

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

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

## FOREIGN AFFAIRS

### AFRICA

[See also, Economy/ Collaboration agreements]

#### Angola

**March 15:** The Deputy President of the Government of Cuba and of the Council of State, Esteban Lazo, arrived in Luanda, Angola, for a five-day working visit meant to reinforce the diplomatic ties between the two countries. During his stay in Luanda, Lazo will meet with the Angolan President, Jose Eduardo dos Santos. (*Angola Press Agency*, 15/3/04)

**March 31:** Foreign Minister of Angola Joao Bernardo de Miranda is arriving in Havana, for a five-day official visit to Cuba. Bernardo de Miranda is scheduled to meet with his Cuban counterpart Felipe Perez Roque, the President of Parliament Ricardo Alarcon de Quesada, and Jose Ramon Balaguer Cabrera, head of the Central Committee's International Relations Department. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/3/04)

**April 1:** Angolan Foreign Minister Joao Bernardo de Miranda is scheduled to meet with Cuban authorities and tour several sites of interests as part of his official visit to Cuba. The Angolan guest and his delegation met with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, who highlighted the long standing bilateral friendship and solidarity links. Bernardo de Miranda layed a wreath on the monument in Havana Colón cemetery dedicated to the 2,106 Cubans who died in the defense of Angola. (*Prensa Latina*, 1/4/04)

**April 4:** Angolan Foreign minister, João Miranda, considered as fruitful the official talks he held in Havana (Cuba), with his local counterpart, Felipe Perez Roque. Speaking at a press conference, the head of the Angolan diplomacy said that under the existing bilateral cooperation, more than 200 Angolan students are currently attending Cuba universities, whereas more than 400 Cuban expatriates are working in Angola as professionals in various areas. (*Angola Press*, 4/4/04)

#### Botswana

**March 10:** Botswana has praised Cuba's medical assistance to this southern Africa nation in its fight against AIDS and HIV infections. Mathias Chakalisa, Botswana's permanent secretary of the Ministry of Health, told the press that Cuban medical personnel have worked tirelessly to help confront this terrible disease. (*Prensa Latina*, 10/3/04)

#### Burkina Faso

**August 2:** Jean de Dieu Samda, Minister delegate of Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation of Burkina Faso, arrived in Havana, invited by the Ministry of Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration (MINVEC). The high official was welcomed at Havana Jose Marti International

Airport by Ramon Ripall, deputy minister of MINVEC and other representatives from the Cuban entity and the local Foreign Affairs Ministry (MINREX). (*Prensa Latina*, 2/8/04)

## Congo

**March 9:** The Congolese press highlights existing cooperation between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Cuba in higher education and short term development projects. Under the headline "Cooperation without Traps", the L' Avenir daily reports on the recent signing of an agreement between the International University of Congo (IUC) and Universidad de Oriente (UO) in Santiago de Cuba, a Cuban eastern province, that envisions an exchange program. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/3/04)

## Djibouti

**September 29:** President of Djibouti, Ismail Omar Guelleh, begins a visit to Cuba to improve cooperation and bilateral relations, according to official sources in Havana. Guelleh is the first president of this African nation to visit the island, and it demonstrates the wish of both countries to strengthen bilateral relations and collaboration. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/9/04)

## Equatorial Guinea

**November 18:** The Foreign Minister of Equatorial Guinea, Pastor Micha Ondó Bile, has begun an official visit to the island at the invitation of his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Pérez Roque. Relations between Havana and Malabo were established in December 1972. Since then, bilateral cooperation has grown and relations between the two countries are excellent. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 18/11/04)

## Ethiopia

**March 4:** Cuba and Ethiopia will sign a cultural agreement, as part of bilateral efforts to increase cooperation particularly to develop joint programs, exchange delegations, publications and general information. Cuban Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto, and Ethiopian Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture, Teshome Toga Chanaka, will preside over the ceremony. Toga Chanaka signed a cooperation protocol with the general secretary of Cuban Communist Youth Union (UJC), Otto Rivero. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/3/04)

**March 9:** Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has said the Cuban government's support to Ethiopia was in tune with the development strategy the Ethiopian government pursues. The Cuban vice-president has described his visit to Ethiopia as fruitful. During talks with Cuban Vice-President Esteban Lazo, Prime Minister Meles said Cuba has been providing support to Ethiopia in the areas, among others, of agriculture, education, health and human resource development. (*BBC*, 10/3/04)

**April 27:** Cuba and Ethiopia have signed an agreement in Havana to strengthen bilateral legislative cooperation. Participants in the signing agreement ceremony included Cuban Politburo member Esteban Lazo Hernandez, the Vice President of the Cuban Parliament Jaime Crombet Hernandez-Baquero and the Speaker of the Ethiopian House of Representatives Dawit Johannes. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/4/04)

## Gambia

**August 5:** The Gambian government's special envoy, Bala Garba Jahumpa, said Cuba is his second homeland, upon his arrival in Havana on a working visit. Bala Garba Jahumpa, Minister of Public Works, Construction and Infrastructure in his country, highlighted the work carried out by

the Cuban medical and paramedical staff in Gambia and other African countries. "We will always be thankful for their contribution," the Gambia official said. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/8/04)

## Guinea

**December 6:** Cuba's Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and Guinea's Mamady Conde held official talks, as part of the African diplomat's visit to Havana. Conde told the press that the purpose of his visit is to boost bilateral cooperation links, especially in public health, construction and higher education. He also thanked Cuba for its support, which has allowed dozens of Guineans to study on the island. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/12/04)

## Lesotho

**November 9:** Lesotho Foreign Affairs Minister, Kenneth Mohlabi Tsekoa, wound up a three-day visit to Cuba, which was aimed at expanding bilateral links. Before traveling to his country, the African diplomat signed the protocol of the 3rd Session of the Inter-Government Joint Commission in health and education, as well as foster the technical support in engineering, information technology and tele-communications, sport sector and training the staff from that nation. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/11/04)

## Mali

**March 30:** Mr. Fidele Idiarra, Malian Ambassador to Cuba, stated that relations between the two nations are excellent. The diplomat spoke at an event carried out with 101 young people from Mali, that are studying at the Caribbean Faculty of Medicine in Santiago de Cuba. (*AIN*, 30/3/04)

## Mozambique

**March 4:** Cuban technicians are to work with their Mozambican counterparts in designing programmes for the National Social Security Institute (INSS) Professional Training Centre, in Chokwe district, in the southern province of Gaza, reports the Mozambican daily paper "Noticias". Mozambican Labour Minister Mario Sevene made this announcement, shortly after signing an agreement to that end with his Cuban counterpart Alfredo Morales Cartaya. (*AllAfrica.com*, 4/3/04)

**June 25:** Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano and Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage held talks in Maputo on matters of mutual interest -- especially Cuban assistance to the African country in the fields of health, education, tourism and fishing. The meeting, held at the Government Palace in Maputo, was also attended by Cuba's Ambassador to Mozambique, Eduardo González, and Marcos Rodríguez, head of the Foreign Ministry's Africa Department. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 25/6/04)

**July 13:** The Foreign Affairs Minister of Mozambique Leonardo Santos arrived in Cuba on a four-day official visit that will include talks with his Cuban counterpart Felipe Pérez Roque. Santos, who is accompanied by Mozambique's Ambassador to Cuba Jeronimo Joao Chivavi and the National Human Resources Director Jorge Tomo, will also meet other top Cuban officials including the Public Health Minister and the Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 13/7/04)

**July 15:** Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque said in Havana that Cuba and Mozambique are faced with the enormous challenges of a globalized world, according to Granma newspaper. The Mozambican official voiced his country's willingness to continue bilateral cooperation in the fields of health and education and to broaden other sectors to the benefit of both countries. The Mozambican delegation held talks with Cuba's Health Minister Jose Ramon Balaguer, Education

Minister Luis Ignacio Gomez and Higher Education Minister Fernando Vecino Alegret. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 15/7/04)

## **Namibia**

**June 22:** Namibian President Sam Nujoma began an official three-day visit to Cuba set to include talks with Fidel Castro, officials said. Nujoma was welcomed in Havana by Foreign Investment and Cooperation Minister, Marta Lomas, and Deputy Foreign Minister, Jose Guerra Menchero. (*AFP*, 23/6/04)

**June 23:** During his three-day visit to Cuba, Namibian president Sam Nujoma was welcomed by Fidel Castro at a ceremony also attended by Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, Health Minister José Ramón Balaguer and Marta Lomas, Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation. Also present were members of the accompanying delegation from Africa, including Namibian Foreign Affairs Minister Marco Hausiko and Hifikepunye Pohamba, Namibia's Minister of Land, Reestablishment and Rehabilitation. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 23/6/04)

**November 25:** Namibia's President-elect Hifikepunye Pohamba says that relations with Cuba are excellent and based on strong ties of brotherhood. The 65-year-old African leader -- who will be sworn in as president in March 2005 -- said that the Namibian people will never forget the Cuban soldiers who fought alongside them in the struggle for independence. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 25/11/04)

## **Seychelles**

**October 7:** Seychelles Foreign Minister Emile Patrick Jeremie Bonnelame said that his country opposes Washington's blockade against Cuba. The African leader, who is on an official visit to the island, said that he is in Cuba at the invitation of his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Pérez Roque. Cooperation between Cuba and Seychelles began in 1980. Over 230 students from Seychelles have graduated from Cuba and the island has sent over 80 people to work in areas like health and sports in that country. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 8/10/04)

## **South Africa**

**March 2:** South Africa stands to benefit in terms of job creation and tourism growth from Cuban labour experts who will be visiting the country this year. Cuban Minister of Labour and Social Security Alfredo Morales Cartaya signed an agreement with his South African counterpart, Membathisi Mdladlana, allowing for improved co-operation in the fields of employment, social security and occupational health and safety. The ministers said priorities would include exchanging advice on medium and long-term employment projection, the creation of jobs for "vulnerable groups" of society, skills development for the youth and campaigns for apprenticeships and training. (*Independent Online*, 3/3/04)

**May 29:** The Cuban and South African governments strengthened their bilateral relations with the signing in Havana of a Framework Programme for Scientific and Technological Cooperation for the period 2004-2008. The document establishes the foundations for increased cooperation in the fields of biotechnology, information and communication technology, plant and animal development and organic science. Cuba and South Africa also agreed to improve mechanisms for cooperation between universities and research institutes in both countries by promoting specialist exchanges and scientific fora. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 29/5/04)

**July 30:** The first eight South African doctors graduated in Cuban schools of medicine have received their certificates in an official ceremony in their country. Following additional studies in South Africa, they recently passed the state examination at the University of Transkei School of Medicine in Eastern Cape province. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 30/7/04)

**October 20:** More than 450 Cubans are on the payrolls of South African government departments including housing, health, and water affairs and forestry. Most of them (at least 339) work as doctors. Others are architects, engineers and technicians. The statistics are found in a report released by the Public Service Commission on the appointment of professional Cubans in the public service. The query arose in a question asked in parliament by Freedom Front Plus Member of Parliament Pieter Groenewald. The report makes clear, however, that the numbers could be higher. "We request that the government put a stop to this practice and start employing South Africans whose qualifications are accepted by the South African Qualifications Authority," Groenewald said. (*Cape Argus*, 20/10/04)

**October 27:** The South Africa Western Cape housing department has recruited 10 Cuban senior engineers and architects to assist in housing projects, because local specialists are too expensive. Housing and Local Government MEC Marius Fransman said this is part of the department's bid to deliver houses faster. Fransman said the 10 full-time Cuban specialists in social housing would work on site with beneficiaries involved in the People's Housing Process projects, in which they built their own homes with the subsidies received from the government. Said Fransman: "I challenge local engineers and architects to match what the Cubans are going to do in our province. The Cubans will also train young people in building housing for the poor. We are not able to recruit our own professionals because they are too costly." (*Cape Times*, 27/10/04)

**December 2:** "The new South African Experiences, Ten Years After the End of Apartheid" was the title of a seminar held in Havana. Sponsored by the South African embassy in Havana and the Cuban Friendship Institute, the meeting was held at Havana's elegant Hotel Nacional. Among the participants was former South African freedom fighter, Ruth Segomotsi Mompati. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 2/12/04)

## Uganda

**January 10:** Cuba has offered five professors to teach technical programmes at the 2-year old Kyambogo University over the next two years, reports Geresom Musamali. Cuba has also offered three more professors to teach at Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST). At least 10 Cuban professors have already been supporting teaching programmes at MUST since it was started about 10 years ago. Tom Butime, state minister for foreign affairs, said there was wide co-operation between Cuba and Uganda in the fields of education, agriculture and medicine, among others. (*All Africa*, 12/1/04)

**March 9:** The Chief of Military Intelligence Col. Noble Mayombo has said the Cuban spirit of resilience against US imperialism should inspire Uganda's own struggles against evil forces. Mayombo praised Cuba for her bilateral assistance to Uganda especially in human resource aid. Cuba helped government establish the Mbarara University of Science and Technology. "Cuba has on several occasions sent its doctors to help us overcome our health problems. But these doctors are also different. They serve with great responsibility and at times in difficult areas like Karamoja," Mayombo observed. (*AllAfrica.Com*, 9/3/04)

**March 29:** Cuba is to support the newly-established Kampala International University (KIU) medical school location. The Cuban ambassador, Ricardo Antonio Danza Sigas, said this while meeting KIU vice-chancellor Prof. Muhammad Ndawula, and the deans and heads of various departments at the university. "The Cuban Government wants everyone to attain university education. We want to help the people and countries of the Third World. Our doctors work for a small fee. Those at Mbarara University are not paid a salary but only get pocket money of about \$500," he said. (*AllAfrica.Com*, 29/3/04)

## Western Sahara

**March 2:** The Saharawi Foreign Minister Mohamed Salem Ould Salek arrived in Havana invited by his Cuban counterpart Felipe Perez Roque. "This visit will strengthen the historical cooperation and friendship links between Cuban and Saharawi people," Ould Salek said on his arrival at Havana International Airport. (*Prensa Latina*, 2/3/04)

**March 4:** Western Sahara's Foreign Minister, Mohamed Salem Ould Salek, arrived in Havana on the invitation of his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Pérez Roque. Ould Salek met with the Cuban Education Minister Luis Ignacio Gómez to examine current bilateral accords and to discuss future Cuban participation in the African nation's education system. The Western Saharan Minister expressed confidence that his visit would "strengthen the historical links of cooperation and friendship between Cubans and Western Saharans". (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 4/3/04)

## Zambia

**February 15:** Cuba has offered to give members of the Zambia's MMD ( Movement for Multiparty Democracy) scholarships in politics and help them learn from its schools on the Cuban revolutionary government. Cuban director of African affairs Luis Morejón Poto said in Lusaka that Cuba had made the invitation because it enjoyed close ties with African nations, especially in Southern Africa. The Cuban envoy said this when he paid a courtesy call on MMD officials at the party secretariat. Speaking at the same function, MMD national secretary Samuel Miyanda thanked the Cuban government for the support it had continued rendering to Zambia. "Credit goes to the Cuban government for all the support it has rendered to Zambia in the field of medicine and the provision of medical facilities," Mr Miyanda said. (*The Zambia Times*, 15/2/04)

**September 28:** Zambia's Foreign Affairs Minister Kalombo T. Mwansa concluded an official visit to Cuba, where he held top-level talks and visited socio-economic centers in the island's western zone. Mwansa arrived in Havana at the invitation of his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Perez Roque, with whom he held official talks at the Cuban Foreign Affairs Ministry. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/9/04)

## Zimbabwe

**March 1:** Visiting Cuban Minister of Labour and Social Welfare Mr Alfredo Cartaya paid tribute to President Robert Mugabe and Zimbabweans for supporting his country in fighting imperialism and economic sanctions imposed by the United States. Speaking through an interpreter, Mr Cartaya told journalists in Harare that Zimbabweans and Cubans would continue to work together in different fields and fight imperialist ideologies that were being imposed on the two countries by western powers, particularly the United States and Britain. (*AllAfrica.Com*, 1/3/04)

**March 3:** The Deputy Minister of Industry and Commerce in Zimbabwe, Kenneth Manyonda declared that Zimbabwe and Cuba should increase mutual co-operation in the wake of sanctions imposed on the two nations by some Western countries. Manyonda's comments came during the official opening of the ninth session of the Zimbabwe-Cuba Joint Commission in Harare. The Zimbabwean Minister thanked Cuba for its "total commitment, support and solidarity" with the African nation. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 3/3/04)

**March 12:** Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe thanked in Harare the solidarity of the Cuban people towards the African nation. Mugabe also characterized Fidel Castro as "a friend and brother." During an interview, the Zimbabwean president recalled that not only did Zimbabwe receive Cuban support during its liberation struggle, but now they are receiving Cuban doctors and other specialists to contribute to the country's health and development. (*Prensa Latina*, 12/3/04)

## ARAB COUNTRIES

## Iran

[See also, Economy/ Foreign investments and trade/ Arab countries/]

**May 10:** Cuba's Ambassador to Tehran José Ramón Rodríguez called for Iran's support for his country to face the renewed and further broadened US sanctions. Rodríguez, who was speaking to the press, added: "The US Government intends to extend its 45-year sanctions against Cuba once again, while broadening the range of those sanctions to an unprecedented level." (*IRNA*, 10/5/04)

