes meeting with Cuban Tourism Minister, Ibrahim Ferradaz; Science, Technology and Environment Minister, Rosa Elena Simeón; Foreign Investment Minister, Marta Lomas; and Public Health Minister, Damodar Peña. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Mexico's Environment Secretary has announced that he will pressure the United States to sign a multilateral agreement with Mexico and Cuba for the protection of the Gulf of Mexico's ecosystem. The announcement was made by the Mexican Secretary of the Environment and Natural Resources, Victor Lichtinger, who concludes a four-day working visit to Havana. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Mexican Ambassador to Cuba, Roberta Lajous, presided over a wreath-laying ceremony at the monument to her country's hero, Benito Juárez, on the occasion of the 197th anniversary of his birth. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Mexico's PRD Senate legislators (Democratic Revolutionary Party) have demanded that the government of President Vicente Fox abstain from an anti-Cuban maneuver. Senator Serafin Rios Alvarez, state of Michoacan, provided the Senate with an agreement sent to the Foreign Affairs Committee, as well as another recently proposed by the Mexican Ecologist Green Party (PVEM). Rios Alvarez told the press that the Senate will vote on both projects to reject any anti-Cuban condemnation at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva, Switzerland. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, said he has information that Mexico will vote in favour of a draft resolution examining the human rights situation in Cuba at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva. "We know that will be the case since we understand Mexico has no room for anything different," said Pérez Roque. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Opposition legislators implored President Vicente Fox to abstain from a UN human rights vote criticizing longtime Mexico ally Cuba. Last year, the Fox administration supported a UN resolution censuring the government of Fidel Castro for its oppression of political movements. The vote in the Human Rights Commission cooled traditionally warm Mexican-Cuban relations. (April, Foreign Affairs)

The Mexican government issued a statement condemning Cuba's execution of three men convicted in a brief trial of hijacking a ferry to flee to the US. "The Foreign Relations Department profoundly regrets the application of the death penalty against three Cuban citizens," the department said in a press statement. The department said its rejection of the Cuban executions was based on "the spirit and tradition of Mexican law enforcement, and its position on the death penalty." (April, Foreign Affairs)

The Mexican Foreign Ministry has indicated that Mexico's vote at the UN Human Rights Commission is consistent with its principles and not condemnatory or critical against Cuba. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Ambassador to Mexico, Jorge Bolaños Suárez, said that relations between Cuba and Mexico "are neither what they used to be nor what both peoples deserve them to be, but I remain hopeful that all lost ground will be recovered." (May, Foreign Affairs)

The Mexican ambassador to Cuba, Roberta Lajous, stated that "México is into Cuba as much as Cuba is into México", at an event commemorating the 40th anniversary of relations between Cuba and Mexico, organized by Cuban-Mexican Friendship Society. When condemning the US blockade against the island, she said "in our historic memory there is the bitter remembrance of such injustices, and that is why my country has been a bridge to Cuba. It is and it will be so, because Mexicans want it like that", she confirmed. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Havana has ruled out any visits by Mexican lawmakers seeking to meet with dissidents about the state of human rights on the Caribbean island, Cuban Ambassador Jaime Bolanos said. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Mexican lawmakers attending a meeting with Cuban legislators are divided over whether the island nation's crackdown on dissidents should be on the agenda. The chairman of the lower house's Foreign Relations Committee, Gustavo Carbajal, told the press that the issue would not be officially raised during the interparliamentary meeting. "It's a domestic issue, they could counter that they also want to know what happened in Chiapas or with (the massacre of) Aguas Blancas," he said, alluding to episodes of political violence in Mexico. But members of the ruling National Action Party (PAN) say the subject of the dissidents is on the agenda and that it will be discussed at the gathering, to be held in Morelia, in the central state of Michoacan. PAN lawmaker Tarcisio Navarrete told the press a session on politics and democracy was on the schedule and that it included a human rights segment, making the issue of Cuba's crackdown "unavoidable." (July, Foreign Affairs)

During the 6th Mexico-Cuba Inter-Parliamentary Meeting, the delegation of the Mexican ruling party, PAN, sparked a heated debate with the delegates from the island, when it moved for the approval of a condemnatory resolution on the "execution of three Cuban ferryboat hijackers." At the end of the first day's sessions, a declaration of support was passed promoting "bilateral relations respectful of each country's sovereignty." (July, Foreign Affairs)

The head of the Cuban legislature's international relations committee, Ramón Pez Ferro, expressed hope that bilateral ties with Mexico would continue to improve. Pez Ferro and other Cuban lawmakers returned to Cuba after attending a Mexico-Cuba interparliamentary meeting, which they characterized as "positive." Legislators signed agreements in the fields of education, science and technology, trade, the environment and the economy at the gathering, which was held in the Mexican city of Morelia, in the central state of Michoacan, Pez Ferro said. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba and Mexico have signed an agreement in neuroscience, with the aim of developing a new method to rehabilitate patients with advanced Parkinson's disease. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque said that Cuba considers "there should be a rectification" of Mexico's position on the human rights situation on the island before returning to the "high level that always characterized" bilateral relations. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Mexico is trying to restore its friendship with Cuba after several years of bad blood, a Mexican foreign ministry official said. The two countries' foreign ministers, Mexico's Luis Ernesto Derbez and Felipe Perez Roque from Cuba, met in New York, the highest level official contact since April 2002. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque described as "useful and productive" the meeting held with Mexican Foreign Secretary Luis Ernesto Derbez at the recent UN General Assembly meeting. Speaking to newsmen, Pérez Roque said that "the meeting was useful and productive. I believe that this was an initial step forward but we are not yet at the point at which we could say that relations have returned to normal". Pérez Roque added: "There was a first exchange; a first rapprochement; and a clear statement of positions. I spoke frankly with Foreign Secretary Derbez and left the meeting with a good impression. I was positively impressed by his willingness to talk." (October, Foreign Affairs)