**July 1:** In a 24-hour flying visit to Cuba, the Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi condemned the US blockade of the island and called on developing countries to join in solidarity for a multi-polar world. Kharrazi arrived in Havana, invited by his Cuban counterpart Felipe Pérez Roque, to hold high level talks on the bilateral relations between the two countries. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 2/7/04)

## Oman

**June 4:** Oman and Cuba pledged to strengthen their bilateral relations while exploring possibilities of joint ventures in various fields. Cuba's visiting Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation Marta Morales, held talks with the top officials in the Sultanate. (*Oman News*, 4/6/04)

## Palestine

**May 17:** Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Abelardo Moreno traveled to Kuala Lumpur to lend a helping hand to the Palestinian cause, despite his country's mounting problems with the United States. The former career diplomat left for home satisfied with the outcome of the Non-Aligned Movement's (NAM) special ministerial session on the Middle East conflict, but still thinking of a way out for his homeland. "The meeting was convened at a vital hour by the Malaysian Government, and NAM members have reaffirmed their solidarity by standing united on the Palestinian issue. I am happy to have played a role," he added in an interview. (*The Star.Com*, 17/5/04)

**October 7:** Palestinian Vice-President, Tassyr Quba, arrived in Cuba on an official visit during which he'll relay a message from Palestinian Leader, Yasser Arafat, to Fidel Castro, reported the official daily "Granma". The message explains the current political situation in Palestine, and Israel's "genocide" against the Palestinian people with backing from the U.S., said Quba to Granma. (*AFP*, 7/10/04)

**November 11:** Cuba said the death of Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat was a "cause for dismay in the international community." The communist island's newspapers featured photos of the deceased leader giving a "V" for victory sign, and hailed Arafat for his efforts to create a Palestinian state. The Cuban Council of State decreed an official mourning period of three days and announced that a book of condolences will be open to the public at the Palestinian Embassy in Havana. In 1973, Cuba broke diplomatic ties with Israel in a move of solidarity with the Palestinian people. A year later it established formal relations with the Palestinian Liberation Authority headed by Arafat. (*UPI, Radio Habana Cuba*, 11/11/04)

**November 12:** Cuba honored the memory of the President of the Palestine National Authority, Yasser Arafat, with a ceremony on the Plaza de la Revolución attended by the Cuban Vice President Raúl Castro, the President of the Cuban Parliament Ricardo Alarcón, the Palestinian Ambassador to Cuba, Imad Jada, Cuban ministers and members of the Central Committee and many of the diplomatic corps in Cuba. Fidel Castro was unable to attend due to his recent accident. The Cuban leader signed the book of condolences for Arafat, opened by the Palestinian Embassy in Havana. On the first page of the book Castro wished "honor and eternal glory to the

unforgettable and heroic fighter, Yasser Arafat." "Nothing will be able to erase his name from the history of great fighters for people's liberation," he wrote. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/11/04)

## ASIA

[See also, Economy/ Collaboration agreements]

### China

[See also, Economy/ Foreign investments and trade/ Asia, and Nickel; and Security/ Military relations]

**February 4:** The Ambassador of the Popular Republic of China in Cuba, Wang Zhiquan, was awarded the Medal of Friendship in recognition of what Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque called "his friendship and solidarity with and assistance for the Cuban Revolution." Pérez Roque presented the award to the Chinese diplomat, who will complete his posting this month, highlighting his tireless efforts to strengthen bilateral cooperation between the two countries. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 4/2/04)

**May 19:** A Chinese Communist Party delegation expressed solidarity with Cuban leader Fidel Castro as he confronts a mounting US embargo, the official press reported. The delegation led by Wang Jiarui, head of the international department of the Chinese party's central committee, met Castro, said *Granma*, the Cuban Communist Party daily. Wang said "China is working to consolidate fraternal links" between the two countries, the official Prensa Latina news agency said, without giving more details of the meeting. The Chinese official also met Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and Vice President Carlos Lage. (*AFP*, 19/5/04)

**June 21:** Cuba and China have announced that inter-ministerial meetings, which got underway over the weekend in Havana will strengthen relations between both countries and raise levels of cooperation in the international arena. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 21/6/04)

**September 20:** A senior Cuban government delegation is headed to Southeast Asia for a three-nation tour. The group, led by senior government official Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, will travel to China, Laos and Vietnam for talks. Also joining the delegation are Salvador Valdés Mesa, member of the Central Committee and first secretary of the Party in Camagüey, and Oscar Martínez Cordovés, vice chief of the International Relations Department of the CC. Details of the meetings have not been released. (*VOA, Granma*, 20/9/04)

**September 24:** Chinese President Hu Jintao said in Beijing that China has set an unswerving policy on consolidating ties with Cuba, and the policy will not alter regardless of changes in the international situation. Hu made the remarks at a meeting with Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Cuba's Central Committee and vice president of the Council of State of Cuba. With concerted efforts, China believes the bilateral friendship between China and Cuba would be better developed, said Hu, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China. (*Xinhua*, 24/9/04)

**October 2:** Fidel Castro led celebrations in Havana for the 55th anniversary of the creation of the People's Republic of China, in a gala attended by the Chinese Ambassador and top Cuban officials and personalities. The Vice President of the Cuban Council of State Esteban Lazo Hernández opened the ceremony, held in a downtown Havana theatre, declaring that "Cuba and China will remain united under the flag of socialism." (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 2/10/04)

**October 11:** Cuba's Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto, began a visit to the People's Republic of China. The Cuban official will meet local authorities and participate in the Seventh Annual Ministers Meeting of the International Cultural Policies Network. The gathering will focus on strategies for the preservation of the cultural diversity of mankind and participants will propose

and analyze initiatives aimed at protecting and developing traditional cultures. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/10/04)

**October 13:** A Chinese parliamentary delegation is currently visiting Cuba. Speaking with reporters upon the delegation's arrival in Havana, Lilian Zhu said she is very pleased to visit Cuba for the first time. Zhu is a member of the Permanent Committee and chairperson of the Education, Science, Culture and Health Commission of the People's National Assembly. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 13/10/04)

**November 2:** Chinese President Hu Jintao will pay state visits to Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Cuba from November 11 to 23. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue made the announcement in Beijing at a routine press briefing. (*Xinhua*, 3/11/04)

**November 22:** China's President Hu Jintao arrived in Cuba on his first visit as Chinese leader to offer the Western Hemisphere's only communist state closer political and economic ties. Hu praised the "heroic Cuban people" and urged them to continue building socialism under the leadership of Fidel Castro, 16 years his senior and in power since 1959. "We sincerely wish the Cuban people do not let up in their advance on the road of socialist construction," Hu said in a written greeting on his arrival from an Asia-Pacific summit in Chile. He was met by Castro's younger brother and designated successor, Raul. Castro, who broke his knee in a fall in October, received his visitor sitting in a wheel-chair as they met for talks at the government headquarters, the Palace of the Revolution. The visit is being seen in the Cuban media as a display of solidarity from a faithful ally, years after the collapse of Cuba's former benefactor, the USSR. But, despite both being officially communist the two states are moving in opposite directions. President Hu is pushing privatisation, while Cuba is seeing recentralisation. It is not expected that differences in style or ideology will be stressed by either side in the coming days. (*BBC, Reuters*, 22/11/04)

**November 23:** Chinese president Hu Jintao and Cuban First Vice President Raul Castro held a friendly meeting in Havana, discussing the results already achieved in Hu's visit to Cuba. Cuban Communist Party Political Bureau member Jose R. Machado Ventura, Vice President Carlos Lage, Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, as well as ambassadors from both countries and some members of the Chinese delegation also attended the meeting. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/11/04)

**November 23:** Chinese President Hu Jintao left Cuba after signing a raft of deals in a 29-hour trip that gave a big political and economic boost to the island's leader, Fidel Castro. "We have a solid base on which to deepen our relations, thanks to our many shared common politics. We both choose a socialist path to our development," Hu said earlier in the day. Castro heaped praise on China's progress but made it clear, with Hu looking on, that Cuba would not adopt China's capitalist path to economic growth. "Socialism will remain in the end the only real hope for peace and the survival of our species," said Castro, at the Palace of the Revolution. Castro said Cuba and China share "the ideals of socialism," and that China "objectively speaking has become the most promising hope and the best example for all developing countries." "I do not hesitate to say that it is now the main engine of world economic growth," Castro added. Yet the Cuban leader, whose government has backtracked on the few concessions to capitalism with which it has experimented, said: "Each people must adapt its revolutionary strategy and goals to the specific conditions of its own country." (*AFP*, 23/11/04)

## Laos

**February 20:** The Vice Foreign Ministers of Laos and Cuba, Phonguavath Bounpha and José Guerra Menchero, met in the capital of the East Asian nation. Guerra Menchero heads a delegation from the Cuban Foreign Ministry currently on an official visit in Laos. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 21/2/04)

**October 21:** Cuba will offer Laos all the support it needs in the sports area, Humberto Rodriguez, president of the Sports Institute of Cuba, said in Havana. In a meeting with Rodriguez, Phounthon

Seng Akon, visiting head of the Laos Olympic Committee, expressed his interest to extend collaboration from boxing to other disciplines like volleyball, gymnastics and athletics. (*Xinhuanet*, 21/1/04)

**November 4:** Cuba and Laos have reconfirmed their bilateral relations during a workshop in the Cuban capital, organized by the Havana-based Center of Studies on Asia and Oceania. The gathering was attended by former Cuban ambassadors to Laos and Vietnam, members of the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee, Foreign Ministry officials and representatives from several Cuban institutions. Also present at the workshop was a delegation headed by Chaleune Yiapaoheu, member of the Central Committee of the People's Revolutionary Party of Laos. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 4/11/04)

## Malaysia

**November 24:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi arrived in Havana in conjunction with the celebration to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Malaysia and Cuba. Malaysian ambassador Datuk Kamal Yan Yahaya said Abdullah was making an official visit to Cuba at the invitation of Fidel Castro. The Cuban leader and Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi analyzed bilateral relations and exchanged viewpoints regarding international issues. The same day, the Cuban government decorated its guest with the Jose Marti Order, the highest award granted by the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba. This is also Abdullah's first official visit to a country in this region. (*The Star.Com, Prensa Latina*, 25/11/04)

**November 26:** Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi wrapped up a two-day official visit to Cuba, during which he exchanged views with Fidel Castro and other Cuban leaders. Badawi was seen off at Havana's Jose Marti international airport by General Raul Castro, who had also welcomed the Malaysian premier when he arrived in Cuba. (*Channel New Asia*, 26/11/04)

## Mongolia

**March 16:** In a meeting with outgoing Cuban Ambassador to Mongolia, Pedro A. Moran Tapanes, Mongolian President Natsagiin Bagabandi highlighted the historic friendship and cooperation ties between Mongolia and Cuba. "Although Mongolia and Cuba are geographically distant from each other, they have been united with good relations for more than 40 years," Bagabandi told Moran Tapanes, who concludes his four years as Cuban diplomatic representative. Bagabandi noted the economic capacity of both countries that allows increased cooperation in different areas, such as health care, biotechnology and education. The Mongolian doctors and dentists who studied in Cuba are working well and have great popular acceptance, the Mongolian leader added. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/3/04)

## North Korea

[See also, Security/ Military Relations]

**June 5:** North Korean Deputy Foreign Minister Choi Su Hon is in Cuba for a three day official visit with the aim of strengthening bilateral relations and will meet Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque. Choi Su Hon expects to meet also with Cuban Deputy Foreign Ministers Abelardo Moreno and José A. Guerra Menchero, as well as ministry officials Rafael Dausá and Aramis Fuentes. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/6/04)

**September 18:** The 23rd Economic and Scientific-Technical Commission between Cuba and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea opened at the Sojedong Residential Complex in Pyongyang. Cuban Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas and DPRK Trade Minister Ri Kyong Man are chairing sessions on the development of bilateral economic and commercial relations

over the last two years, and exchange views on relations in 2005 in a wide variety of areas. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/9/04)

## **Vietnam**

[See also, Security/ Military Relations]

**February 18:** Vietnam's President Tran Duc Luong highlighted the excellent relations with Cuba in a farewell reception to retiring Cuban Ambassador to Vietnam, Fredesman Turro González. Luong said relations between Vietnam and Cuba are at a great moment and sent his greetings to Fidel Castro and the Cuban people. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/2/04)

**March 7:** Vietnam's Communist Party chief, Nong Duc Manh, has met with Fidel Castro, at the Palace of the Revolution in Havana. The two communist leaders posed for photographs before their talks, on the second day of a five-day visit to Cuba. Mr Nong Duc Manh will also receive Cuba's highest honour, the order of Jose Marti, and visit scientific research stations in Havana. (*Asia PacificBreaking News*, 7/3/04)

**March 8:** Fidel Castro attended an event in solidarity with Vietnam -- just one day before the secretary general of Vietnam's Communist Party wrapped up his official visit to the island. Addressing the rally, Nong Duc Manh said that Cuba can always count on the support of Vietnam. He thanked the Cuban Communist Party and people for their hospitality during his four-day stay, which he described as productive and fruitful. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 9/3/04)

**March 9:** The leaders of Vietnam and Cuba, two of the world's last five communist-run societies, pledged to stick together in their march to build socialism. The secretary-general of Vietnam's Communist Party, Nong Duc Manh, ended a four-day visit to Cuba where he visited Havana's Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology and the Information Technology University supplied with Vietnamese computers. "We are two small countries, fighters with experience, and we march forward together as an example," Fidel Castro said as he bid Manh farewell at Havana airport. "We will continue together, Vietnamese and Cubans," Manh said. (*Reuters*, 9/3/04)

**November 15:** The President of Vietnam, Tran Duc Luong, paid a brief visit to Cuba to inquire about the health of Fidel Castro. The Vietnamese leader was on his way to Chile when he made a quick morning stop-over to meet with the Cuban leader. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 15/11/04)

**November 26:** Cuban experts and workers of the Ho Chi Minh Construction Group which was set up to help Viet Nam carry out Cuba-funded projects, gathered at a ceremony in Havana to celebrate 30 years of the group's foundation. The group had teamed up with their Vietnamese counterparts to build Thang Loi (victory) hotel in Ha Noi, Dong Hoi hospital (central Quang Binh province), Xuan Mai road (northern Hoa Binh province), Moc Chau dairy farm (northern Son La province), and Luong My chicken farm (northern Ha Tay province). (*VNA*, 26/11/04)

## **ASIA, CARIBBEAN AND PACIFIC GROUP (ACP)**

**May 7:** Cuban Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas thanked the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Group (ACP) members in Gaborone for their position in favor of Cuba in Geneva. Cabrisas addressed the 79th meeting of the ACP Group Council of Ministers held in Gaborone about the support of ACP member countries and their rejection of the maneuvers to condemn Cuba at the 60th period of sessions of the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC). (*Prensa Latina*, 7/5/04)

**June 24:** Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage addressed the opening of the 4th Summit of the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Group (ACP) in Maputo -- noting the ACP has become an important forum of consultation that international institutions must take into account. Carlos Lage said that every day the European Union shamelessly boasts of its alliance with the United States. He noted that Washington's unilateral and imperialist policy is unprecedented, without regard to the United

Nations, its allies or international public opinion. And Cuba's vice-president said that recent events confirm that empires have neither friends nor principles, only interests. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 25/6/04)

## CANADA

[See also, Economy/ Foreign investment and trade, Energy/ Oil and other resources, Nickel and Tourism]

### Business

#### Energy

**March 13:** The Cuba-Canada joint venture in the energy sector, known as Energas, will make important investments in East Havana to increase power generation this year. Energas executives say that the project is expected to allow for the improved use of gas reserves on the northern coastal strip of Havana province and make a considerable contribution to environmental preservation. The company's station in central Matanzas province, with a 200-megawatt-hour potential, contributed 144 million kilowatt-hours in January, which satisfied all local consumption needs during hours of the highest electrical demand. Also in that central province, Energas produced tons of pure sulphur and liquefied gas, which is distributed throughout the island as kitchen fuel. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 13/3/04)

**May 8:** Sherritt International Corp. plans to boost electricity production in Cuba by 71 per cent over the next three years, supplying about 20 per cent of the island's needs. Energas, a natural gas-fired generator one-third owned by Sherritt, will add about 150 megawatts of new capacity, chief operating officer Jowdatt Waheed said in a conference call yesterday, one day after Sherritt announced a 52-per-cent increase in quarterly profits. The expansion plans are still being worked out, but Sherritt executives hope the two-phase development will proceed. The Toronto-based company says it will finance its share of the project with its Cuban cash flows. (*The Globe and Mail*, 8/5/04)

**October 27:** Canadian PEBERCAN Inc. announced an intensification of its oil exploration and development project within Bloc 7, a concession located between Havana and Matanzas on the north coast of the Republic of Cuba. At present, three drilling rigs are active in this zone and will remain active until the end of 2004. PEBERCAN Inc. is involved in the exploration, development and operation of oil reserves in the Republic of Cuba. Its mining domain includes five concessions covering 6,155 km<sup>2</sup>, including Block 7, the only concession operated to date. PEBERCAN sells all of its production to the Cuban government. (*Canada News Wire*, 27/10/04)