The third Cuban-Mexican Joint Commission for Development and Cooperation concludes in Mexico after exchanges were termed very positive. Cuban Vice Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration (MINVEC) Raúl Taladrid told the press that these meetings are valuable in renewing bilateral relations. The Mexican delegation to this third bilateral meeting is chaired by Economic Affairs and International Cooperation Under Secretary Maria de Lourdes Dieck and formed by officials from the ministries of foreign affairs, agriculture, environment, health, energy, work, communications and science, and Mexican Ambassador to Cuba Roberta Lajous. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Tensions between Cuba and Mexico stem mainly from Mexico's position at the Geneva Human Rights Commission, said the Cuban Foreign Ministry, Felipe Pérez Roque. The Minister did not deny the decline in the bilateral relationship. (October, Foreign Affairs)

The Mexican Chamber of Deputies condemned the recent tightening by the US of the economic embargo against Cuba, calling it "foreign interference." (November, Foreign Affairs)

Two years after relations with Mexico entered the deep freeze, Mexican officials have said they are ready to discuss warmer ties with Havana at a high-level meeting. Mexican Deputy Foreign Minister Miguel Hakim Simón said that Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque and his Mexican counterpart Luis Ernesto Derbez would probably meet at the upcoming Ibero-American Summit in Bolivia. "The meeting is planned with the aim of continuing to work at all levels" to improve relations," Hakim told a news conference. "It is a fact that we want to better these ties," he added. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Foreign Minister of Mexico, Luis Ernesto Derbez, and of Cuba, Felipe Pérez Roque, discussed the main issues on the bilateral agenda at a meeting in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. This is the second high-level meeting between the two nations in less than two months. (November, Foreign Affairs)

A privately held Mexican institution and a Cuban entity signed an agreement to exchange information, courses and practices on workplace medicine. The Mexican Instituto de Salud de los Trabajadores (Insat) based in the state of Coahuila, announced that it would launch a master's program on that specialty with Cuban instructors. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Mexico and Cuba, whose historic ties suffered a war of words in 2002, would like a meeting between President Vicente Fox and Fidel Castro to usher in renewed relations, a top official said. "We both have decided to work from top to bottom," Mexican vice minister of foreign relations Miguel Hakim told Formato 21 radio. "When we see improvement and the level has risen, we will think about a meeting between the leaders." Hakim said that Mexican foreign minister Luis Derbez and his Cuban counterpart Felipe Pérez Roque would meet in the first half of next year. After evaluating those meetings, they would determine whether Fox and Castro should meet. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Nicaragua

The Nicaraguan Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated its strongest condemnation of the upholding by the Supreme Court of Cuba of most of the prison sentences arbitrarily meted out to 75 Cuban dissidents last April. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Over 20 workers from Nicaraguan communities are training in Sancti Spiritus on use of renewable energy sources in a project at the Sancti Spiritus graduate center, center promoter Naybi Salas told the press. Salas said this will signify improvement of living conditions for the districts of León, Corinto, Chinandega, Jinotega and Matagalpa in Nicaragua. Training includes lectures and visits demonstrating Cuban development in the use of solar, water, wind power and biomass, which have been used to satisfy social needs, mainly in rural areas where there is no electricity. The Nicaraguan professionals are also studying the use of hydraulic ram and small hydroelectric plants, two alternatives that have achieved increased productivity of sown fields and electrification of isolated communities in Cuba. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Panama

The 8th Cuba-Panama Inter-Parliamentary Meeting is underway in the Cuban capital. Eight officials from the main Panamanian political parties are delegates to the meeting, led by Panamanian Legislative Assembly President Carlos Alvarado. Delegates are analyzing bilateral programs in the fields of health, education and sports exchange. Other topics on the agenda include an international parliamentary fund and the signing of a joint declaration. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Paraguay

Paraguay's President-elect Nicanor Duarte Frutos spoke on the telephone yesterday with Cuban leader Fidel Castro. Duarte Frutos confirmed that their conversation lasted approximately 30 minutes during which they talked about globalization, regional blocs and the possibility of establishing broader bilateral relations between Paraguay and Cuba. The Paraguayan president-elect said Fidel is interested in visiting Asuncion to attend in the presidential inauguration that will be held on 15 August. Nicanor added that Castro has not yet confirmed his attendance, but he did ask about certain details concerning the organization of the ceremony, as well as matters relating to Paraguayan society. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Granma, Cuban official newspaper, carried a report on comments made by Paraguayan President-elect Nicanor Duarte -- who has promised that his incoming administration "will fight against neo-liberal capitalism." The president-elect of Paraguay noted that neo-liberalism is based on profits alone and the 'logic' of success at the expense of the failure of others. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro declared his "spontaneous love" for Paraguay upon his arrival in Asunción to attend Nicanor Duarte's presidential inauguration. "This is a country I've always admired for its history, for its heroes, and I've felt a spontaneous warmth, you could say," Castro said in brief statements to Radio Nanduti during his first visit to Paraguay. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Castro met with the elected president of Uruguay, Nicanor Duarte Frutos who is to take office during an official ceremony at the Legislative Palace of that nation. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro held a meeting with thirty members of parliament and senators of all the political parties of Paraguay. (August, Foreign Affairs)

While in Asunción, Paraguay, Fidel Castro reiterated his interest in increasing co-operation between Cuba and Paraguay. The Cuban leader placed a flower wreath at the National Pantheon of the Heroes and during an exchange with journalists he praised the struggle of the Paraguayans in their reconstruction work after the cruel wars that they had faced with. Fidel also underscored that an awakening can be seen in the hemisphere, and he assured that Latin America can not stand the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA), and that the FTAA will not be able to deal with the awakening of Latin America. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro returns to Havana from a three-day visit to Paraguay. The leader of the Cuban Revolution attended the inauguration of the South American country's new president, Nicanor Duarte. Arriving at Havana's José Martí International Airport, Castro was accompanied by the world renowned Paraguayan writer, Augusto Roa Bastos. (August, Domestic Affairs)