#### Nickel

**March 5:** The head of Sherritt International says the company needs to "make something happen" in the next six months to get expansion of its Cuban nickel project underway or it will miss a chance to take advantage of the recent strength in nickel prices. "We're sitting down with our counterparts in Cuba and it's really a matter of negotiations to define the terms that are satisfactory to both parties," Dennis Maschmeyer, Sherritt's chief executive, said during a conference call with analysts. Last year, Sherritt's Moa mining and processing facilities in Cuba produced 7,715 tonnes in the fourth quarter and 32,042 tonnes for the full year of nickel plus cobalt contained in mixed sulphides. That compared with 8,159 tonnes during the fourth quarter of 2002 and a record 33,382 tonnes during the prior year. The company attributed the lower production rates to lower-grade ore and additional maintenance activities in 2002. (*The Toronto Star*, 5/3/04)

**May 6:** Sherritt International Corporation boosted its first-quarter profit by 52 per cent as revenue rose 16 1/2 per cent, the mining company reported. Sherritt, which also has significant oil, gas,

power generation and tourism assets, mostly in Cuba, said it earned \$52.9 million or 35 cents per share in the first three months of 2004, compared with net earnings of \$34.8 million or 26 cents per share in the first quarter of 2003. Revenue climbed to \$224.9 million from \$192.9 million. (*The Toronto Star*, 6/5/04)

**November 4:** Sherritt International Corp.'s earnings doubled in the third quarter, results showed, on the back of higher nickel and cobalt prices and strong sales. The company, which has power, oil and nickel investments in Canada and Cuba, earned \$40.2-million or 26 cents a share in the three months ended September 30. That compared with \$20.7-million or 11 cents in the same quarter a year ago. Sherritt said that sales of nickel, a metal used to produce stainless steel, increased by 5 per cent in the fourth quarter to 8.3 million pounds. Sales of cobalt, which is mined with nickel, were 900,000 pounds, up slightly over the prior-year quarter. (*The Globe and Mail*, 5/11/04)

**December 25:** An oil deposit with an estimated 100-million-barrel reserve has been discovered off Cuba's coast by Canadian companies Sherritt International Corp. and Pebercan Inc., Fidel Castro said. "We have a new oil discovery (...) the first since 1999," Castro said during a closed-door speech to parliament deputies, parts of which were carried by official media next day. "The oil has a density of 18 API (...) and contains less than 5 percent sulfur," he said, pointing out it was of better quality than the heavy crude associated with the area, which averages 16 API and 8 percent sulfur. The new Santa Cruz field, 33 miles east of the capital, will go into production in 2006, Castro said, while the Canadian firms will drill two new test wells, and explore three other potential deposits nearby in 2005. (*Reuters, The Globe and Mail*, 26/12/04)

**December 31:** Sherritt International Corp. has confirmed "promising" exploration results from an offshore oil prospect in Cuba, but made no predictions as to when or if the prospect could be brought into production. Shares of Sherritt and exploration partner Calgary-based Pebercan Inc. soared following reports of a joint oil discovery in Cuba. The discovery is in Block 7, an area off the northwest coast of Cuba. Sherritt, the largest foreign oil producer in Cuba, holds a 45-per-cent working interest in Block 7. Pebercan holds the remaining 55-per-cent stake and is the operator. (*The Globe and Mail*, 31/12/04)

## Tourism

**March 19:** Hola Sun Holidays opened for business in the Toronto area, in 1992, and is a part of Havanatur, an operator based in Havana with more than 200 employees in Cuba and 90 tour operators in 50 countries. Martha Chapman, a spokesperson for Signature Vacations, said it is well known that Hola Sun is Cuban-owned, and it deals entirely with trips to that country. Pat Georgiades, owner of Rex Travel, said Hola Sun is one of her preferred wholesalers. She said she didn't know about Hola Sun's affiliation with Cuban leader Fidel Castro's regime, but she doesn't think Canadian travellers will care. "People want to go to Cuba because it's a nice destination and it's a cheap holiday," she said. About 452,000 Canadians travelled to Cuba last year, Toronto's Cuba Tourist Board says. Most go on all-inclusive packages like the ones offered by Hola Sun. (*The Toronto Star*, 19/3/04)

**March 24:** Effective in July, Air Canada will boost its non-stop flights between Toronto and Havana, Cuba to daily service operated with Airbus A319 aircraft. In the meantime, the carrier has introduced a larger Airbus A320 aircraft on the route in response to customer demand for the popular new service launched only last December. (*CNW*, 24/3/04)

**December 1:** Cuba has become the second major tourist destination for Canadian vacationers during the second quarter of this year, according to the Canadian Office of Statistics. Tourists from Canada preferred Cuba over Mexico and other vacation destinations. The Office of Statistics reports that from April to June, 143,000 Canadians visited the Caribbean island, where they stayed for an average 8.9 nights. This accounted for an 88.4 percent increase in contrast to the same period last year. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 1/12/04)

## Trade and investments

**March 17:** Eight Canadian Companies representing the sectors of fresh, processed and natural foods and alcoholic beverages will be visiting with respective producers and suppliers in Havana, Cuba and at their places of work. The purpose of this visit is to introduce Canadian buyers to Cuban suppliers in order to increase Cuban exports to Canada, assist in the development of Cuban production and export capacities, and to generally enhance the trade relationship between Cuba and Canada. (*Trade Facilitation Office Canada, 17/3/04*)

**April 8:** Cuban officials and eight Canadian import companies met in Havana to foster Cuban exports to Canada, Business in Cuba weekly informed. The meeting, sponsored by the "Centro de Promocion para las Exportaciones de Cuba" (CEPEC) and the Trade Facilitation Office Canada (TFOC), focused on food products such as nutritional supplements, drinks, organic products as well as sugar by-products, medicine and others. The Canadian business representatives met with at least 25 Cuban export companies. (*Prensa Latina, 8/4/04*)

**May 26:** The Cuban-Canadian joint venture PROSA looks forward to a significant production growth and expansion on the local and foreign markets this year. Located in central Matanzas province, PROSA expects to soon increase sales up to eight million dollars, which would translate into eight percent growth with respect to 2003. The company's products include toilet paper, tissues, handkerchiefs and other items, which are sold on the Caribbean market and in Cuba's dollar shops. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 26/5/04*)

**December 14:** Cuba has reopened its border to Canadian beef and beef products of any age, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has confirmed. Canadian officials hope the agreement, which also includes the importation of certain Canadian pet food, will lead to the reopening of the border to live Canadian cattle. "This is a very important gain for Canada," Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister Andy Mitchell said in a statement. "We continue to make progress internationally, and this agreement further demonstrates the level of confidence that our trading partners have in Canada's human and animal health safeguards." The Cuban border will remain closed to mechanically separated meat, vertebral column, trimmings, and tissues derived from the head, the CFIA said in a news release. (*CTV.Ca, 15/12/04*)

## Cooperation

**February 19:** About 30 Canadian secondary and university students are in Cuba on the second phase of a cultural, social and labour exchange program between the two nations- now in its 9 th consecutive year. "This program is more than a school as it allows to get acquainted with reality in the context of human relations," said in Havana Matteu Pearse, president of Canada World Youth, a non-governmental organization that since 1977 hosts exchanges of students and teachers between Canada and developing countries. (*World Data Service, 19/2/04*)

**February 20:** Canadian choir, the Greystone Singers, from Saskatchewan University, and Cuban Schola Cantorum Coralina performed at the Basílica Menor of San Francisco de Asís, in Havana. The Greystone Singers, headed by professor Gerald Langner and sponsored by Cuba-Canada Sports & Culture Festivals, showed a wide repertoire of both European classics and Canadian composers. (*Granma, 20/2/04*)

**October 12:** Cuisine Canada's successful Northern Bounty VI Conference ended with the formal announcement of the first Cooks' Tour of Cuba, in which Canadian culinary professionals will visit the farms, markets and cities of Cuba to meet local farmers and chefs. They will learn traditional Cuban cuisines first hand and will gain an understanding about how Cuba has managed to attain "an abundant supply of fresh, local, high quality, and sustainably produced foods for both rural and urban populations". This will be followed by an exchange visit of Cuban chefs to Canada, hosted by Cuisine Canada members throughout the country. (*Press Release, 12/10/04*)

## Diplomatic activities

**August 4:** Cuban dissidents Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello, Oswaldo Payá Sardinás, Félix Bonne Carcassés, Vladimiro Roca Antúnez, René Gómez Manzano and Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz met with Paul Gibbard and Simón Cridland, political counsellor and first secretary respectively of the Canadian Embassy in Cuba. The meeting was held at Mr. Gibbard's residence at the end of his posting. Gibbard will be replaced by Simon Cridland. (*Cubanet*, 11/8/04)

## Helms-Burton Law

**February 27:** The long-running case of a Canadian businessman charged with violating the US embargo against Cuba came to an end with a fine and a sentence of a year's probation. James Sabzali, 45, pleaded guilty to a charge of "smuggling" several thousand dollars worth of supplies destined for the island. He pleaded guilty in exchange for the probation and a \$10,000 fine. With the sentence, he avoids deportation. Sabzali has lived in Philadelphia since 1996. U.S. prosecutors said Sabzali broke the law while working for the American company Brotech Corp. U.S. officials said the company circumvented the trade embargo by selling products to foreign companies, which then shipped them to Cuba. (*CBC Canada*, 27/2/04)

**March 17:** The Bush administration identified a Canadian travel company that it says is linked to Cuba and thus forbidden from doing business in the United States. The Treasury Department's action against Hola Sun Holidays Ltd. of Richmond Hill, Ontario, just north of Toronto, marks the latest development from President George W. Bush's call for more aggressive enforcement of provisions that prohibit most travel to Cuba. The department alleged that the travel agency is "controlled by Fidel Castro and his regime." (*Canada News*, 18/3/04)

**July 1:** The first course in Canadian Studies was opened in the eastern university of Ciego de Ávila (UNICA). Second Secretary of the Canadian Embassy in Cuba Jeff Senior attended the ceremony, which was held on the 137th anniversary of Canada's independence, and praised the new course for promoting mutual awareness and respect between the two countries. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 1/7/04)

## Solidarity

**August 24:** Members of the 12th Ernesto Che Guevara Canadian Solidarity Brigade have reaffirmed their total support of the Cuban people and their Revolution. In a statement released at the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp, located on the outskirts of Havana, the Canadian group said that the Cuban Revolution continues to serve as an example of a just society, pointing to respect for the dignity of all Cubans. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 24/8/04)

**September 9:** The Canadian Network on Cuba is currently holding its convention to evaluate the solidarity work carried out over the past two years and to draw up new action plans. Representatives of 11 Friendship-with-Cuba Associations in English speaking Canada, two communist parties, and the Worker to Worker and the Postal Workers labor unions are attending the event underway in Toronto, Canada. In a press release, the Cuban Friendship Institute (ICAP), said convention activities began as over 50 participants waged a demonstration to protest the recent pardoning of four anti-Cuba terrorists by former Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso, including Luis Posada Carriles. ICAP vice-president Enrique Roman heads a delegation from Cuba to the Canadian event. Also attending are Antonio Pubillones, Cuban political attaché in Ottawa and Laureano Cardoso, the Caribbean nation's General Consul in Toronto. (*A/N*, 9/9/04)

**November 4:** Canada World Youth celebrated the 10 year anniversary of its international educational programs with the Cuban Department of Education at Government House in Halifax.

These programs have provided more than 500 young people from Canada and Cuba with the opportunity to live and work in a cross-cultural setting. (CWY E-News, 17/11/04)

**December 31:** The head of the Friends of Cuba Association in Quebec, Michael Walsh, told reporters in Havana that solidarity with Cuba continues to grow in Canada. Walsh explained that the friendship association has among its objectives the distribution of news, books and other information about Cuba. He said his organization also explains the real situation about Washington's blockade against Cuba to those who are uninformed. Michael Walsh said that during the recent Congress of Professional Journalists in Quebec, two new books were launched: "El Dossier" by Robert Menard and "Why Reporters Without Borders" by journalist Jean Guy Allard, with the collaboration of French journalist Marie Dominique Bertuccioli, from Radio Havana Cuba. According to the solidarity activist, the organization Reporters without Borders is financed by the Central Intelligence Agency and right wing Cuban-American organizations in Miami. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 31/12/04)

## CARIBBEAN

[See also, Economy/ Foreign investments and trade, and Collaboration agreements]

### Barbados

**September 27:** Barbados Prime Minister Billie Miller expressed in New York the rejection of his country and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) of every attempt of "change of regime" imposed from abroad on Cuba. Cuba's isolation in the hemisphere is also a problem that concerns Barbados, that is why we embrace (Cuba) as a sister nation and we are committed to keep a constructive policy towards its government and people, Miller stated at the UN. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/9/04)

### Belize

**March 27:** Belize Minister of Foreign Affairs, Defense and National Emergency Management Organization, Godfrey P. Smith, began an official visit to Cuba. The Belizean minister is participating in the 3rd Meeting between the Cuban and Belizean Foreign Ministries and holding important meetings with Cuban officials. Cuba and Belize established diplomatic relations on July 14, 1995. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/3/04)

**March 30:** Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque and his Belize counterpart Godfrey Smith, signed an agreement in Havana concerning the repatriation of illegal Cuban immigrants in the Central American nation. Pérez Roque said the accord establishes the foundations for legal and organized migration between the two countries, adding that the number of cases of illegal Cuban immigrants in Belize is relatively low. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 31/3/04)

**June 25:** Belize will widen areas of cooperation with Cuba, especially in the treatment of AIDS. According to reports from Belmopan, the Belizean capital, a delegation recently visited Havana to see first-hand the methods used to fight HIV/AIDS in Cuba. Both governments are reportedly studying the possibility of sending a group of doctors from Belize to Cuba, to train at specialized hospitals. Cuba now has 112 doctors and medical personnel working in remote areas of Belize. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 25/6/04)

## CARICOM

**July 15:** Cuba offered to build training centers for nurses to handle AIDS patients in Caribbean nations and provide antiretroviral drugs to fight the pandemic. Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque made the offer at a one-day meeting with counterparts from the Caribbean Community (Caricom). "From the social standpoint, the major challenge ahead of us is the fight against HIV/AIDS," Perez Roque said. He added that economic ties between Cuba and the 15-

member regional Caricom bloc, whose members include Haiti, Jamaica and Trinidad, had not developed sufficiently, despite a trade agreement signed four years ago. The meeting is the first between Caricom and Cuban foreign ministers and comes in the wake of an agreement made during a 2002 Caricom summit to establish closer ties. At that summit it was agreed that Caricom countries and Cuba would meet every three years. (*AFP, Reuters, 15/7/04*)

**July 15:** CARICOM members rejected the recent tightening of the US embargo against Cuba and expressed concern over the impact of Washington's measures on "stability and security" throughout the Caribbean region. Foreign ministers from thirteen member countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) attended the 1 st CARICOM-Cuba Ministerial Meeting in Havana. (*EFE, 15/7/04*)

**December 8:** Activities for the 32nd anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Cuba and CARICOM continued with cultural galas in different Cuban universities. A delegation of the Caribbean Community is scheduled to visit higher education centers in Cuba, where youth from the region are studying different specialties. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 9/12/04*)

**December 10:** The celebrations for the 32nd anniversary of Cuba- Caribbean Community (CARICOM) relations concluded with the creation of the Caribbean Professorship at the University of Havana. CARICOM delegates left the Cuban capital to travel to the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba where they will participate in a cultural gala. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 10/12/04*)

## Dominica

**April 25:** Dominica's Commonwealth Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Planning and Caribbean Affairs, Roosevelt Skerrit, is beginning an official visit to Cuba to further expand trade and economic relations. Skerrit will participate in several official activities including the 3rd Meeting of the Cuba-Dominica Joint Commission and will visit sites of political, economic and social interest. (*Prensa Latina, 25/4/04*)

**April 27:** Dominica's Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit visited the Latin American School of Medicine and the Computer Science School in Havana on the second day of his official visit to Cuba, geared to strengthen bilateral ties. Fidel Castro and other Cuban authorities welcomed Skerrit and his delegation and held the first round of talks. The visitor also presided over the opening session of the 3rd Cuba-Dominica Mixed Commission. (*Prensa Latina, 27/4/04*)

**May 4:** Cuba has agreed to release three students from Dominica sentenced to long prison terms on drug trafficking charges last year, officials said. Fidel Castro agreed to pardon the students after meeting with Dominica's Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit in Havana last month, according to a statement from the Dominica Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth Affairs. The statement did not say when the students were scheduled to be released. They were given sentences ranging from 10-20 years. Castro "agreed on conditions to be followed by all parties involved to issue a presidential pardon," the statement said, but did not specify what the conditions were. (*AP, 4/5/04*)

## Grenada

**September 27:** Cuba will send a brigade of electricians and linesmen to Grenada to help re-establish electricity on that island, seriously damaged by Hurricane Ivan several weeks ago. According to the daily Granma, the brigade -- made up of workers from seven Cuban provinces -- will travel to Grenada in the next few days. Angel Morfi, general secretary of the National Chemical, Mining and Energy Workers Union, said that the electricians just finished repairing damage done by hurricane-force winds in western Pinar del Río. (*Prensa Latina, 28/9/04*)