"An honor for our country" is how Fidel Castro defined the visit to the island by Augusto Roa Bastos, the Paraguayan writer who won the Cervantes literary award in 1989 and is best known for his novel "Yo, El Supremo", about a ruthless dictator. Roa Bastos and Castro first met 44 years ago in Buenos Aires, and their paths crossed again during Castro's three-day visit to Paraguay, where he attended the swearing in of the new president, Nicanor Duarte. The Cuban leader visited the author in his Asuncion apartment and invited him to come see him in Havana. Roa Bastos flew back with him, and was greeted by the Cuban

Defense minister, Raúl Castro, the Culture Minister Abel Prieto and a large number of intellectuals.
(August, Foreign Affairs)

Peru

Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, met in Havana with a visiting parliamentary delegation from Peru. The delegation is made up of ten legislators and members of the parliament's Peru-Cuba Friendship Association. Among the subjects discussed during a meeting with Cuba's top diplomat were solidarity projects between Havana and Lima and the 300 young Peruvians who are studying in Cuba to become doctors. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Uruguay

Uruguayan President, Jorge Batlle, regarded as "impossible" Cuba's integration in the Mercosur because the island does not have a "democratic government." In an interview published in the weekly Expresso, Batlle maintains that "the only political agreement among the members of the group is the Declaration of Usuhaia, which requires members to have a democratic government, and I don't think that's the case of Cuba."
(October, Foreign Affairs)

Venezuela

Fidel Castro called on the island's delegation to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, to denounce what he termed the "fascist aggression against the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela". Speaking during a televised Round Table program, Castro praised the social forum and the importance of the Cuban delegation's participation in the event. A large delegation headed by Cuban Communist Party official, Jose Ramón Balaguer and Culture Minister Abel Prieto will participate in the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. (January, Foreign Relations)

Fidel Castro believes that the group of countries called "Friends of Venezuela" would be an interventionist and supranational body that would pass over a legally constituted government, that of Hugo Chávez. During a talk to national and foreign press Castro said that the Group would be working under the aegis of the "rulers of the world", that is, the United States. (January, Foreign Relations)

Fidel Castro attended the launching in Havana of a book by his Venezuelan colleague Hugo Chávez. The book titled "El golpe fascista en Venezuela" (The Fascist Coup in Venezuela) is a compendium of speeches and public appearances by President Chávez in the last few years. Lately, the Venezuelan situation has become the main topic of the "Battle of Ideas" campaign launched by Fidel Castro more than two years ago in Cuba. Chávez's speeches have been taking up hours of Cuban national television and are being rebroadcast by both state channels during peak audience hours. The campaign has now been transferred to Venezuela where popular organizations are studying the book by Chávez published in Havana. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Hugo Chávez said that his Cuban counterpart, Fidel Castro, has sent 10,000 tons of sugar to Venezuela after a two-month general strike. The Venezuelan president made the announcement at an event organized by those involved in small and medium-sized businesses. Chávez pointed out that Fidel Castro is a friend and the raw sugar sent will be refined for distribution throughout the country. The Venezuelan president said that Fidel Castro called him on the phone and said he'd already sent the sugar, saying Caracas could pay for it later. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Venezuela President Hugo Chávez affirmed that Cuba is not participating in the negotiations for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), because the island was excluded. Speaking at a Venezuelan Commission for FTAA negotiations, Chávez declined to sign the treaty because it would mean death for the people. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban sport authorities announced that assistance to Venezuela in the sports sector would be increased. More experts in different areas will be sent to the South American nation. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Opponents of President Hugo Chavez protested the "Cubanization" of Venezuela outside the Cuban Embassy while others voiced support for the leftist leader's "revolutionary" government. Dozens of government adversaries waved Venezuelan flags and placards reading "Fidel, Assassin!" and chanted "Chavez, Communist!" outside the embassy in eastern Caracas. Meanwhile, "Chavistas," as the president's supporters are called, shouted "Fascists, Go Home!" as they waved small Cuban flags. Police and National Guardsmen formed a barricade to prevent the rival groups from clashing. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Venezuelan troops and police fired tear gas and shotgun pellets to separate opponents and supporters of Fidel Castro who clashed on Saturday near the Cuban embassy. Several truckloads of National Guard troops in riot gear rushed to a street near the embassy after the rival groups pelted each other with stones and bottles. At least one person was hurt. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Venezuela and Cuba signed 15 accords at an event in which Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez invited his Cuban counterpart, Fidel Castro, to visit the country to discuss bilateral relations. The agreements, made official at an event in the Miraflores presidential palace, address the health, farming, construction, tourism and technology sectors within the framework of a broad cooperation pact signed in October 2000. (May, Foreign Affairs)

In his three-hour speech at the closing of the 3rd International Congress of Culture and Development, Fidel Castro praised the "exceptional human virtues" of his Venezuelan counterpart, Hugo Chavez. In Castro's opinion, Chávez has only one fault: to want to help the poor. "I am a Chavez' follower and I know him very well", said the president, commenting on a cable in which White House National Security Council Special Envoy to Latin America Otto Reich holds Chavez responsible for Venezuela's economic problems. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Venezuela's education minister defended a plan to use Cuban volunteers for a nationwide literacy program, saying the government only wanted to use Cuba's successful experience in teaching people to read. Critics say the plan is aimed more at indoctrinating Venezuelans with socialist ideals than making them literate. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro congratulated counterpart Hugo Chavez for the literacy program he is launching in Venezuela, predicting that its results would have "an impact on the hemisphere and the world." The literacy plan, which draws heavily on Havana's own educational models and calls for participation by Cuban teachers and advisers, has drawn sharp criticism from opponents of Venezuela's left-wing populist president. "I congratulate you (...) for your immense wisdom and courage in fighting to draw millions of people out of the darkness," said Castro's message to Chavez, which was cited in the front pages of the official press and read on state television. "Venezuela could attain in 10 to 15 years what it took Cuba 44 to achieve," he added. (June, Foreign Affairs)

Hugo Chávez paid a visit to Cuba, but the trip was kept secret until an official announcement was made, after the Venezuelan president had already left the island. State-run Cuban television said that Chavez had met with Cuban leader Fidel Castro about bilateral projects and visited Venezuelans in Cuban hospitals for specialized medical care. The statement said: "The brief visit to the island of the head of the Bolivarian revolution highlighted once more the ties of brotherhood and solidarity between the peoples of Bolivar and Marti." (June, Foreign Affairs)

A Cuban-inspired national literacy campaign was launched in Venezuela. More than 70 Cuban instructors are in Venezuela training for what the Hugo Chávez's government says will be 100,000 volunteer "facilitators" who will teach 1.5 million people to read and write. (July, Foreign Affairs)

In a show-down with Venezuelan medics who refuse to take on public health services in impoverished districts of his country, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez Frias has announced that more almost 1,000 medics will be flown in beginning this week by month's end, 815 Cuban doctors are scheduled to arrive and Chavez Frias says more will follow before the end of August. (July, Foreign Affairs)

The Venezuelan government began to distribute more than 13 million books donated by Cuba for students who just completed grade school. President Hugo Chavez and Education Minister Aristobulo Isturiz attended an event kicking off the distribution process at the multi-purpose Poliedro de Caracas. The so-called "family libraries" printed and donated by Cuba are sets of 25 books by renowned world authors. They are to be presented to approximately 550,000 Venezuelan children who successfully completed sixth grade this year. (July, Foreign Affairs)

Caracas Mayor, Alfredo Peña, accused Fidel Castro of "blatantly interfering" in Venezuela's internal affairs. The Mayor cited recent statements from Castro saying that Peña is "against" Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez and that he "orders the Metropolitan Police against the people" of that South-American nation. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Up to a thousand Cuban doctors are working and living in slums in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, under a program sponsored by the Venezuelan government. The presence of the doctors in the slums is part of the "Inside the Barrio" program set up by President Hugo Chavez. (August, Foreign Affairs)

The 1,000 Cuban doctors providing healthcare to Caracas' poor are illegally practicing medicine in Venezuela and should be replaced, a top appeals court ruled. The decision was a blow to Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez's "Inside the Neighborhood" program, in which doctors from the communist island nation provide primary care to people in the slums of Caracas. The program was widely criticized by Venezuelans who argued that the doctors are practicing illegally and may not even be physicians. The judges ordered the government to replace the Cuban doctors with Venezuelans or licensed foreigners. (August, Foreign Affairs)

A controversy has arisen in Venezuela, between Hugo Chávez's government and the opposition, because many of the advisers assisting with a gardening programme sponsored by Chávez are Cubans. Chavez's opponents, who accuse him of desiring to convert Venezuela into a communist dictatorship similar to that led by his friend, Fidel Castro, suspect that the Cubans are in Caracas to do more than teach farming. Chavez critics charge that the Cubans' true goal is to teach communism, spy or even provide paramilitary training to pro-Chavez guerrilla organisations. "[The Cubans in Venezuela] are persons prepared to indoctrinate," said retired Vice Admiral Rafael Huici, founder of an organisation of retired military officers. (August, Foreign Affairs)

President Hugo Chávez has vowed to defy a court order prohibiting Cuban doctors from practicing medicine in Venezuela and asked his friend Fidel Castro to send more medical personnel to work in the big-city shantytowns and rural villages. "This is constitutional craziness on a par with ruling that noon is now the same as midnight," Chávez railed in his weekly broadcast to the nation. He vowed to have the three judges of the Caracas lower court removed from the bench for exceeding their competency as well as the limits of common sense and denying citizens their constitutional right to decent health care. Chávez said that at his request Castro had agreed to send more medical personnel until their number rises from under 1,000 in the country at present, to total 5,000, but did not indicate a time frame for their arrival. (August, Foreign Affairs)

Venezuelan President, Hugo Chávez, arrived in Havana to attend a UN Conference on Desertification and Drought. This is the third time that Venezuela's President visit the island in less that three months. (August, Foreign Affairs)

President of the Caracas Medical College, Fernando Bianco, has come out in favour of the hundreds of Cuban doctors working poor neighbourhoods in and around Caracas, under a programme set up by

President Hugo Chávez. Bianco said that the programme had provided for 350,164 patients from low-income neighbourhoods in just three months. 653 fully-qualified Cuban doctors are currently working in the metropolitan area of Venezuela's capital. Many of the Cuban doctors have been trained in a variety of medical specialist areas. (September, Foreign Affairs)

The 4th Joint Commission of Integral Cooperation Agreement between Cuba and Venezuela is underway in Caracas. Marta Lomas, Cuban Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration, and Ramón Rosales, Venezuelan minister for Production and Commerce, lead the missions of its respective nations, stated Granma daily. (October, Foreign Affairs)