**December 7:** Current chairman of the Caribbean Community, Grenada Prime Minister Keith Mitchell, said that Caricom "will continue to demonstrate solidarity with the people of Cuba". The pledge came in a statement on the eve of the second anniversary of "Caricom-Cuba Day", as determined at the December 8, 2003 special summit of Caricom and Cuban government leaders in Havana. This special annual calendar event is to commemorate the joint diplomatic relations first established with Cuba by four Caricom states on December 8, 1972-Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Guyana and Jamaica. (*Trinidad and Tobago Express*, 8/12/04)

## Haiti

**March 2:** Despite the serious political crisis and social instability in Haiti, Cuban doctors have continued to provide health service to the people, the Cuban TV reported. Cuba has been cooperating with Haiti for over a period of five years and doctors are distributed throughout the country assisting 75 percent of the population. They are working restlessly in coordination with the Pan American Health Organization and the International Red Cross. The Cuban embassy in Haiti said the team of 525 physicians will not abandon the Haitian people and will continue to work under any circumstance. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/3/04)

**March 2:** The Cuban Ambassador in Haiti officially declared that Cuban doctors will not abandon the Haitian people and will continue to offer essential medical services regardless of developments in the current tense situation in the country. Cuban medical personnel have worked in Haiti for the last five years with 75 percent of the population receiving treatment from Cuban doctors. The only hospital to remain open is in Port-au-Prince and is staffed almost entirely by Cubans, now receiving support from the Pan American Health Organization and the International Red Cross. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 2/3/04)

**March 8:** At least 30 Haitians fleeing violence in their homeland have sought refuge in Cuba, authorities said, adding that they don't expect a mass exodus from the nearby country. "I can confirm the presence of 30 Haitian immigrants in Maisi," a town on Cuba's east coast, the Foreign Ministry said in response to queries from the press. The Haitians came by sea, but the spokesman's office gave no other specifics. Maisi is about 45 miles from Haiti's shore. For decades, it has been a destination point for small groups of Haitians escaping political violence at home. (*AP*, 9/3/04)

**March 25:** The Committee for Non Governmental Organizations of Africa and the Caribbean described as "extremely helpful" the assistance that Cuba has been providing to Haiti over the past 5 years. Wilfred Grey, speaking on behalf of that group, stressed that the work carried out by Cuban volunteers, mostly doctors, has been- especially beneficial during this latest crisis. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 25/3/04)

**April 17:** The Cubans -- part of the country's 525-member medical mission here -- treated more than 400 Haitians who had sustained deep gashes from machete attacks, bullet wounds or burns from being doused with gasoline and set on fire, when Haiti's political crisis spiraled into massive bloodshed. "Hellish," is how some of the Cubans describe February 29, when President Jean-Bertrand Aristide left the country and his angry supporters roamed the streets on a murderous rampage. "In my capacity as a doctor it was the worst day I've lived," Dr. Héctor Torres Nuñez, 39, said of the carnage. "By noon the injured started to arrive and we worked almost into the evening in what became a makeshift hospital in the courtyard." Even before that day, the Cuban doctors had won the love and respect of many poor Haitians who now seek them out for medical care or drop by to say hello. "I'm very happy with them," said Marie-Lourdes Pierre, a nurse at the overcrowded general hospital in Port-au-Prince. "Every time you call them, no matter what time, they come. The patients like them." (*The Miami Herald*, 17/4/04)

**May 12:** In Port au-Prince, Cuban Ambassador to Haiti Rolando Gómez told the press that, following President Jean Bertrand Aristide's exit from power, cooperation between Cuba and Haiti has continued in "most of the areas" it covered. Collaboration is taking place in the areas of health care, veterinary medicine and agriculture. He said that the number of Cuban doctors and health technicians in Haiti remains at 550. (*AFP*, 12/5/04)

**September 22:** The head of Cuba's medical brigade in Haiti, Juan Carlos Chávez, has announced that Cuban doctors are working to return health facilities to normal and assist Haitians affected by tropical storm Jeanne. In an interview with Cuban journalists, Dr. Chávez said Cuban medical personnel were evacuated from the path of the storm, but are now ready with medicine and provisions to help counteract infections and possible epidemics in Haiti. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 23/9/04)

## **St. Lucia**

**July 30:** Cuba's Acting Foreign Minister Fernando Remírez de Estenoz held talks with the president of the 58th Session of the UN General Assembly, Julian Robert Hunte. The UN official is also the foreign minister of Cuba's Caribbean neighbor, Saint Lucia. Hunte told reporters that discussion with Cuban officials concerned viewpoints on the revitalization of the United Nations General Assembly and the transformation of the UN Security Council. The UN official said that they also touched on topics related to the Caribbean, specifically regarding the possibility of establishing associations in different fields of common interest and the relationship between CARICOM and Cuba. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 30/7/04)

## **St. Vincent and The Grenadines**

**March 31:** The IV Session of the Joint Cooperation Commission between Cuba and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is closing a working session in Havana with the signing of a collaboration protocol. Leading the delegation from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is Assistant Prime Minister, also Foreign Relations and Trade Minister Louis Straker, who will attend a conference on the Cuban health system. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/3/04)

**March 31:** The IV Session of the Joint Cooperation Commission between Cuba and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is closing a working session in Havana with the signing of a collaboration protocol. Leading the delegation from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is Assistant Prime Minister, also Foreign Relations and Trade Minister, Louis Straker, who will lay a floral wreath at the monument to Jose Marti and attend a conference on the Cuban health system. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/3/04)

## **Trinidad and Tobago**

**August 5:** Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Patrick Manning arrived in Havana in a private visit, carrying a heavy agenda. Manning highlighted the good relations between his country and Cuba and made reference to the fact that during his last visit to Havana, Fidel Castro advanced the possibility of creating a regional school of medicine. Trinidad and Tobago already has a direct flight to Havana and its government has the intention to encourage foreign tourists visiting its territory to also come to Cuba, and the other way around, the Prime Minister added. (*Prensa Latina*, 5/8/04)

## **EUROPE**

[See also, Domestic Affairs/ Relations with the international community and Cuban exile organizations]

## **Belarus**

**February 2:** A visit of a parliamentary delegation of Belarus to the Republic of Cuba has started. The Belarusian delegation is headed by Sergei Kostian, deputy chair of the permanent commission on international affairs, and head of the working group on cooperation with the Cuban National Assembly. (*Belta*, 2/2/04)

**October 31:** The Foreign Minister of the Republic of Belarus, Serguei Marynov, arrived in Cuba, responding to an invitation of his Cuban counterpart Felipe Pérez Roque. The visitor and his delegation will carry out a very intense program of activities that include official talks with the island's Foreign Minister and other government officials. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 31/10/04)

**November 2:** The Belarusian minister met with the president of the People's Power National Assembly (the parliament) Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada. The parties discussed the prospects of further intensification of the inter-parliamentary contacts between the two states and exchanged their views on the international situation. Within the framework of the visit, Sergei Martynov held negotiations with foreign minister Felipe Perez Roque. The chair of the Belarusian foreign ministry handed a message from the president of the Belarusian state, Alexander Lukashenko, to Fidel Castro. (*Belta*, 2/11/04)

## **Bulgaria**

**October 7:** Re-establishing bilateral relations in all areas is the objective of the official visit to Bulgaria by Vice-President of the Cuban National Assembly of the People's Power, Jaime Crombet. Our mission is not only to find common interests to enhance commercial relations, but to increase relations in all possible areas including social issues, culture, sports, health and education," said Crombet to the press. (*EFE*, 7/10/04)

## **Czech Republic**

**March 21:** Czech Senate Speaker Petr Pithart has pointed out that Fidel Castro's anger at the Czech support for human rights in Cuba might be so strong because of the support provided to his regime by Czechoslovakia in the communist era. (*CTK*, 22/3/04)

## **European Union**

**January 13:** Irish officials managing their nation's term in the European Union's rotating presidency say they're willing to resume talks and seek improvement of recently frosty relations with Cuba, if they receive a formal proposal from Havana to do so. "There's no date or concrete plans," presidential sources said, adding that "we are always ready to renew the dialogue" with the Caribbean island. They made it clear, however, that it would be up to Fidel Castro's government to make the first move. (*EFE*, 13/1/04)

**January 17:** Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Perez Roque, stated that the solution to current conflict between the European Union and Cuba is "in the hands of the EU". "This situation was created by and is the full responsibility of the EU". "The only possible solution to this situation would be to end the diplomatic sanctions imposed on Cuba, especially those of inviting mercenaries [dissidents] to their diplomatic parties. (*AFP*, 17/1/04)

**January 27:** European Foreign Commissioner Chris Patten deplored and condemned the Cuban government's decision to prevent dissident Oswaldo Paya from traveling to attend the 2003 Sakharov Prize ceremony, which this year will be bestowed on US Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The decision "evinces great weakness" on the part of Cuban leaders and "deserves condemnation," the commissioner told the European Parliament's Foreign Committee, to which he reported on his recent trip to Latin America. Answering a question from Spanish MP Jose Ignacio Salafranca, Patten expressed hope that the Cuban leaders would "reconsider" the ban and allow

Paya to attend the awards ceremony. The delivery of the Sakharov Prize for Human Rights and Freedom of Thought is slated to take place at European Parliament headquarters. (EFE, 27/1/04)

**February 5:** At the inauguration of the 13 th Havana's International Book Fair, the president of the Cuban Book Institute, Iroel Sanchez, accused the European Union of "complicity in an attempted cultural embargo" against the communist island and of hindering cultural exchanges between Cuba and Europe. He criticized the German government for having rejected Cuba's invitation to participate as an honored guest at the fair, although Berlin had committed itself to do so one year ago. "Our decision to honor German culture even under these circumstances was welcomed immediately by a group of friends and intellectuals from that country," Sanchez declared. He added that the Cuban publishing houses had specially published 22 titles by German authors for the occasion and that a group of important story-tellers, essayists and poets from Germany had signed over their authors' rights without compensation for those editions. (EFE, 5/2/04)

**February 7:** The European Commission's delegation in Cuba denied the European Union had imposed a "cultural blockade" on the island, as a Cuban official claimed at the opening of this capital city's 23rd International Book Fair. "The European Commission's delegation in Cuba wants to say that the EU has never imposed a cultural blockade on Cuba and continues to be willing to support cultural activities in Cuba within the current framework defined by Cuban authorities," the delegation said in a note released in Havana. "On June 5, 2003, the EU (simply) decided to reduce the presence of its member states at cultural events in protest against the imprisonment of 75 political dissidents in March 2003, all of whom remain in prison," the note explained. (EFE, 7/2/04)

**February 7:** The office of the European Union Commission in Havana has been informed of the "cruel and degrading" treatment that Cuban dissidents suffer in the country's jails, said EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid , Poul Nielson, to the EU Parliament. The Portuguese Member of the European Parliament, José Ribeiro e Castro, condemned before the Executive the living conditions of dissidents in Cuban jails. (Europa Press, 7/2/04)

**February 8:** The Organizing Committee of the 13 th Havana International Book Fair rejected a communiqué from European Union in which it denies to be applying a cultural blockade against the island. "It is unbelievable that such a statement is released in a time when all measures taken by the EU on June 5, 2003 are in place (...) including a cultural boycott against our country which several [EU] members have been applying since then," said the Cuban statement. (World Data Service, 8/2/04)

**February 19:** "A shameful and indefensible behavior is that adopted by the European Union, which uses culture as a hostage to join the blockade against Cuba", said Cuban Culture Minister Abel Prieto to the press in Eastern Camaguey city. Such a behavior was fought back during the 13th Havana International Book Fair, which was attended by more than 80 German personalities, and 34 publishing houses, Prieto told reporters. The Cuban Culture Minister recalled that the event, which was dedicated to Germany, has generated wide promotion of German culture in the island. (Notimex, 19/2/04)

**February 24:** The European Union put out feelers to Cuba in an effort to overcome the deep chill in relations prompted by last year's wave of harsh repression on the communist-ruled island, but the overture was rejected by Havana, diplomatic sources said. They spoke of "discreet gestures" and "testing the waters" from the European side but reported that Havana did not respond in kind. It was up to Ireland, which currently holds the rotating presidency of the European Union, to contact high-ranking Cuban officials in Dublin with a "conciliatory message" in the hopes of breaking the ice, according to the sources. In the message, the EU told Cuban officials that if Cuba "took concrete steps to improve the human rights situation, we would correspond immediately." Cuba's written response came a few days later, and stated that authorities on the

island believe the "only way to improve the situation is for the EU to stop inviting mercenaries to their embassies." (*EFE*, 24/2/04)

**March 12:** Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque said that the Cuban government is willing to resume its dialogue and ties with the European Union on condition that they stop inviting "mercenaries" --referring to local dissidents -- to their embassies in Havana. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 12/3/04)

**April 1:** Dutch Ambassador to Cuba Wieck Wildeboer has been "frozen" for eight months. Except for that one hour when he presented his credentials. "It is rather frustrating," Wildeboer says. "All my requests to speak to officials are rejected or there is no reply." Persistent European protests over the treatment of Cuban dissidents have gone down completely the wrong way with the Fidel Castro regime. On the order of the commander who has been in charge for 45 years on the largest Caribbean island, no European diplomat is being spoken to. "The Cubans have dug a pit for themselves, and they can no longer come out of it because the leader has forbidden that," says EU ambassador in Havana Sven Kuehn von Burgsdorff. "They [dissidents in jail] are people who wish to have a chance to make known a different opinion quite peacefully. It is unacceptable to shut up dissidents and treat them as criminals," Von Burgsdorff says. (*Rotterdam NRC Handelsblad*, 1/4/04)

**April 7:** Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, refused versions about the possibility of an arrangement between Cuba and the EU in the near future. "There are no conditions to talk about that possibility", Pérez Roque said. "Relations have deteriorated because there are European countries that prefer to maintain relations with factions paid by Washington than with the Cuban government", he added. (*EFE*, 7/4/04)

**April 22:** Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs, Felipe Pérez Roque, accused the European Union of being an accomplice of the human rights violations inside the US military base in Guantánamo. According to Cuba, the allegation is based on the EU's support of the United States and opposition of a Cuba-sponsored draft resolution on the issue at the UN Commission of Human Rights in Geneva. (*Europa Press*, 22/4/04)

**April 22:** With the adoption of a resolution on the situation in Cuba after its emergency debate, the European Parliament again calls on the Cuban authorities to immediately release all political detainees. It is pleased to note the release of Julio Antonio Valdes for health reasons. It is waiting for the Cuban authorities to decree a new de facto moratorium on the death penalty. Parliament calls for utter compliance with the constitutional process, which consists in collecting signatures in the context of the Varela project on the basis of Article 88 of the Constitution, which authorises citizens to present a legislative initiative as soon as 10,000 signatures, or more, have been collected. It unreservedly restates the EU's commitment and willingness concerning aid for the Cuban population. The Parliament invites all Community institutions to send an open invitation to Oswaldo Paya Sardinias, Sakharov Prizewinner 2002, and calls on the Cuban authorities to no longer prevent him travelling to Europe. (*Agence Europe*, 22/4/04)

**May 1:** At a massive May Day rally in Havana's Revolution Square, Fidel Castro called the European Union a "Mafia allied and subordinated to Washington" and spared no words for Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and the Baltic states, former Communist allies he feels have let down the cause of socialism. "A plague of renegades, anxious for loans and consumer society goods has joined the Mafia of the European Union," he said. Departing occasionally from his prepared speech, the Cuban leader reiterated that "Cuba will not bow down before the dictates of the old colonial powers of Europe". (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 1/5/04)

**May 10:** The European community has been urged to inspect the conditions of Cuban prisons, where 75 Cuban dissidents are being held after they were arbitrarily arrested in March 2003 and sentenced to prison terms ranging from six to 28 years. In a statement, 124 members of the European Parliament said they are calling for the "urgent dispatch" of a mission to Cuba, adding

that the Communist-ruled island is a member of the United Nations and is therefore required to respect the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights regarding the legal rights of those accused of crimes. The European Parliament, the legislative branch of the European Union, also adopted a resolution calling on the regime of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro to release the political prisoners arrested in March 2003. (*Washington File*, 11/5/04)

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**May 17:** Cuban Ambassador to the European Union (EU) Rodrigo Malmierca said that, if the EU wants its relations with the island to resume, the steps taken last year against the Cuban authorities must be rectified. In a Brussels press conference, Malmierca said that Cuba is willing to have once again a relationship with the EU that is conducive to dialogue on an equal footing, but, as a first step towards that goal, the EU measures against the island must be lifted. (*AFP*, 17/5/04)

**May 20:** A group of 124 legislators presented a petition to the European Union's highest bodies to send a delegation to visit Cuban jails "to guarantee that prisoners' rights are respected," officials said. The group's leader, Italian Eurodeputy Maurizio Turco, said the petition was delivered to both the European Commission and Council of Ministers out of concern for the many people convicted last year who are "without international human rights guarantees." Among the document's signers were Spaniards Fernando Fernandez, Concepcio Ferrer, Manuel Perez Alvarez, Javier Pomes and Rosa Diez. The text notes that, "since October 1945, Cuba is a member of United Nations and is therefore subject to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights." (*AFP*, 20/5/04)