Around 11,000 Cuban intelligence agents would have entered Venezuela in the course of a month in order to "defend" President Hugo Chávez's government, reported the local press. The daily El Universal indicated the agents arrived in the Maiquetía airport in 73 flights from Havana between September and October. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Venezuela's Supreme Court threw out the government's appeal of a lower court's decision to suspend a program putting hundreds of Cuban doctors to work in Caracas slums. The decision was a blow to a program that President Hugo Chávez has hailed as a cornerstone of his professed "revolution" for Venezuela's poor majority. The program is one of several initiatives into which the government has poured millions of dollars ahead of a possible recall referendum on Chávez's rule next year. The ruling was a victory for Venezuela's medical establishment, which argues the so-called "Inside the Slum" program violates laws requiring foreign doctors to pass equivalency exams before practicing in Venezuela. Chávez's political foes claim the program seeks to indoctrinate the poor with socialist ideals, charges the government denies. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Venezuela's President, Hugo Chávez, gave Fidel Castro a 2000 series Falcon 900 jet. The aircraft - acquired by the Venezuelan state company PDVESA, at a cost of de \$27 million - "will be at Fidel Castro's disposal, though it will retain Venezuelan registration." According to information published in the Caracas daily El Nacional, Cuban pilots and crew are training in Panama to learn to fly the plane. (November, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban folk singer Silvio Rodríguez is helping Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez celebrate his fifth anniversary in power by performing at a concert dubbed, "A Song of Love for the Revolution." Rodriguez was expected to join other Cuban and Venezuelan musicians for the event, which coincides with a large street rally marking Chavez's 1998 presidential win. "I'm here because I believe in revolutionary processes," said Rodriguez, whose songs of love and social justice have won over fans throughout Latin America. "There have been difficulties, but it must be given a vote of confidence," Rodriguez said at a news conference. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Chatting with Fidel Castro during his weekly television show, President Hugo Chavez thanked the Cuban leader for sending more than 10,000 doctors to work in poor communities across Venezuela. Chavez and Castro bantered for about 10 minutes on Venezuelan television and radio after Chavez aides telephoned the Cuban president in Havana. Chavez spoke to Castro on a speakerphone live on air. Castro, who sounded hesitant and complained about the phone connection, said Chavez had established himself as a leader of the Third World. "You are leaving an example not only for Latin America but for all of the Third World," Castro said. "I must express the admiration of all our people for you." (December, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro met revolutionary ally President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela at a Caribbean island retreat in a morale-boosting visit to the leftist Venezuelan leader, who faces a campaign to vote him out of office. "We talked about everything," Chavez told reporters after returning from the talks on Orchila island, a military base and presidential retreat 110 miles north of Caracas. Government officials had earlier refused to disclose the site of the meeting. This had shrouded in secrecy the brief visit by the 77-year-old Castro to Venezuela, Communist Cuba's biggest political ally and trade partner in Latin America. Chavez said he and Castro had discussed growing medical and energy cooperation between their nations. They also reviewed the political situation in Venezuela, where the populist president is resisting a determined opposition bid to

trigger a referendum next year on whether he should stay in power. State television showed the two leaders embracing. It also broadcast a long, rambling interview with Castro in which he praised Chavez as an influential leader spearheading the fight in Latin America against U.S.-style global capitalism. "I challenge the world to produce a more generous man," the Cuban leader, who spoke slowly and haltingly, said. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro has warned that any foreign military intervention in Venezuela would "ignite a powder keg throughout South America." Castro's warning came during a televised eight-hour speech to lawmakers in reference to statements made recently by White House Special Envoy Otto Reich over reports that Cuban agents were operating in Venezuela under the guise of volunteer workers. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Non-Aligned Movement

Cuba wants the 114 member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to find ways to enhance cooperation in trade, economy, politics and other relevant fields. This was conveyed by Cuban Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister, Abelardo Moreno, to Deputy Foreign Minister, Datuk Dr Leo Micheal Toyad when visiting Wisma Putra. Asked if Fidel Castro would attend the 13th NAM Summit to be held in February, Toyad said that it has yet to be confirmed. (January, Foreign Relations)

The active participation of Cuba, which will host the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit after Malaysia, is vital for the success of the 114-member organisation, said Malaysian Ambassador in Havana Datuk Mohammad Kamal Yan Yahaya. He said Malaysia and South Africa, the current NAM president, would work closely with Cuba to strengthen the movement, which will hold its 13th summit this month in Kuala Lumpur. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba was chosen to host the next summit of the 114-member Non-Aligned Movement during the Movement Summit held in Kuala Lumpur, officials said. That means that Havana will receive the movement's presidency when it hosts the next summit in 2006, said Milos Alcalay, Venezuela's representative to the United Nations. Cuba last hosted the summit in 1979. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Fidel Castro had a busy agenda on the opening day of the 13th summit of non-aligned countries, holding bilateral meetings with several leaders. Castro met in private with the Pakistani head of state, [Gen] Pervez Musharraf. He had previously met [Xanana] Gusmao, the president of East Timor. He also met the Bahraini prime minister, Shaykh Khalifah Bin-Salman Al Khalifah and Taha Yasin Ramadan, the vice-president of Iraq. Parallel to the Cuban leader's conversations with those important figures, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque also had a busy agenda of contacts with several colleagues from Africa and the Middle East. Perez Roque met the foreign ministers of Kenya, Kalanzo Musyoka; of Uganda, James Wapakhabulo; of Bahrain, Muhammad Bin-Mubarak Al Khalifah; of Sierra Leone, Momodu Koroma, among others. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Addressing the 13th summit of non-aligned countries, Fidel Castro said that the human species is facing extinction from its own insane behaviour and is becoming a victim of "civilisation". Third World countries, he said, were under constant pressure to pay up US\$2.5tril in debt, which they could ill afford to do so under the present circumstances. "Developed countries spent a similar amount on commercial publicity, sowing consumerist expectations that cannot be realised in the minds of billions of people. "Development aid to these countries have been reduced, while at the same time, US\$1 tril (RM3.8tril) are spent on ever more sophisticated and deadly weapons," he said when addressing the summit. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque has said that Malaysia is occupying the presidency of the Non-Aligned countries at a time of very great importance for the movement, because it is a country which wields great authority. He emphasized that Malaysia is a non-aligned nation that has maintained very firm and consistent positions of defending multilateralism and a new international order. (February, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, travelled to France to attend the first meeting of the NAM Troika, invited by his Malaysian counterpart, Datuk Syed Hamid Albar, whose country currently chairs the Non-Aligned Movement (May, Foreign Affairs)

OCEANIA

New Zealand

Cuban advisors from the Ministry of Education are collaborating in New Zealand to develop a literacy program for radio and TV. The cooperative project, named Greenlight, works directly in the Maori university, the community that the project is aimed at. (September, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban volunteers are teaching Maori reading and numerical skills. Te Wananga o Aotearoa (the University of New Zealand) is believed to have three "volunteers" from Cuba to help improve literacy rates among Maori. Chief executive Rongo Wetere was not available, but a wananga spokeswoman confirmed that a programme with Cuban educators was under way. "Literacy and numerical has been identified as a major impediment to people's participation in society, and that is what the wananga is wanting to address," she said. (October, Foreign Affairs)

The Cuban ambassador to New Zealand is defending a Cuban-sponsored Maori literacy project, branding ACT MP Rodney Hide a racist America-lover for criticising it. Indonesia-based ambassador Miguel Ramirez said the Cuban method of teaching literacy through radio and television had been used throughout Latin and South America and was in demand throughout the world. "Cuba does have a lot of things to show despite whatever Mr Hide may say," Mr Ramirez said. Mr Hide said he was "staggered" that New Zealand's biggest tertiary institution, Te Wananga o Aotearoa, was getting help from Cuba to write its distance-learning literacy programme called Greenlight. (October, Foreign Affairs)

A Cuban diplomat defended his country's literacy program for New Zealand's Maori minority, rejecting charges that the project was a veiled attempt at Marxist indoctrination. "In its cooperation with the Maori community, Cuba is not going to indoctrinate or export any political or economic model," ambassador Miguel Ramirez said in a statement published in local newspapers. "We only want to contribute to a higher standard of living for this part of the population," he explained. (November, Foreign Affairs)

ORGANISATION OF AMERICAN STATES

A United States-backed resolution condemning human rights abuses in Cuba is up for debate at the Organization of American States, but the proposal is stirring opposition from some Latin American nations. The resolution, proposed by Nicaragua and co-sponsored by the United States and Costa Rica, will be taken up by the permanent council of the Washington-based OAS. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Deep divisions are again surfacing within the Organization of American States, as the 34-member group addresses Cuba's human rights record. Canada, Chile and Uruguay introduced a US-backed statement condemning rights violations on the communist-run island. But, the measure was withdrawn after several member nations, including Brazil and Venezuela, failed to endorse it. Later, 16 OAS members endorsed a revised text, which expressed deep concern about the sharp deterioration of the human rights situation on the island. (May, Foreign Affairs)

Canada will ask the Organization of American States to consider taking non-economic measures against Cuba in response to a crackdown on peaceful dissent, Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham said. In a telephone interview, Mr. Graham said the OAS should follow the lead of the 15-member European Union, which said it would cut back political and cultural contacts with the government of Fidel Castro due to the crackdown. Mr. Graham said he would steer clear of proposing economic sanctions, in line with Canada's long-standing opposition to the US trade embargo against Cuba. "Cutting out high-level meetings is a good

way of sending a signal," Mr. Graham said. "Economic sanctions punish the people. We want measures to punish the elite." (June, Foreign Affairs)

At the close of 33rd General Assembly of the Organization of American States, Secretary General César Gaviria agreed to have the human rights situation in Cuba discussed at the OAS. (June, Foreign Affairs)

UNITED NATIONS

General

Fidel Castro opened in Havana a high-level segment of a UN conference on drought and desertification that was attended by around a dozen heads of state. Dressed in a dark business suit and accompanied by the convention's executive secretary, Hama Arba Diallo, Castro greeted the presidents and chiefs of the delegations present at the event. Alienated from European nations after a crackdown on the opposition and the execution of three ferry-boat hijackers, Fidel Castro closed ranks with friendly African, Caribbean and South American heads of state at the UN conference. Notably absent from the sixth UN Convention to Combat Desertification were high-ranking representatives of the European Union. The 13 heads of state and government from Africa and the Caribbean attending the UN conference included the presidents of Zimbabwe, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Mali and Namibia and the prime ministers of Lesotho, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Grenada, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez was the only Latin American head of state attending the conference. (September, Exile Community)

The Declaration of Havana against desertification and drought was approved by the presidents and heads of state that are taking part in the UN summit meeting in the Cuban capital. The Declaration, which was read by Hama Arba Diallo, Executive Secretary of the Convention, includes the commitment to work together to fulfill the agreements of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The Declaration of Havana also recognizes the urgent necessity of increasing international cooperation between the rich North and the poor South. The text of the Declaration refers to the lifestyles and consumption models of capitalism, pointing out that they cause serious problems in a world filled with increasing levels of poverty, illiteracy and disease. The Declaration of Havana calls for the improvement of conditions in regions affected by drought and poverty -- with a commitment to work for a better and more equitable world. (September, Exile Community)

Cuba's Ambassador to the United Nations Bruno Rodríguez declared that the Security Council (SC) has become an anti-democratic and conspiratorial organization acting after opaque and secret informal meetings. Rodríguez said that in no other organization is the principle of sovereign equality violated so blatantly and institutionally, every day, to the point that non-permanent members are excluded and ignored despite the legality of the vote and against war. Speaking at the General Assembly session dedicated to UN reform, Rodríguez stated that if true reform is desired, it must begin with the Security Council. (October, Foreign Affairs)

The United Nations labor agency considers Cuba as "an urgent case". The 177-nation International Labor Organization (ILO) cited Cuba and Zimbabwe "for infringements of the principle of freedom of association and violation of trade union rights." In the case of Cuba, the ILO noted "the extremely harsh sentencing" of seven officials of independent trade unions, who were sentenced to between 15 and 26 years imprisonment. The Cuban government prohibits any unions outside the sole recognized trade union, which is controlled by the state and by the Communist Party, ILO said. (November, Foreign Affairs)

A large Cuban delegation has arrived in Geneva, Switzerland to take part in the World Summit on Information Society, which is sponsored by the United Nations. The delegation is headed by Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón, and is made up of representatives from different social sectors, including university students, the Cuban Association of United Nations (ACNU), the Cuban Union of Journalists (UPEC) and the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC). (December, Domestic Affairs)