**May 26:** Negotiations for the Final Declaration of the upcoming European Union, Latin America and Caribbean Summit (EU-LAC) in Guadalajara are underway and, so far, the results are few. According to the head of the Cuban delegation to the meeting, Bruno Rodríguez, there has been little progress because "Europe does not seem to understand our countries' problems." Noting that Cuba is actively participating in the EU-Latin American Summit, Rodríguez told reporters that among Europeans, "there is a selfish position, a great misunderstanding of their historical responsibility and a great lack of political will to establish true cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean." (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 26/5/04)

**May 28:** Cuba denounced the European heads of states attending a summit meeting in Guadalajara, Mexico, as cowards for failing to condemn Washington's aggressive policy toward the Caribbean island and for making what it called weak criticisms of the US-led war in Iraq. A declaration signed by the leaders of 58 Latin American, Caribbean and European nations expressed horror at the abuse of prisoners in Iraq and urged nations to gain the support of international organizations before going to war. But it failed to mention the United States by name, as Cuba and Venezuela had demanded. Cuba refused to sign, citing the failure to mention the US by name, and to include specific language condemning the Helms-Burton law, which penalises US companies that trade with the US. Fidel Castro, the Cuban leader, described the EU as "cowardly" and "hypocritical," while Felipe Perez Roque, the Cuban foreign minister, criticised "flagrant omissions" and "ambiguous language". (*Houston Chronicle, Financial Times*, 29/5/04)

**May 28:** Bill Rammell, the UK foreign office minister, said that Cuba's position in the European Union-Latin America summit is "pure political theatre". "We are not supporting the American blockade, and we were prepared to make that abundantly clear in the communiqué, but they wanted to drive a wedge." European Commission President Romano Prodi called Cuba's attitude "regretful." Britain's undersecretary of state, Bill Rammell, told British journalists that the Cubans deliberately made unrealistic demands at the meeting and tried to inject wording in the declaration that they knew would be unacceptable. (*Houston Chronicle*, 29/5/04)

**June 14:** The European Union Ministers reiterated diplomatic sanctions against Fidel Castro's regime. The Group of the Twenty Five made an implicit acknowledgement to Cuban internal dissidents while renovating their invitations to their diplomatic events in Havana to the oppositionist organisations. In the document approved by consensus, the Group makes explicit their interest to renovate dialogue with Havana, and regrets Cuba's rejection to accept cooperation from the EU nations. (*Europa Press*, 14/6/04)

**June 14:** The Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Miguel Angel Moratinos, said the European Union would be willing to revise its diplomatic sanctions against Cuba, which are renewed every six months, provided further positive steps are taken, like the recent release on health grounds of one of the 75 imprisoned dissidents. (*Europa Press*, 14/6/04)

**July 15:** The European Union welcomed the recent release of some dissidents in Cuba, but said the gesture was not enough. A statement made in Brussels by the EU presidency and distributed in Havana called the freeing of six of the 75 dissidents sentenced last year to jail terms of up to 28 years a "positive gesture." But it added that "the aim continues to be the immediate release of all political prisoners." (*Reuters*, 15/7/04)

**September 6:** Recent denunciations of political prisoner abuse in Cuba could delay consideration by the European Union (EU) of a downgrading of diplomatic sanctions imposed against Havana in June 2003, European diplomatic sources told the media. According to a Dutch report to the EU, the Dutch EU Presidency summoned Cuba's second ambassador to The Hague to communicate concerns over the use of "torture and abuse" against imprisoned oppositionists in Cuban jails. (*Europa Press*, 6/9/04)

**September 6:** EU Council experts on Latin American issues will debate a study on the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, a recent Bush Administration initiative concerning the future of the island. Taking into account recommendations by the EU-25 ambassadors in Havana, the Dutch EU Presidency's considers that the U.S. initiative only has bilateral political relevance between Cuba and the United States. (*Europa Press*, 6/9/04)

**September 15:** At the European Parliament (EP) Chamber, a group of 40 representatives from 10 countries have formed the Group for Solidarity and Friendship with Cuba, which seeks non-discriminatory treatment of Cuba by the European Union, like the rest of the developing world receives. EP socialist representative Miguel Angel Martinez was unanimously chosen as president of the Group. (*Europa Press*, 15/9/04)

**October 6:** EU Development and Humanitarian Aid Commissioner-designate Louis Michel urged Cuban authorities to make "gestures" toward resuming the political dialogue with the European Union. "The whole world knows that I'm in favor of keeping open terms for a political dialogue. That's why I think it would be useful and desirable for Cuba to make some moves to allow this dialogue to reopen," Michel told the press following a presentation before the EU development committee. (*EFE*, 6/10/04)

**October 15:** Cuba's communist government barred three European lawmakers from entering the country on a visit to support Cuban dissidents, a foreign ministry statement said. Deputy Jorge Moragas, of Spain's opposition Popular Party, and Dutch legislators Boris Dittrich and Kathleen Ferrier were told to reboard their Air France flight and go back to Paris when they arrived in

Havana. Moragas, an opposition party member who led the trip, had planned to meet opponents of Fidel Castro in a show of support after the new Spanish government announced it would try to mend relations between the European Union and Cuba. "The publicly declared objectives of his visit are a flagrant violation of our sovereignty," the ministry said. "This is a gross political provocation for Cuba." The Cuban statement said Mr Moragas was illegally entering Cuba on a tourist visa. (AP, EFE, BBC, 15/10/04)

**October 18:** Three days after it expelled three European politicians, communist-run Cuba said the European Union's policy of pressing it over human rights was destined to failure. "Relations are at a dead-end. Cuba will not give in to pressure. If there is no change, this could go on for 1,000 years," Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said at a reception in Havana for the leader of Belgium's Flemish Socialist Party. Perez Roque said Spain was on a "sensible" track to restore political dialogue, which would benefit EU interests. (*Reuters*, 18/10/04)

**October 19:** Senior foreign ministry officials from EU member states met in Brussels, to discuss softening the bloc's stance toward Cuba. The talks were called by Spain, which believes that the EU should adopt a softer line towards the Cuban regime of Fidel Castro. The Spanish government believes that only an increase in dialogue will help to improve the human rights issues in Cuba. The officials agreed to request reports from their respective ambassadors in Cuba on the current situation there. These reports will be the basis for discussion during the next meeting, taking place 16 November. Britain, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland and Sweden are reported to be against softening EU pressure on the Cuban regime. (*EUObserver*, *BBC*, 19/10/04)

**October 21:** Loyola de Palacio, Vice-President of the European Commission, was pessimistic about the prospects for democracy and freedom in Cuba and suggested Fidel Castro's passing as the only solution. "We hope Castro dies as soon as possible. I don't mean killed, but dead, because I doubt there will be any change while he lives," she said. (*El Mundo*, 21/10/04)

**October 26:** Cuba said it will not make any "gesture" to induce the European Union to soften its stance toward the country's Communist regime, and also deplored what it termed "the low human quality" of a high-ranking EU official who said Fidel Castro's death would bring positive change on the island. Cuba's ambassador to the European Union, Rodrigo Malmierca, also insisted that it was the EU that is mistaken in its policy toward the 45-year-old one-party state, and that it must "rectify" its position if relations are to improve. Malmierca said statements concerning the convenience of the rapid demise of Fidel Castro by the European Commission vice president for energy and transport, Loyola de Palacio, demonstrated the lack of "ethics" and "low human quality" of the conservative official. "They surprised me. I thought that any European politician or official would have a modicum of human quality. It doesn't seem very ethical to me to wish for anyone's death," Malmierca said when reporters asked him about the comments made by De Palacio, a Spaniard. (*EFE*, 26/10/04)

**October 28:** Cuba has suggested that the European Union (EU) take care of its own problems -- including xenophobia, domestic violence, racism and drug abuse -- before trying to criticize the island. In response to comments by an EU representative at the United Nations, Cuba's alternate permanent representative at the United Nations, Rodney López, rebuffed statements made by the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union, "which has no moral authority to criticize Cuba." Rodney López said that "the EU must change its policy and rectify its shaky position and lack of principles regarding Cuba." (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 29/10/04)

**November 4:** A group of EU lawmakers ended a two-day visit to Havana aimed at breaking the logjam in communist Cuba's relations with the European Union. It was a chance for a dialogue "with the main parties involved to try to move forward from a blocked situation that we see as very unfortunate," said Miguel Angel Martinez of Spain, who leads the group of Cuba "friends" in the European parliament. An EU delegation of Martinez, two Britons, a French lawmaker and a Belgian, met with Vice President Carlos Lage, Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, National

Assembly speaker Ricardo Alarcon, and Roman Catholic cardinal Jaime Ortega, NGO representatives and EU ambassadors in Havana. The EU lawmakers however did not meet with dissidents, representatives of the outlawed Cuban opposition. (AFP, 4/11/04)

**November 8:** During a press conference in Spain, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder said that current conditions in Cuba do not favor a warming of the semi-freeze European Union nations adopted regarding Cuba in the wake of the Communist regime's harsh 2003 crackdown on peaceful dissent. Schroeder made the comments at a joint press conference in León with Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the EU's major proponent of expanding dialogue with the Castro government. Schroeder, on an official visit, said that given the right conditions, he would favor improving relations with Havana, but insisted that those conditions "had yet to be created." "But this doesn't mean we can't progress through patient negotiations and attempts to convince," the German chancellor added. (EFE, 8/11/04)

**November 11:** Polish Foreign Minister Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz said in Madrid that his government leans towards supporting "Cuban democrats" but understands the position of Spain. Cimoszewicz reminded that, in the case of Poland, "the moral and political support" received from many European countries "was very important." Therefore, he believed that "no effort should be spared to show respect for the Cuban democrats." However, he felt that, with regards to sanctions, "caution should be exercised" since they sometimes "only make matters worse" for the general population. (AFP, 11/11/04)

**November 16:** Representatives of the EU's 25 member states have reviewed the EU's policy towards the Caribbean Communist island at the request of Spain's new Socialist government, keen to end the row with the island. No decision was taken on whether to continue inviting dissidents to official receptions, so the policy remains unchanged for the moment, a spokesman for the EU's Dutch presidency said. One suggestion to stop holding National Day receptions at all was quashed, diplomats said. "The concrete result this morning is that chiefs of mission in Havana have been asked to come up with proposals to make this dialogue with dissidents and civil society in Cuba more effective," the spokesman for the presidency said. Envoys will report back next month and the recommendations will have to go to EU foreign ministers for any policy change. One Brussels diplomat said the EU was divided between a group including Spain, France, Britain and Italy which wanted to take the initiative to improve ties with Havana, and others such as Germany, Hungary and the Czech Republic which argued Fidel Castro should make the first move by releasing political prisoners. (Reuters, CNN, 16/11/04)

**November 17:** The European Parliament responded to indications from the EU's executive that Brussels might pursue a rapprochement with Cuba's Communist regime by passing overwhelmingly a resolution opposing such a move. The European Union should maintain its firmer posture toward Cuba until the government of Fidel Castro frees all political prisoners and respects human rights, said the text lawmakers approved by a vote of 376-281 with 26 abstentions. The conservative European Popular Group authored the resolution, which garnered support from most of the centrist legislators, while the chamber's left wing - comprising Socialists, Communists and Greens - introduced an alternative proposal, which was rejected. Voting on the resolution followed a heated debate that carried on until almost midnight, with 18 Euro-lawmakers - an unusually high number - taking the floor. Passage of the resolution came one day after the EU took a first step toward reviewing the tough stance, including diplomatic and political sanctions, that the bloc took against the 45-year-old one-party state last year. (EFE, 17/11/04)

**November 18:** The foreign minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, criticised the steps taken by the European Union to redefine its policy regarding dialogue with the government of Fidel Castro and the political opposition. Pérez Roque said the EU was sending out 'timid signals' of intent. Pérez Roque said that only if the EU recognized its error in inviting "paid mercenaries of the US government" to official receptions would the new policy be well received by the government. (Latin News, 18/11/04)

**November 26:** European Union member states want to renew their diplomatic contacts with Cuba, the Dutch EU presidency said, after Spain became the first in the bloc to re-establish links with the island since sanctions were imposed 17 months ago. "Our common goal is to have contacts between all the member countries with the authorities on the island," said spokesman Frits Kemperman. (*EUBusines*, 26/11/04)

**November 30:** The Dutch Foreign Relations Minister and current president of the EU's Council of Ministers, Bernard Bot, said that the release of journalist and poet Raúl Rivero "is encouraging". He added that Cuban authorities should give similar treatment to the rest of the 75 dissidents still in jail. "I find this very encouraging, but don't forget there are still 75 political prisoners in jail, and we have asked for the release of all of them." "This is a good sign, and I encourage the Cuban authorities to keep on this track", Bot added. (*Europa Press*, 30/11/04)

**December 1:** The heads of European Union diplomatic missions posted in Havana agreed on a document containing policy options to be examined during the revision of the community's common position on Cuba. Ambassadors and heads of diplomatic mission from the EU met to discuss the document requested from Brussels. The result of several meetings, the document will feed the debate on the issue on January 14. (*EFE*, 1/12/04)

**December 7:** Cuba's well-known dissident, the Christian Democrat Oswaldo Paya, warned the European Union (EU) not to change its common position and give concessions to the communist government in regard to human rights. "The political dialogue must have the goals of the release of political prisoners in the short term and then democratic reforms," the 2002 laureate of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize told the press in Havana. Paya called the European Union measures "symbolic actions of moral worth", but are not by any means tough. "It was the Cuban government, that broke off contacts to the European Union embassies, because they invited us," Paya said referring to a symbolic move to invite dissidents to national festivities at EU embassies. He hailed Germany's withdrawal from the Havana book fair earlier this year as being appropriate "in a country where people sit in prison because they write what they think". (*DPA*, 7/12/04)

**December 13:** Neither the Speaker of the Slovak Parliament Pavol Hrusovsky nor Speaker of the Czech Senate Petr Pithart support softening the European Union's stance towards Cuba. "We stated jointly that there is no reason to make such a change as in the area of respecting human rights, political and religious freedoms, virtually nothing has changed in Cuba," said the Speaker of Slovak Parliament. (*SITA*, 13/12/04)

**December 14:** The European Union's Committee on Latin America (COLAT) reached a consensus to recommend to the EU's 25 member states the suspension of the diplomatic sanctions imposed on Cuba in June 2003, Spanish diplomats said. COLAT recommended, as an alternative to the sanctions, that the EU seek a "strong dialogue with the opposition" to Fidel Castro's regime. According to the diplomats, the recommendation calls for the re-establishment of high-level visits to the island "at a regular rate." It also proposes that the EU temporarily suspend, until June 2005, invitations to dissidents to national celebrations organized by member states' embassies in Cuba. The EU also will not invite high-level Cuban government officials to such events. COLAT recommended that the EU end its policy of maintaining a low profile when staging European cultural events in Cuba. (*EFE*, 14/12/04)

**December 22:** Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Perez Roque, said that the European Union (EU) should change its policy of imposing diplomatic sanctions against Cuba. The EU has to correct its policy, as it stands as a huge mistake in developing bilateral relations, he told the press. According to Perez Roque, Cuba is "closely following the process currently taking place at the European Community," referring to discussions the EU 25 foreign ministers are scheduled to hold in January to decide on future links with the island. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/12/04)

## **Finland**

**March 11:** A group of parliamentary leaders from Finland have been touring the island in recent days. Arriving in Havana, the legislators are meeting with their Cuban counterparts and have visited a number of hospitals and schools in the capital. The Finland-Cuba Parliamentary Friendship Group is led by its chair, Esko-Juhani Tennila, and includes representatives Sinikka Hurskainen, Helena Comi and Marja Johanna Tiurna. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 11/3/04)

## France

**April 29:** In a letter to a Senator from Strassburg (North), the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Michel Barnier says that the French government closely follows the situation of political prisoners in Cuba, and will continue to request from Cuban authorities their total liberation. The French Minister also says that he has "attentively followed the situation of Mr. Manuel Vázquez Portal and that of the whole group of political prisoners in Cuba". He also added that France has "regularly" requested from Cuban authorities "to review their position on this matter". (*AFP*, 29/4/04)

**April 29:** A French Film Festival has been inaugurated in eight Cuban provinces after its success in Havana. The official inauguration of this annual event in the island took place in the Charles Chaplin Theater with the film *The Choir*. (*Boletín Cubarte*, 30/4/04)

**November 26:** Responding to a request from Cuban authorities, Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, held a meeting with the French Ambassador to Havana, Sylvie Alvarez. A day before, a similar meeting had taken place between Pérez Roque and the Spanish Ambassador to Havana, Carlos Alonso Zaldívar. The meeting has been kept in secret, and it is the first formal contact between a representative from the Cuban government and a French high diplomat since the European Union imposed political sanctions against the island, on June 5, 2003. (*European Press*, 26/11/04)