Cuba expressed its pleasure for the Declaration of Principles draft at the first World Summit on the Information Society to reduce the computer information gap between rich and poor. "The main document has advanced considerably, and I think an important, balanced text has emerged," Cuban Information Technology and Communications Minister Ignacio Gonzalez told the press. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Congress President Ricardo Alarcon affirmed that to seriously talk about a society of information, world leaders should first win a world free of hunger, ignorance and exclusion. Only in a truly humane and context of solidarity can access to new technologies of information and communication be more than a deceitful slogan, noted Alarcon in the First World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) at the Exhibition Palace in Geneva. (December, Foreign Affairs)

Human Rights

The UN high commissioner for human rights has appointed a Frenchwoman to monitor the degree to which Cuba fulfills the world body's recommendation that it improve respect for human rights on the island. The appointment of French Supreme Court Justice, Christine Chanut, is the result of a decision adopted last April by the UN Human Rights Commission, said High Commissioner Sergio Vieira de Mello. An expert in criminal law, Chanut was the first woman appointed to head the UN Human Rights Committee. Chanut is to present a report on basic human rights in Cuba at the upcoming session of the commission. Cuba has never allowed a UN human rights envoy to visit the country and has not granted independent inspections of its prisons since 1989. (January, Foreign Affairs)

The Cuban government refused permission for a visit by a special United Nations representative, Christine Chanut, named to monitor the human rights situation in the Caribbean island. Cuba "will not allow (Chanut) to carry out her mandate," Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque said. He clarified that the refusal to authorize the visit should not be understood as anything personal against the special representative herself or against UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Sergio Vieira de Mello, who appointed her. Pérez Roque underlined that his country viewed the designation of a special human rights representative to visit Cuba as invalid, as it forms part of a UN Commission on Human Rights resolution that it deems illegitimate. (March, Foreign Affairs)

Peru, Costa Rica and Uruguay introduced a resolution critical of Cuba at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva. According to sources with the Commission, the resolution expresses satisfaction with the appointment last year of a special representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and requests Fidel Castro's government to cooperate with her. (March, Foreign Affairs)

A resolution presented to the top UN human rights body does not include a condemnation of Cuba's record, a rare move that immediately drew protests from rights campaigners. The activist groups charged that just last week Cuba arrested scores of dissidents, accusing them of conspiring with American diplomats in Cuba to encourage opposition to the communist government. In wording that will likely draw US protest as well, the draft measure produced by Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Peru and Uruguay simply asks Cuba to accept a visit by a UN monitor appointed earlier this year by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. (March, Foreign Affairs)

The United Nations' special human rights monitor for Cuba said that she was unable to present her report on the island because of obstacles the communist regime has posed to her mission. Christine Chanut, appointed special envoy to Cuba last year by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, reminded members of the UN Commission on Human Rights that Fidel Castro refused her entry to visit Cuba. The French former supreme court justice said Cuban authorities told her they denied her entrance because the Cuban government considers the resolution appointing her to be "unjust, selective and discriminatory." (April, Exile Community)

Mexico's PRD Senate legislators (Democratic Revolutionary Party) have demanded that the government of President Vicente Fox abstain from an anti-Cuban maneuver. Senator Serafin Rios Alvarez, state of Michoacan, provided the Senate with an agreement sent to the Foreign Affairs Committee, as well as

another recently proposed by the Mexican Ecologist Green Party (PVEM). Rios Alvarez told the press that the Senate will vote on both projects to reject any anti-Cuban condemnation at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva, Switzerland. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, said he has information that Mexico will vote in favour of a draft resolution examining the human rights situation in Cuba at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva. "We know that will be the case since we understand Mexico has no room for anything different," said Pérez Roque. (April, Foreign Affairs)

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Sergio Vieira de Mello has expressed concern over the arrests and ongoing trials of approximately 80 persons charged with working for a foreign Power to undermine the Cuban Government. Mr. Vieira de Mello voiced disquiet regarding the severe sentences defendants had reportedly already received after less than a week on trial. He recalled that he had raised the issue of the arrests during a meeting with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque and in subsequent discussions with Cuban authorities. Mr. Vieira de Mello said he was requesting Cuba to provide urgently detailed information on the trials. "There are questions about the fairness of such expedited proceedings, which have been closed to the public and observers, and I am calling for transparency", the High Commissioner said. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Appalled by the latest round of summary trials and sentencing of dissidents in Cuba, a group of countries from Latin America and Europe plans to toughen a draft resolution that would result in censure by the UN Human Rights Commission. Until recently, a group of countries led by Peru, Uruguay, Costa Rica and Nicaragua had planned to repeat last year's resolution. But the sudden onset of a wave of repression has spurred efforts to win a stronger resolution -- and outright condemnation. According to US State Department sources, Great Britain, France and Greece have joined efforts to toughen the resolution. Of the original backers, Nicaragua and Uruguay are similarly disposed to back tougher language, but Peru is not. The position of Costa Rica is unclear. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Opposition legislators implored President Vicente Fox to abstain from a UN human rights vote criticizing longtime Mexico ally Cuba. Last year, the Fox administration supported a UN resolution censuring the government of Fidel Castro for its oppression of political movements. The vote in the Human Rights Commission cooled traditionally warm Mexican-Cuban relations. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Secretary of State Colin Powell, calling Cuba's rights situation horrible and getting worse, urged the UN Human Rights Commission to censure Cuba for suppressing dissent. Powell spoke in unusually harsh terms about Cuba when he was asked Tuesday at a news conference for an assessment of its rights record. "It has always had a horrible human rights record. And rather than improving as we go into the 21st century, it's getting worse," Powell said. He noted that scores of dissidents were arrested and given long prison terms recently "just for expressing a point of the view that is different from that of Fidel Castro". Powell said Cuba's behavior "should be an outrage to everyone. It should be an outrage to every leader in this hemisphere, every leader in this world." (April, US-Cuba Relations)