**December 7:** French President Jacques Chirac used a bilateral summit meeting with Spain to describe the recent freeing of several Cuban political prisoners as a "positive effect" arising from Spanish attempts to soften the EU line on relations with Havana. Although Washington continues to support a tough line on Cuba, Chirac praised Spain for its attempts to restore dialogue with Havana. "Truth does not always necessarily come from the mouth of some (US) State Department official," said a smiling Chirac when asked to comment on a recent accusation by US Undersecretary of State for Latin American affairs Roger Noriega that Madrid was making "concessions" to Cuba. Chirac, speaking after wide-ranging talks with his host, Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, said that France "perfectly approved" a policy designed to establish a dialogue with Havana. "I note that this policy has had positive effects with the freeing of several personalities," said Chirac. (*EUObserver*, *AFP*, 7/12/04)

**December 20:** A group of 32 French members of Parliament recommended Spanish authorities to "closely monitor" and put "all pressure" in its relations with Cuba in favour of the release of more political dissidents on the island. The group, led by Vice-President of the National Assembly, Yves Bur, expressed in a communiqué concern for the "lack of news" about the prisoners they sponsor, after the release of 13 of the 75 dissidents sentenced to harsh prison terms in April 2003. (*EFE*, 20/12/04)

## Germany

**December 3:** The German government is expecting further gestures from Cuba before supporting further dialogue between the European Union (EU) and Havana, according to government sources. (*EFE*, 3/12/04)

## Holland

**September 16:** During a Parliament session, Dutch Foreign Minister, Bernard Bot, said that Dutch diplomats in Cuba do not have access to the intellectuals imprisoned in Cuban jails. Bot said that, "our Embassy in Havana cannot have access to Cuban dissidents, in spite of the efforts they make to meet them". The Dutch minister emphasized the importance of the European Union pressures on the Cuban government in order to obtain the liberation of "the 68 intellectuals imprisoned in Cuba for the crime of having opposed current political regime". (*EFE*, 16/9/04)

**October 16:** The Dutch government expressed outrage after two Dutch deputies were arrested and deported from Havana. A Dutch government spokeswoman said Cuba's envoy to the Netherlands would be summoned to explain why Boris Dittrich, head of the Liberal-Democrat group in the Dutch parliament, and Christian Democrat Kathleen Ferrier, were expelled. Dittrich's spokeswoman said the lawmaker had kept her informed of his situation via SMS text messages from his detention cell. "I am furious. I have never experienced anything like this," Dittrich said. Dutch Foreign Minister Ben Bot was also outraged by the incident. The Dutch ambassador in Cuba was also demanding an explanation from the Cuban government. Dittrich, whose country currently holds the EU presidency, said he would press Dutch Foreign Minister Bernard Bot to cut the EU's diplomatic relations with Cuba to a strict minimum. (*AFP, ANP*, 16/10/04)

## **Russia**

[See also, Economy/ Foreign investments and trade/ Europe, and General indicators/ External debt]

**January 18:** A Russian delegation led by Tax Minister Gennady Bukayev will hold talks with Cuban officials on several important issues as part of its visit to Havana. The Russian delegation arrived in Cuba on an official visit. During the visit, Bukayev will meet Cuban Finance and Price Minister Georgina Barreiro and officials of the national tax bureau. The sides are expected to sign an intergovernmental agreement on the exchange of information and tax cooperation. "The agreement will help our businessmen to actually plan their work in Cuba. I am sure that in the end the information exchange will make it possible to raise [tax] contributions to the two countries' budgets," Bukayev said. (*ITAR-TASS*, 19/1/04)

**January 28:** Fidel Castro may visit Russia this year, said Cuban Ambassador to Moscow Jorge Martí Martínez. "I do not rule out that Fidel Castro could pay a reciprocal visit to Russia this year. I hope this will happen as soon as possible. He accepted an invitation to visit Russia from Vladimir Putin long ago," the ambassador told the press. The ambassador recalled that Putin was on an official visit to Cuba on December, 2000, during which he invited Castro to visit Moscow. Martí also said Cuban Minister Without Portfolio Ricardo Cabrisas, who oversees Cuba's foreign economic relations, will pay an official visit to Moscow in the first half of 2004. (*Interfax*, 29/1/04)

**January 29:** Russian President Vladimir Putin had a telephone conversation with Fidel Castro to discuss relations between the two countries. (*ITAR-TASS*, 28/1/04)

**May 20:** Russia criticized US moves to tighten the US embargo against Cuba, calling the measures a counterproductive step reminiscent of the Cold War. "Russia sees the American policy of sanctions against Cuba as an anachronism, an echo of the Cold War period that does not answer to today's realities," Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Yakovenko said. "In today's rapidly globalizing world, any attempts to isolate any individual country are, in our view, counterproductive," Yakovenko said in a statement. He called for an end to the 44-year-old US embargo against communist Cuba, Moscow's Soviet-era ally, and for a "constructive dialogue" between Washington and Havana. (*AP*, 20/5/04)

**May 24:** The new US sanctions against Cuba "will be foremost" during the political consultations between the Russian Foreign Ministry and Cuban representatives, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Trubnikov, head of the Russian delegation, said in Havana. "The US sanctions run counter to the opinion of a huge number of countries which have unequivocally expressed their attitude to them in the course of the UN General Assembly's 58th session,"

Trubnikov stated. He said the number of states which understand "the senselessness and danger of moves such as the economic blockade" of this Caribbean republic was growing every year. (ITAR-TASS, 24/5/04)

**May 26:** Cuba and Russia have expressed satisfaction with the current level of friendship and bilateral cooperation between the two countries. Speaking with journalists at the end of what he described as a productive visit to Havana, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Viacheslav Trubnikov said that Moscow continues to work for increased ties with Cuba. Following a meeting with his Cuban counterpart, Fernando Remírez de Estenoz, the high-ranking Russian official told reporters that Moscow will support Cuba at international forums on the issues of the US blockade and human rights. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 26/5/04)

**September 28:** The visit of Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov, to Cuba is devoted to development of trade and economic relations between the two countries, according to an interview he gave to the Russian journalists in Havana. "The purpose of the visit is, along with an exchange of views on international problems, to discuss ways, so to speak, to 'push' towards acceleration of the development of trade and economic relations," Russia's Foreign Minister said. "Following the well-known changes which have taken place in our relations, including the termination, for objective reasons, of the implementation of the 'oil for sugar' traditional scheme, it is necessary for us to seek new forms of cooperation, including establishment of joint ventures and joint production units, development of the natural resources, and other projects linked with industrial investment," Mr. Lavrov went on to say. (*Novosti*, 28/9/04)

**September 29:** "Cuba is not unfriendly towards the United States," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said at a news conference he gave with his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Perez Roque. "I have never felt Havana's unfriendliness towards the United States whenever I talked to Cuban officials. Russia believes Cuba is eager to be energetically engaged in tackling problems facing the world," said Mr. Lavrov. Mr. Lavrov said Russia believed the policy of imposing embargoes and economic sanctions was inefficient, although it was not ruled out by the United Nations Charter. (*Novosti*, 29/9/04)

**September 29:** Russia and Cuba agreed on a collective reaction to crises and conflicts under the UN aegis on the basis of international law. A statement issued by the Russian and Cuban Foreign Ministers, Sergei Lavrov and Felipe Perez Roque, confirmed "the readiness of both sides to an overwhelming boost of cooperation in the international scene in the interests of forming a more just, equal and democratic world order, based on strict observance of the norms and principles of international law and the UN Charter". (*Novosti*, 29/9/04)

**September 29:** Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with Fidel Castro and other Cuban leaders as the countries worked on re-creating more modest versions of political and economic alliances that unraveled after the Soviet Union's collapse. Lavrov said in Havana that his lengthy meeting with Castro started the day before. "I slept five hours," Lavrov said before meeting with Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage. Lavrov characterized the encounter as "very useful and interesting" without offering any details. The meeting with Castro underscored the importance of Russia's past relationship to Cuba, a strategic Soviet ally in America's backyard during the Cold War. (*AP*, 29/9/04)

**December 16:** Russian Foreign Minister Serguei Lavrov welcomed Cuba's Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas who is on an official visit to Moscow aimed at expanding bilateral ties. Both sides will discuss issues for the next Intergovernmental Commission For Economic, Commercial and Scientific-Technical Cooperation to be held in Moscow in 2005. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 16/12/04)

## Slovakia

**March 4:** The chairman of the Slovak Parliament's human-rights committee, Laszlo Nagy, visited Cuba where he met with opponents of the Fidel Castro regime, including well-known dissident Osvaldo Paya Sardinias, along with a Czech lawmaker, he said at a press conference. Nonetheless, Nagy added, he would prefer not to mention which Czech MP had accompanied him, or even which party he belonged to. "The name of the representative of the Czech Parliament is one I presently cannot state, since he is still in Cuba fulfilling his mission. He will return by the end of the week," Nagy said, adding that both politicians had travelled there to support the opposition's fight for freedom and democracy. The trip to visit Cuban dissidents, which also supplied them with money and other items, was prepared by the European People's Party and a Swedish NGO, and included three Swedish politicians in addition to Nagy and the unnamed Czech MP. British and Spanish politicians also planned to take part, but they cancelled at the last moment. (CTK, 4/3/04)

**December 3:** Slovakia and Cuba are embroiled in a diplomatic squabble following the Cuban ambassador's describing as a "miserable manipulation" a note the president of the European nation's parliament, Pavol Hrusovsky, sent her government requesting information on a political prisoner, Luis Ferrer, a prisoner of conscience of the Communist regime. The Cuban ambassador to Slovakia, Caridad Yamiri Cueto Milian, replied to Hrusovsky saying, "the reservations expressed in your letter have no legitimacy or value whatsoever in the eyes of Cuba and its government." "We are convinced Slovak citizens will, at the proper time, judge the way you have employed the parliamentary mandate entrusted to you in a miserable manipulation," she added. (EFE, 3/12/04)

## Spain

[See also, Economy/ Foreign investments and trade/ Europe]

**January 13:** Spanish President José María Aznar said that any decisions regarding Cuba should be made with the "Cubans of the future" in mind, as their president, Fidel Castro, "is a tyrant who will fortunately disappear one day." Aznar made these comments following an exchange with business people, organized by the US Chamber of Commerce. (EFE, 13/1/04)

**January 26:** Cuban opposition leader Oswaldo Paya telephoned Madrid from the island to express his gratitude for Spain's support of the Cuban people's efforts to achieve a peaceful transition to democracy similar to its own following the 1975 death of dictator Francisco Franco. The Cuban dissident spoke with those attending the presentation of a document entitled "National Dialogue in Cuba" drafted by Paya in his capacity as the leader of the Christian Liberation Movement together with other Cubans. (EFE, 26/1/04)

**January 26:** The Spanish Popular Party (PP), the Socialist Party of Spain (PSOE), the Democratic Union of Catalonia (UDC), and other organizations, stressed the importance of maintaining a dialogue and consensus within Spanish political circles with regards to a "peaceful political change" in Cuba based on the Varela Project and inspired by the Spanish Transition. (EFE, 26/1/04)

**February 4:** Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar told US Congress that Cuba is "one of the last remaining anomalies of history". Mr. Aznar was the first Spanish prime minister to address Congress. Mr. Aznar added that he "would like to reiterate here my desire and hope that, before long, Cuba can be welcomed into the fold of free nations." (The Washington Times, 5/2/04)

**February 7:** Fidel Castro described presidents José María Aznar, of Spain, and George W. Bush, of the United States, as "repugnant characters." In a 3-hours-and-20-minutes long speech closing a higher education congress, Castro, who has called Aznar the 'Spanish Celestine,' said that the Spanish President was a "Mussolini-like acolyte of the Führer who today holds in his hands the reins of the [US] empire." (Europa Press, Granma, 7/2/04)

**February 12:** The Executive Committee of the Centrist Democrat International (CDI), headed by Spanish President, José María Aznar, passed a resolution condemning the Cuban government's

"repressive campaign." The resolution also requests from Fidel Castro's government the immediate suspension of all "terrorist acts", the release of all political prisoners, and full respect for civil and political rights. (*Europa Press*, 12/2/04)

**March 2:** The Spanish embassy has opened its library to all Cubans, who can obtain cards that allow them take out books. The decision by the embassy was considered by Cubans to be a response to an order by the Cuban government last September to turn over operation of the Spanish Cultural Center in Havana to Cuban officials. (*Cubanet*, 2/3/04)

**March 13:** Fidel Castro has accused Spain's government of deceiving its citizens over the Madrid train bombings for electoral gain. In a television interview, Castro said the government of Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar had known an Islamic group was behind the explosions that killed 200 people but preferred to blame Basque separatists ahead of Sunday's general elections. "They are deceiving the Spanish people (...) it is a most important factor in the elections on Sunday" because a majority of Spaniards opposed the war in Iraq, he said. (*Gulf Daily News, Reuters*, 13/3/04)

**March 14:** An enthusiastic Cuban government had the local TV channels interrupt their regular programming to announce the Spanish Popular Party's electoral defeat, "(brought about) by its war-mongering and servile pro-US imperialist policies." (*La Jornada*, 15/3/04)

**March 14:** No Cuban officials attended the mass held in the Havana Cathedral in memory of the victims of the Madrid commuter train attacks. Cuban Foreign Affairs Vice Minister, Angel Dalmau, signed the book of condolence at the Spanish Embassy in Havana. (*EFE*, 14/3/04)

**March 16:** Fidel Castro has congratulated Spain's newly elected Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and expressed support for his decision to withdraw the Spanish troops from Iraq before June 30. Considering that decision, Fidel Castro has called on Rodriguez Zapatero not to forget that under pressure from Jose Maria Aznar as President of the Spanish Government thousands of young men from small and impoverished Latin American countries were sent as cannon fodder to Iraq under the command of the Spanish Legion. (*EFE*, 16/3/04)

**March 16:** Vladimiro Roca, president of the illegal Cuban Social-Democrat Party (PSC), congratulated soon-to-be Spanish president José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Last February, the PSC submitted its official bid for membership during the latest Socialist International (SI) Council meeting. The SI is a bloc of social-democrat organizations that includes Mr. Rodríguez Zapatero's political party, the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE). (*Notimex*, 16/3/04)

**March 16:** Fidel Castro says 1,000 Latin American troops are "cannon fodder" in Iraq and calls for them to withdraw along with the Spanish unit they are serving in. Castro, a fierce critic of the US-led occupation of Iraq, applauded Spanish Prime Minister-elect Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero for his decision to withdraw Spain's contingent of 1,300 troops by the June 30. In a message published by the ruling Communist Party daily Granma, Castro said "more than 1,000 young men from small and impoverished Latin American countries were sent to Iraq as cannon fodder under the command of the Spanish Legion." (*Financial Times*, 16/3/04)

**March 30:** Cuba sees prospects to repair with the incoming Socialist Spanish government bilateral relations that deteriorated markedly under the outgoing conservatives. It also insists that improvement depends on acknowledging that EU sanctions against Havana are "mistaken." Cuban Ambassador to Spain, Isabel Allende, in a talk with journalists, cited what she called "objective conditions" for betterment of relations following the Socialists' upset victory in March 14 general elections. Allende noted that after winning Spain's March 14 elections, Socialist leader Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, who will become prime minister in mid-April, expressed a desire to give a boost to Spain's relations with Latin America. "If he does, it will result in improved relations with Cuba," Allende said. (*EFE*, 30/3/04)

**April 30:** Spain will favor democratic development in Cuba through dialogue, the first vice president of the socialist government in Spain, María Teresa Fernández de la Vega, said. "Our policy will be that of favoring, supporting and trying to help the modernization of those countries which are still under non democratic situations from an economic, social and political perspective." "And Cuba is one of them," Fernández de la Vega said. (*AFP*, 30/4/04)

**May 11:** According to Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos, the Spanish government will continue to push for the normalization of relations with Cuba in the context of EU policy. Likewise, it will keep promoting democratization and the advancement of human rights. Moratinos warned that, considering first the Cuban citizens' situation, his government's policy towards Havana would avoid "straining" bilateral relations, remaining "calm" but "vigilant." (*Europa Press*, 11/5/04)

**May 29:** In a press conference, Spanish president, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, said that Cuba's position at the Guadalajara summit was in clear minority. Rodríguez Zapatero said that the disqualification that the Cuban delegation made of the final declaration of the III Summit was "the opinion of a minority, that should make that country reflect on what happened there". (*Europa Press*, 29/5/04)

**May 31:** The Spanish government has asked for Cuba's approval for the appointment of Carlos Alonso Zaldivar as Spanish ambassador in Havana, replacing Jesus Gracia, the press has learnt from diplomatic sources. Alonso Zaldivar, posted in Rome as cultural adviser, is an experienced diplomat with great analytical abilities who has always taken leftist positions and he has occupied various posts, including that of ambassador to Korea. (*ABC*, 31/5/04)

**June 1:** Spain's governing Socialist party indicated that it hopes to improve bilateral relations with Cuba, ties that deteriorated during the previous conservative administration. The secretary of the ruling party's international committee, Trinidad Jimenez, met in Madrid with the vice president of Cuba's Council of Ministers, Jose Ramon Fernandez. Jimenez told the press that, during their meeting, Fernandez expressed his country's desire to "resume dialogue with Spain and the European Union." She added that her party considered relations with Cuba "extraordinarily important" because "we Spaniards have a lot in common with Cubans," including culture, trade relations and even family ties. But, for that to happen, the "will and effort of both countries" would be necessary, she added. (*EFE*, 1/6/04)

**June 9:** Cuban dissident and democracy activist Oswaldo Paya said he wants to accept the Spanish Socialists' invitation to attend their annual party congress in Madrid next month. What remains to be seen is if Cuba's communist government will allow the dissident to make the trip. "It's a gesture that acknowledges the pluralistic spirit in Cuba's civil society, which neither I alone nor Fidel Castro's government represent," Paya, leader of the dissident Liberation Christian Movement and winner of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for human rights, told the press. "It's my right to leave the country, but it's the government who decides if I may," he said. Paya said his presence at the assembly of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) would be a good opportunity to "have an open exchange and strengthen the relationship between democratic movements like the PSOE and the Liberation Christian Movement." (*EFE*, 9/6/04)

**July 9:** The Spanish Council of Ministers has appointed Carlos Alonso Zaldivar as the country's new ambassador to Cuba. Zaldivar, 58, a former secretary of the Spanish embassy in Washington and ambassador to Korea, also held different positions at the Spanish embassy in Israel. Since 2001 he had been posted to the Spanish Embassy in Rome in a Political Counselor capacity. Zaldivar was a member of the Communist Party's Executive Committee during the Franco Era and joined the PSOE when it rose to power, holding different posts within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidency. (*Europa Press*, 9/7/04)

**July 15:** Jorge Moragas, Foreign Relations Secretary of Spain's Popular Party (PP), completed his visit to Cuba, where he met with oppositionists to Fidel Castro's regime. Among those he spoke to were Varela Project leader Oswaldo Payá and incarcerated journalist Raúl Rivero's wife,

Blanca Guerra. However, Moragas has said that some PSOE members advocate searching for a "more active communications channel with the regime." (*Europa Press*, 15/7/04)

**July 20:** After returning from Spain, Cuban oppositionist Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo said that he held talks in Madrid with Spanish government's president José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, and other authorities. Menoyo considers that Rodríguez Zapatero has the will to "improve relations with Cuba", in spite of "Cuba's problems with political prisoners". "Spain should follow the European Union's position in this regard," he said. "It would be very good if Cuba makes a gesture, releases political prisoners, and allows an independent opposition in the island", he said. "That would be a positive move, and would help change Cuba's image and position in the world", Menoyo said to the foreign press. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 20/7/04)

**August 2:** The press has learnt from government sources that the Spanish government has proposed to its EU partners a reconsideration of the maintaining of the sanctions adopted by the 15 after Fidel Castro's regime executed three hijackers of a boat which they wanted to take the USA and imprisoned, with sentences of as long as 28 years, 75 dissidents convicted in trials without guarantees over a year ago. Spain's initiative is reflected in a veiled fashion in the statements made by the foreign minister, Miguel Angel Moratinos, during his recent visit to Colombia where he expressed the government's satisfaction at the freeing of anti-Castro dissident Marta Beatriz Roque. The minister's precise words were that: "Spain is in touch with the Cuban authorities and with its EU partners to examine the current state of relations and their possible evolution". (*ABC*, 2/8/04)

**August 6:** The Spanish President, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, does not rule out meeting with Fidel Castro, and emphasizes that Spain will continue working to facilitate that "Cuba gets on a democratic path" in the future. "That will possibly happen (the meeting with Castro)", said Zapatero in an interview with the Organización Editorial Mexicana (OEM), made up of over 60 Mexican newspapers. (*Europa Press*, 6/8/04)

**September 9:** The Parliamentary Group of Spain's People's Party has submitted draft legislation to its Congress aimed at having the Chamber of Representatives' Plenary Session express support for the Varela Project. The Popular Party initiative takes place prior to the second phase of the Varela Project, known as "National Dialogue," soon to be launched in Cuba and abroad. (*Europa Press*, 9/9/04)

**September 24:** In a press conference, Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos confirmed that, during a meeting with his Cuban counterpart Felipe Pérez Roque, the release of political prisoners in Cuba, particularly that of Raúl Rivero, had been discussed. Asked whether they had talked about the incarcerated poet, Moratinos answered with a terse "yes," and made no further comment. (*Europa Press*, 24/9/04)

**September 29:** Spanish Foreign Affairs Minister, Miguel Ángel Moratinos, admitted that Madrid is looking for consensus among the twenty-five EU ministers in order to ease some of the diplomatic sanctions imposed by the EU Council on Cuba. Moratinos added that limitation of diplomatic contacts with Havana is "irrational" and doesn't lead anywhere". (*Europa Press*, 29/9/04)

**October 6:** Eduardo Zaplana, Spokesperson of the Popular Parliamentary Group in the Spanish Congress, urged the Government to reject the "blackmail" from Fidel Castro's government and to invite Cuban dissidents to the National Day celebrations at the Spanish Embassy in Havana on October 12. Otherwise, representatives of the Popular Party would visit Cuba to meet the dissidents, said Zaplana in Congress. Zaplana accused Foreign Minister, Miguel Angel Moratinos, of attempting to change the European Union common position "unilaterally". (*Europa Press*, 6/10/04)

**October 8:** The Spanish First Vice-President, María Teresa Fernández de la Vega, said that members of the dissidence would be invited to attend a reception hosted by the Spanish

Embassy in Havana on the occasion of Spain's National Day on October 12. Fernández de la Vega also indicated the need to look for alternatives to the EU's common position on Cuba since the current policy is not effective. (*EFE*, 8/10/04)

**October 12:** Spain's new envoy to Cuba has criticized the European Union's policy toward the island and said Madrid would work to thaw relations with President Fidel Castro's Communist government. Ambassador Carlos Alonso Zaldivar indicated that Spain would not break with the EU's common position on Cuba, which is based on human rights concerns. "Unfortunately, the current situation of relations between Cuba and Spain, and between Cuba and the European Union, is profoundly unsatisfactory," Zaldivar said in a speech at a diplomatic reception celebrating Spain's national day. "We want to overcome the present situation, but we want to do that in agreement with the rest of the EU," he said. (*Reuters*, 12/10/04)

**October 12:** The Cuban dissidents who attended the diplomatic reception at the Spanish embassy in Havana were very upset with the Ambassador's speech during the event. At the diplomatic reception celebrating Spain's national day, Carlos Alonso Zaldivar said Spain was working to improve relations with Cuba's government. About 20 dissidents and relatives of political prisoners attended the event. After the Spanish Ambassador's comments, many of them said they respected Spain's position but that they hoped the European Union would continue to unwaveringly support the island's opposition. Elizardo Sanchez, an activist at the event who heads the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation, said the Spaniards face "an arduous task" ahead, as the Cuban government is not likely to be receptive to their requests, he said. Dissidents Martha Beatriz Roque and Oswaldo Paya left the event after the Spanish Ambassador said his country would thaw relations with Fidel Castro's communist government. Payá told the press it was a gesture to show his displeasure about the Spanish position. Vladimiro Roca, who also attended the event, issued a letter addressed to the president of the Spanish government, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, requesting from Spain to abstain from reestablishing normal relations with Havana while political prisoners remain in jail. (*Reuters*, *AP*, *Netfor Cuba*, *VOA*, 13/10/04).

**October 15:** Speaking in Hungary, the President of the Spanish Government, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, played down an incident in Havana when a group of Cuban dissidents decided to leave a function in protest against a speech by the Spanish Ambassador in Cuba, calling it a "momentary discrepancy" which does not affect his country's policy. Zapatero defended his policy to "firmly demand" changes in Cuba while seeking a softening of the European Union's sanctions against the island. (*AFP*, 15/10/04)

**October 16:** Spain summoned Cuban ambassador Isabel Allende to protest the removal of deputy Jore Moragas, external relations spokesman of the conservative opposition Popular Party. "The Spanish government deems it unacceptable that Cuban authorities refused entry to Jorge Moragas, deputy of the Popular Party, refusing him access to consular officials in Havana," a foreign ministry statement said. Spain's Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos said the expulsion was "unacceptable", while urging the Popular Party to back Madrid's attempts to establish "dialogue with the Cuban authorities but, above all, deepen democracy with respect for human rights and individual freedoms." (*AFP*, 16/10/04)

**October 18:** Spain called on Cuba to release all political prisoners in the Socialist government's firmest response yet to Havana's decision to bar a Spanish politician from entering the country to meet with dissidents. The diplomatic flap came amid Spanish efforts to ease tough European Union policy toward Fidel Castro. "Cuba should free its political prisoners," Deputy Prime Minister Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega told the press. "The Cuban government has to make moves," she said. (*AP*, 18/10/04)

**October 18:** Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, whose Socialist government came under attack for its efforts to foster dialogue with Havana, said in a letter to supporters of a high-profile Cuban political prisoner that his aim is to improve the lives of residents of the

Communist-ruled island. Zapatero replied to an October 13 letter from a group of intellectuals asking the Spanish premier to intercede with Cuban authorities to obtain the release of jailed Cuban poet and journalist Raul Rivero. "My government's principal objective is to improve the living conditions of the Cuban people and to achieve in that country - so close historically, culturally and people-wise to Spain - that the most basic rights and freedoms be guaranteed, an objective on which we won't give up and which is still in line with the dialogue we maintain with Cuban authorities," Zapatero said. "I fully concur with you that an important step in that direction - and my government has expressed this to Cuban authorities - would be the release from prison of Raúl Rivero," he said. (*EFE*, 18/10/04)

**October 20:** Clashing points of view over policy toward Cuba produced a heated exchange in Spain's parliament, with conservatives saying Madrid is coddling a dictator and the incumbent Socialists defending their actions. Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos said the government had immediately condemned Cuba's "unacceptable behavior" toward a Spanish legislator it expelled. He also denied the administration is sympathetic to Fidel Castro, as the conservative Popular Party maintains. On the house floor, PP spokesman Eduardo Zaplana said that of all the reactions to PP lawmaker Jorge Moragas's expulsion from Havana, those of Spain's Socialist government "were the most sympathetic to the dictatorship" of Castro. Zaplana compared those responses with the reactions of the rest of the European Union countries, which, he said, had "harshly" criticized the incident, leaving "the Spanish government isolated in its strategy." (*EFE*, 20/10/04)

**October 22:** Spain called on the European Union to help Cuba negotiate entry into the Cotonou Agreement, an EU trade and development aid pact with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) developing countries. "Cuba would be better as part of the Cotonou Agreement than under the EU's non-negotiated, unilateral common policy of sanctions, said Enrique Viguera, chief coordinator for European affairs at the Spanish foreign ministry. By allowing Cuba to join the comprehensive trade pact, which already includes all other Caribbean nations, the EU would gain "on the political front, and would be better able to monitor the respect of human rights" in Cuba, he said. "We will see how circumstances evolve and whether the reality makes it possible for Cuba to join Cotonou," added Viguera, who was speaking at a forum on relations between Cuba, Spain and the EU, organised by a Cuban business magazine. Membership of the agreement would be worth an estimated 48 million euros (60 million dollars) per year for Cuba, according to the Spanish official. (*EUBusiness*, 22/10/04)

**October 28:** Spain and Britain agreed to look at revisiting European policy on Cuba "so it can be more effective," Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos said following talks with British counterpart Jack Straw. "The United Kingdom agrees with the Spanish position to revise some measures so they may be more effective," Moratinos said after some three hours of talks with Straw. Moratinos said that following his discussions with Straw on a variety of issues, including Gibraltar, he believed both countries "share the same philosophy regarding reinforcing democracy, respect for human rights and public freedoms." (*AFP*, 28/10/04)

**November 4:** Spanish executives doing business in Cuba are urging Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero to "do what he can" to normalize political and economic relations between Spain and the Communist-ruled island. "The Spanish business community in Cuba has been completely deprived of political support," due to a lack of understanding between Madrid and Havana, Victor Moro, the president of the Association of Spanish Business Leaders in Cuba, said Wednesday night at the organization's annual dinner. Moro, one of the most influential Spanish business leaders on the island, had warned last year that the deterioration of ties between the government of Spain's then-premier, conservative Jose Maria Aznar, and the regime in Havana would have economic repercussions. (*EFE*, 4/11/04)

**November 18:** The president of the Spanish government, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, said that Fidel Castro's regime must make immediate and firm changes to bring democracy to the island. "Spain has an important commitment of economic investment in Cuba," he said in an

interview with the press. "What we want to do is help the changes, encourage them and demand them if necessary from a political standpoint and from the conviction we have that Cuban regime has to change thoroughly," he added. " I believe Fidel Castro should listen to us, knowing that we only want the best for Cuba." (*EFE, Herald Tribune, 18/11/04*)

**November 25:** Cuba restored normal diplomatic relations with Spain that soured last year when the European Union began inviting dissidents to its National Day receptions. "We met at the Spanish embassy (...) and we have re-established official contact with the Spanish ambassador in Havana," Perez Roque said in an impromptu press conference at the foreign ministry, where he was joined by Spanish Ambassador Carlos Alonso. Zaldivar. Perez Roque praised the Spanish government, in particular Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos, for its efforts to improve relations with Cuba. (*Reuters, AFP, 25/11/04*)

**November 25:** Spain's foreign ministry stressed Madrid's desire to see normal relations between the whole of the European Union and Cuba. "The foreign ministry notes the announcement by the Cuban authorities and signals that its objective is the normalization of contacts between the Cuban authorities and all the embassies of the European Union, not just specific embassies," a ministry statement read. "Spain will continue working with all its EU partners to achieve this normalization with a view to reaching the objectives fixed by the common (EU) position adopted in 1996," the ministry added. (*AFP, 25/11/04*)

**December 2:** Spain's Socialist government defended the soundness of its efforts to renew dialogue with Cuba's Communist regime and denied that the new tack is "conditioned" by demands from Fidel Castro. "The effort to renew dialogue (with Cuba) should not be the object of scorn or disdain," Francisco Javier Sandomingo, who is in charge of Spain's Latin American policy, said during a round table discussion on EU policy and human rights in Cuba. Sandomingo insisted that "our policy is not conditioned by Cuban gestures," and emphasized that the path taken by the administration of Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero toward dialogue with Cuba had led to the recent release of imprisoned dissidents. "Let anyone ask these 12 dissidents (...) if they're better off than they were 15 days ago," Sandomingo said, referring to the release of poet-journalist Raul Rivero and other opponents of the Castro regime. (*EFE, 2/12/04*)

## Ukraine

**March 30:** Ukrainian officials visiting Havana reiterated their gratefulness to the Cuban people for their assistance throughout the years following the Chernobyl crisis in 1986. Letters of interests were also signed between the Ukrainian province of Kiev and Havana for developing closer relations in the areas of commercial, economic and cultural cooperation. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 30/3/04*)

**October 6:** The latest round of talks between the heads of departments of the foreign ministries of Ukraine and Cuba wound up in Havana. While discussing Ukrainian Cuban relations, representatives from both nations praised the ongoing dialogue between the countries and the gradual development of trade and economic cooperation, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry's press service has reported. (*Interfax, 6/10/04*)

## United Kingdom

**September 15:** Great Britain offered the Cuban government emergency aid to alleviate damage caused by hurricane Ivan, which killed at least 71 people in the Caribbean and is currently headed for U.S. shores. Last week, Fidel Castro declared that Cuba would not accept humanitarian assistance from countries that have enforced sanctions against its government. (*AFP, 15/9/04*)

**September 28:** In response to a voter letter campaign, 79 percent of the British Parliament voted to oppose any US military action and hostile policy against Cuba. Concerned that Bush is

increasing aggression against the island, the British Solidarity Campaign organized "Hands Off Cuba", in which a large number of British voters overwhelmingly rejected all belligerent actions by Washington, *Granma* daily reported. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/9/04)

**November 8:** The First Bilateral Meeting Cuba-Britain on Nanotechnology got underway in Havana with the participation of prominent experts in the field. The meeting, organized by Cuba's Science, Technology and Environment Ministry (CITMA) and the British Council, includes nine British post doctorate scientists who will discuss recent advances in nanotechnology with their Cuban colleagues. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 9/11/04)

**December 10:** During a visit to London, the President of the Cuban Academy of Science, Dr. Ismael Clark, said that Great Britain and Cuba are strengthening their relations in the scientific-technical field. Clark's visit responds to an invitation by London's Royal Society, allowing him to visit scientific research centers and meetings with important figures. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 10/12/04)

## IBERO AMERICAN SUMMIT

**November 16:** A display on advances within the Cuban educational system was opened in San José, Costa Rica, as part of the 14th Ibero-American Summit. The display included the launching of a book by Cuban writer and poet, Roberto Fernández Retamar. Fernández Retamar's book "Cuba Defendida" (Cuba Defended) is a compilation of essays, articles and conferences that gives a general overview of the island's history. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/11/04)

**November 16:** Dozens of Costa Ricans blocked what the Cuban government has called "an anti-Cuban maneuver" in the legislative assembly, by preventing the celebration of a meeting organized by the International Forum for Democracy on Cuba. Convened by organizations and former Latin American leaders to denounce Cuba's violations of human rights, the forum was suspended minutes after it began as a result of its repudiation by members of groups of solidarity and friendship with the Cuban government. Barely two speakers had finished when a large group began to shout slogans of support for Cuba and to demand an end to the forum, organized in the context of the 15th Ibero-American Summit. Cuban Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rafael Daussá, called the organization of the forum an "insult" to his country. "I am convinced that all the participants have received money from the US government", he said to the press. (*AFP, Granma Internacional*, 16/11/04)

**November 17:** Costa Rican President Abel Pacheco decried the demonstrations for or against the Cuban government and asked all Costa Ricans concerned "not to interfere with the development of the Ibero-American Summit. However, he said that his country was a "democratic" state and that "it comes as no surprise" that this type of controversy should arise, since Costa Ricans – he admitted – have the right to express support for, or disagreement with, the Cuban government." (*ANSA*, 17/11/04)

**November 17:** Cuba Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque said that Cuba's high morale will assist the Caribbean island in its defense of the Revolution's achievements at the 14th Ibero American Summit in Costa Rica. Pérez Roque told the press that Cuba has the right to participate in the summit despite pressures and maneuvers as the farce and pathetic action financed by Washington in its frustrated attempt to organize a so-called "Forum for Democracy". The diplomat recalled that the representatives of "the Miami mafia", "the Czech satellites" and "Costa Rican bootlickers" had to leave the Costa Rican legislative assembly. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/11/04)

**November 18:** Cuban Vice President, Carlos Lage, is leading this country's delegation to the 14th Ibero-American Summit, to be held in San Jose, Costa Rica. The main topic of Ibero-American countries will be "Education for Progress," and participants will analyze the critical situation of this geographic area in this sphere, as well as different ways to overcome the crisis.