The top UN human rights body debated a resolution censuring Cuba as the communist nation accused "vile lackeys" of the United States of trying to undermine its stability. The 53-nation Human Rights Commission postponed a vote on the resolution for one day following two hours of politically charged debate over Cuba's latest crackdown on dissidents. Cuba, meanwhile, accused the United States of trying to strong-arm poor nations into supporting the measure. "The government of the United States is applying colossal pressures on the countries of Latin America, Africa and others from the Third World," said a government statement read on state television. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Shortly before announcing that the first of two amendments presented by Cuba to the Human Rights Commission (HRC) - urging an immediate end to the US blockade - had been rejected, Parliamentary President Ricardo Alarcón stated that such a vote would allow members of the Human Rights Commission (HRC) to demonstrate that they really are concerned about the human rights situation on the island, or whether this is merely part of an annual ritual acted out against the island. The other amendment that Cuba

wanted to be added to the anti-Cuban resolution condemned acts of terrorism committed against the island from the United States. (April, Foreign Affairs)

The top United Nations human rights watchdog narrowly passed a resolution calling on Cuba to accept a visit by a rights investigator but rejected an amendment that would have criticized the country for the recent wave of repression. The 53-nation Human Rights Commission voted by 24 votes to 20 in favor of a resolution, presented by Peru and Uruguay, urging Cuba to accept a visit by a UN investigator, French jurist Christine Chanet. Against the document voted Algeria, Bahrain, Burkina Faso, China, Cuba, Congo, Gabon, India, Libya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe. In favor of the document voted: Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, France, Germany, Guatemala, Ireland, Japan, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, South Korea, Sierra Leone, Sweden, Great Britain, United States and Uruguay. Argentina, Brazil, Kenya, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Thailand, Togo and Uganda abstained. Cuba has refused to allow Chanet to visit, claiming such a visit could infringe on its sovereignty. (April, Foreign Affairs)

The Mexican Foreign Ministry has indicated that Mexico's vote at the UN Human Rights Commission is consistent with its principles and not condemnatory or critical against Cuba. (April, Foreign Affairs)

The United States insisted it was pleased by the UN body's passage of a mildly worded resolution that omitted any mention of Havana's recent harsh clampdown on dissidents. The State Department, which has been pushing for the Geneva-based commission to specifically condemn the crackdown, said the resolution sent a "strong message" to Cuban dissidents and Fidel Castro's communist government. In a statement by the White House Deputy Press Secretary, the US Government expressed its satisfaction with the resolution approved in Geneva. "The United Nations Commission on Human Rights has once again voted to express its concern about the appalling human rights violations by the Cuban Government against its own people", the statement says. (April, US-Cuba Relations)

Cuba's foreign minister cried victory after the UN Human Rights Commission voted against condemning his country's recent crackdown on dissidents, and Fidel Castro's government dismissed the possibility of US punitive steps. Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque called the vote a "resonant victory." "The unquestionable majority vote is a clear signal from the Human Rights Commission that Cuba has the right to apply its own laws," Perez Roque told a news conference. Perez Roque said his country would not comply with the milder resolution, which urged Cuba to accept a visit by UN human rights investigator, French jurist Christine Chanet. Facing growing international isolation, Pérez Roque said Cuba was considering the withdrawal of a request to join a European Union preferential trade and aid accord with former colonies due to European criticism of its rights record. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba was re-elected to the UN Human Rights Commission despite the island's crackdown on dissidents, prompting the United States to walk out of the United Nations meeting in protest. "They won't be able to force us out," said Jose Antonio Fernández, the head of Cuba's delegation. Latin America chose Cuba, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras and Peru for six open seats. (April, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba's highest-profile advocate for democracy called on the UN General Assembly to condemn "the cruelty" with which the Fidel Castro regime treats its political prisoners. Oswaldo Paya, this year's winner of the European Union's Sakharov Award for the promotion of human rights, issued a statement, the day after the General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to condemn the four-decade-old US embargo on trade with the Communist-ruled island nation. "If the governments represented in the United Nations are truly concerned about the welfare and the rights of the Cuban people, and are morally consistent, they must demand the Cuban government to stop its cruel and degrading treatment of political prisoners and release them," Paya said in a communique made public in Havana. "They must also demand the Cuban government respect human rights and the right of Cubans to peaceful changes leading to democracy," he added. (November, Foreign Affairs)

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

World Trade Organization (WTO) General Director Supachai Panitchpakdi is completing a comprehensive work agenda in Cuba, as part of a tour that also includes Honduras and Guyana. His program on the island includes meetings with Council of Ministers Executive Committee secretary Carlos Lage, Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Perez Roque, and Congressional Economic Committee chair Osvaldo Martinez, among other officials. On his arrival in Cuba, the WTO general director highlighted that the objective of this regional trip is to increase the countries' participation in the Doha Development Round, launched at the 2001 ministerial meeting in Qatar. (November, Foreign Affairs)

The head of the World Trade Organization shared views about global economic problems with Fidel Castro before wrapping up his visit to the island. "During the meeting with the president it was most interesting for me to learn of his global will, to learn of his concerns on behalf of developing countries," WTO director general Supachai Panitchpakdi said in comments aired on Cuba's state television. "I was impressed by many remarks," Panitchpakdi said. "But one of the remarks I was most impressed with is that he realizes that this is a chaotic world but at least the WTO is doing its best to make sense of this world." (November, Foreign Affairs)

Cuba says the recent G-20 meeting held in Brasilia was excellent and offered positive and constructive suggestions in preparation for the upcoming General Council of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Ricardo Cabrisas, Cuban government minister and head of the island's delegation to the meeting, told reporters in Rio de Janeiro that the Brazilian initiative to call the group before the WTO meeting in Geneva was "magnificent." He said that "the G-20 is committed to discuss the multilateral process of commercial negotiations interrupted in Cancun." (December, Foreign Affairs)