The Cuban delegation is composed by, Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, Deputy Foreign Minister and Ibero-American National Coordinator for Cuba Rafael Daussa, Deputy Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration Raul Taladrid, and other officials from the island Chancellery. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/11/04)

**November 18:** Cuba has won approval of a broad anti-terror draft resolution at the 21-nation Ibero-American Summit that condemned a Panamanian pardon for men accused of trying to kill Fidel Castro. Foreign ministers or ranking diplomats from Spain, Portugal and 19 Latin American nations polished a declaration for their leaders to endorse when the summit itself gets underway after a morning filled with side meetings. The biggest sticking point came over a Cuban call to criticize former Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso for the pardon in August of four Cuban exiles who had been accused of plotting to assassinate Fidel Castro at the 2000 Ibero-American Summit in Panama. It also criticized the United States for taking in three of the men. The measure was approved unanimously, but only after extensive editing of the harsh original language, said Costa Rican Foreign Minister Roberto Tovar, the meeting's host and spokesman. Tovar said the text presented to the presidents said the pardons were incompatible with the fight against terrorism. Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque called it "an important result" and said "Cuba feels satisfied." (*AP*, 18/11/04)

## LATIN AMERICA

[See also, Domestic Affairs/ Relations with the international community and Cuban exile organizations; and Economy/ Collaboration Agreements]

### ALADI

**July 9:** Cuba, a member of the Montevideo-based Latin American Integration Association (ALADI), was excluded from the regulations-prescribed rotation of that regional body's Committee of Representatives' Chairman and Vice-chairman duties. Although, according to ALADI regulations, the Chairman and Vice-chairman posts are to be held on a rotational basis and in alphabetical fashion, when Colombian Ambassador Claudia Turbay took over as Chairman, the remaining Permanent Representatives passed over Cuba, and unanimously nominated the Ecuadorian ambassador as Turbay's replacement in 6 months from now. (*Europa Press*, 9/7/04)

**October 18:** Cuba's Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas is participating in the 10th Meeting of Council Ministers from Latin America's Integration Association, ALADI, in Montevideo, Uruguay. The ministers' regional organization will update cooperation agreements among its member nations and the role of the Association in strengthening ties leading to Latin American Unity. The agenda also includes studying the basis for free trade among the 12 member nations whose economies represent close to 90 percent of the region's economic growth. Other issues for discussion are the MERCOSUR accord and naming Uruguayan Foreign Minister Didier Operti as ALADI's new general secretary until 2007. The Latin American Integration Association is comprised of Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela, Uruguay and Cuba. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 18/10/04)

### Argentina

**January 7:** The Argentine government responded angrily to declarations by Roger Noriega, US assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, on relations between Nestor Kirchner government and Fidel Castro's. Noriega told reporters he was "disappointed" that officials visiting Cuba failed to meet dissidents, a reference to Foreign Minister Rafael Bielsa's recent trip. "We consider the declarations aggressive (...) and inopportune, and the foreign minister has expressed this in the name of the Argentina government," Vice Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana told local radio. Some US officials have said there is a growing alliance emerging in Latin America

between Cuba, Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina, countries that have swung to the left in recent years amid a backlash against free-market policies advocated by Washington. (*Reuters*, 7/1/03)

**January 9:** Argentine Cabinet Chief, Alberto Fernández, said that his government will once again abstain from voting against Cuba for human rights violations in the island at the annual meeting of the UN Human Rights Commission, scheduled for next April. (*Europa Press*, 9/1/04)

**January 15:** Argentine President Néstor Kirchner confirmed that he would not be visiting Cuba in February, as previously announced. He explained the cancellation citing important meetings involving the Jewish community in Argentina. (*Radio Martí*, 15/1/04)

**January 22:** In a letter, five Argentine authors petitioned the Foreign Affairs Ministry to have the Argentine embassy in Havana, and all other Latin American diplomatic missions, open doors to Cuban dissidents. The letter was signed by, Marcos Aguinis, María Sáenz Quesada, Sylvina Walger, Juan José Sebrelli, and Fernando Ruiz. (*Radio Martí*, 22/1/04)

**January 26:** Ten Cuban intellectuals released a letter of support for the government in response to criticism by five Argentine authors who petitioned their Foreign Minister, Rafael Bielsa, to have the Argentine embassy and all other Latin American diplomatic missions in the island open their doors to Cuban dissidents. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 28/1/04)

**February 3:** Argentina's president, Nestor Kirchner, will travel to Cuba "between February and March", said Raul Taleb, the Argentine ambassador to the island nation. He also defended his government's stance of not condemning the administration of Fidel Castro at the United Nations for alleged human rights violations. "There is no final date, but I would venture to say that President Kirchner will visit Cuba between February and March. I believe that the president wants to do so, although he has a very hectic and full schedule," Taleb said during an interview at the Argentine diplomatic mission in Havana. (*BBC*, 3/2/04)

**February 13:** Argentine Foreign Minister, Rafael Bielsa, met with five anti-Castro intellectuals who in a public letter urged Argentina to recommend during the next meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Commission that Cuba allow international observers into the country. The letter also requests that the Argentine Embassy in Havana invite Cuban dissidents to its events. The meeting was attended by Marcos Aguinis, María Sáenz Quesada, Juan José Sebrelli, Fernando Ruiz, and Gabriel Salvia, director of CADAL, a policy centre based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. (*Clarín*, 13/2/04)

**February 25:** The Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque's visit to Argentina marks an important moment for strengthening bilateral relations. His visit includes discussions with Buenos Aires authorities to coordinate President Kirchner's next visit to the Caribbean island. Other points on the foreign minister's agenda will be to discuss Cuba's \$1.9 billion debt with Argentina and Buenos Aires' abstention on the United Nations vote on the question of human rights in Cuba. Both governments already exchanged points of view about these matters last October when Bielsa made an official visit to Cuba. (*Prensa Latina, EFE*, 25/2/04)

**February 26:** Argentina and Cuba touted the warmth of their bilateral relations in a press release, during the last day of Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque's official visit to Buenos Aires. Perez Roque, who met with president Nestor Kirchner, is set to tour Argentina's provinces. Also, Perez Roque's Argentine counterpart, Rafael Bielsa, delivered to the Cuban visitor two letters written by the son of a Cuban doctor barred from leaving the Communist island because of her differences with the Castro regime. (*EFE*, 26/2/04)

**March 1:** Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said he was pleased with his visit to Argentina. He highlighted that it proved very fruitful and that there are possibilities for strengthening and increasing bilateral relations. "We have restored a respectful political dialogue without confrontation points and have reached a clear understanding on Cuba's reasons to

oppose the blockade and Argentina will not get involve in campaigns against Cuba at the UN Human Rights Commission," Perez Roque asserted. The Cuban minister highlighted that Argentina's solidarity with Cuba is stronger than ever since Fidel Castro visited Buenos Aires to attend the inauguration of President Nestor Kirchner last May. (*Prensa Latina*, 1/3/04)

**March 18:** Argentina said it will not vote against Cuba at the UN Human Rights Commission. Argentinean Minister of Justice, Gustavo Beliz, told the press in Geneva that his country will abstain from voting on an upcoming resolution expected to try to condemn Cuba at the Commission. Foreign Minister Gustavo Beliz noted that the priorities of Néstor Kirchner's government were to unceasingly battle against measures to address "social genocide". (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 18/3/04)

**May 12:** During an interview in Buenos Aires, Argentinean President Néstor Kischner told US magazine Newsweek that he would meet with the Cuban opposition, should he ever visit the island. (*Noticias ProCuba Libre*, 12/5/04)

**October 19:** Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez has been asked informally to help mediate with Fidel Castro in the case of a Cuban doctor banned from leaving the island for Argentina, according to one Buenos Aires daily. Argentine Foreign Relations Minister Rafael Bielsa Bielsa asked Gabo (Garcia Marquez' nickname) to intercede before Fidel Castro in order to allow Cuban neurosurgeon Hilda Molina Morejón to leave the island and be reunited with her son, who has been living in Argentina for the past 10 years. The Nobel laureate said that he would do what he could after studying the case. (*Financial Times*, 19/10/04)

**October 29:** Eight National Argentinean members of Parliament have each decided to sponsor one Cuban prisoner of conscience after the March 2003 crackdown. The eight are: Guillermo Cantini (Unión por Argentina), Federico Pinedo (Compromiso para el Cambio), Andrés Zottos (Partido Renovador de Salta), Encarnación Lozano (Movimiento Popular Neuquino), Alberto Natale (Partido Demócrata Progresista), Hugo Martini (Recrear para el Crecimiento), Guillermo Alchourón (Acción por la República) and Mauricio Bossa (Ucedé). During a meeting at the Mexican Parliament in solidarity with Cuban pro-democracy activists, national representative Gabriel Llano (Partido Demócrata de Mendoza) decided to sponsor political prisoner Iván Hernández Carrillo, an independent journalist sentenced to 18 years in jail. (*ProCuba Libre*, 29/10/04)

**November 27:** The President of the Cuban Institute of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation (INDER) Humberto Rodríguez and the Sports Secretary of the Argentinean Chamber of Ministers Claudio Morresi signed a major cooperation agreement in Havana. Cuba will offer technical training in boxing and rhythmic gymnastics, will assist in the preparation of large sporting events and will send a sports methodologist to Argentina. For his part, the Argentinean sports official offered to send football trainers to Cuba. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 27/11/04)

**December 3:** Cuban doctor Hilda Molina, who for over a decade has not been able to visit her son and grandchildren who reside in Buenos Aires, has stated that she does not want "any problems to exist between Cuba and Argentina" and reaffirmed her desire to continue living on the island even if her travel abroad is authorized. The doctor, during a dialogue with the press, preferred to somewhat downplay the problem that arose over the statements made by Argentine Foreign Minister Rafael Bielsa, who said he had "hope and reasonable belief that Molina would be able to spend this Christmas with her grandchildren and with her son". "I thank the foreign minister very much; he has expressed himself in such a way, with extreme compassion, a form of support that my son had never received in Argentina," she said sitting in an armchair in her modest apartment located in downtown Havana. (*Telam*, 5/12/04)

**December 7:** A Cuban neurosurgeon who has been trying for 10 years to get permission from the island's Communist regime to visit her son in Argentina issued an appeal to the Spanish government to join Buenos Aires in lobbying Havana on her behalf. Hilda Molina's case has

gained notoriety thanks to Argentine President Nestor Kirchner's efforts to persuade Cuban authorities to allow the physician to visit her son, Roberto Quiñones, in Buenos Aires and meet her daughter-in-law and grandchildren. In an interview with the press at her Havana home, Molina said she felt "hopeful" about finally being granted permission to visit her son in Argentina. Molina thanked Kirchner and Argentine Foreign Minister Rafael Bielsa for their efforts in her behalf. "Now I have hope, because the Cuban government responded to the Spanish request to release the sick political dissidents. In this case, it's not a European government making the request but a Latin American one," she said. (*EFE*, 7/12/04)

**December 14:** Argentinean Foreign Minister, Rafael Bielsa, said that his government "expects respect from the United States, but from Cuba as well". "Dignity is not a one-way street, but a multi-lane highway", added Bielsa in the wake of Fidel Castro's refusal to accede to a personal request from President Néstor Kirchner to allow Cuban brain surgeon Hilda Molina to visit her son and grandchildren in Buenos Aires. (*La Nación*, 15/12/04)

**December 15:** A Cuban doctor, denied permission to travel to Buenos Aires to visit relatives there, sought refuge in the Argentine Embassy in Havana, according to a newspaper report. Embassy officials declined to confirm that the woman, Dr. Hilda Molina, was inside the embassy. While the Argentine government remained silent about the case, the prominent Argentine daily *La Nación* reported that Molina, a brain surgeon, entered the embassy with her 84-year-old mother and has yet to come out. (*AP*, 16/12/04)

**December 16:** A prominent Cuban doctor returned home after an overnight stay at the Argentine Embassy that raised tensions between the two nations amid reports she was seeking political asylum. Dr. Hilda Molina, 61, denied she had sought refuge at the embassy, telling reporters at her home in Havana that she wanted Argentina's help arranging a teleconference with her son, an exile living in the South American country. "I was discussing something that didn't have anything to do with political asylum," said Molina, a brain surgeon who has held top government posts in Cuba. She said she ended up staying overnight because her 84-year-old mother, who had accompanied her to the embassy, fell ill while they were there. (*AP*, 17/12/04)

**December 20:** The Under Secretary for Latin-American Affairs at Argentina's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Darío Alessandro, has been appointed Ambassador to Cuba, said official sources. Alessandro will replace Raúl Taleb, one of the Argentinean officials criticized over the diplomatic handling of the case of Cuban doctor Hilda Molina. (*EFE*, 20/12/04)

**December 22:** Argentinean President, Néstor Kirchner, and his Foreign Minister, Rafael Bielsa, met with Spanish Ambassador in Buenos Aires, Carmelo Angulo Barturén, to try and find a solution to the case of Cuban dissident Hilda Molina, who has requested permission from Cuban authorities to travel to Argentina or a third country to get together with her family during the Christmas holiday season. (*Europa Press*, 22/12/04)

**December 24:** The Argentinean government warned that the likely solution to the case of Cuban doctor Hilda Molina would not be achieved by "putting pressure" on the regime of Fidel Castro. "This case has to be solved through dialogue, respecting each country's idiosyncrasies and without exerting pressure or insulting their governments", said Argentinean Cabinet Chief, Alberto Fernández. (*EFE*, 25/12/04)

**December 29:** Roberto Quiñones, the son of Cuban doctor Hilda Molina, has described his meeting with Foreign Minister Rafael Bielsa as "very productive", since he obtained a commitment from the government that it would "exhaust all diplomatic channels" to reunite him with his mother. "Speaking both for himself and in the name of President Nestor Kirchner, Bielsa confirmed to us that we should remain calm, because they are not going to leave us alone in this," Quiñones said. He was referring to the negotiations with Cuba concerning Molina's request that she be allowed to visit her grandchildren who live in Argentina. (*BBC*, 29/12/04)

## Bolivia

**November 30:** Bolivian Foreign Minister Juan Ignacio Siles del Valle started a visit to Cuba to ratify friendship and cooperation relations between both countries, according to Cuban Foreign Ministry sources. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/11/04)

## Brazil

**March 11:** Cuba and Brazil are negotiating a film exchange agreement that will allow for the annual exhibition of five motion pictures from each country. According to the Audiovisual Secretariat of the Brazilian Ministry of Culture, the proposal would allow a Brazilian producer to have the exhibition rights of a Cuban film within the country. Orlando Senna from the Brazilian Ministry of Culture told reporters in Brasilia that the agreement provides for the sharing of profits from the film showings. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 11/3/04)

**October 22:** Brazil will propose that the Haitian crisis and a dialogue between the Rio Group and Cuba be included in the coming presidential summit of that political consultation mechanism, according to official sources. "Brazil is interested in intensifying a regional dialogue with Cuba and we think this can be pursued within the Rio Group", said a Brazilian diplomatic source on condition of anonymity. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 23/10/04)

**November 14:** Rio de Janeiro Mayor Cesar Maia told the press that the goals of his first visit to Cuba "are being met" and that, so far, the trip had been a "positive surprise." Maia is one of the mayors invited to festivities celebrating the 485th anniversary of the Cuban capital's founding and the 12th annual Meeting for Cooperation and Solidarity of City Halls with Havana. Since his arrival in Havana, Maia has been meeting with island officials to discuss the possibilities for cooperating in several areas, including culture and physical education. (*EFE*, 14/11/04)

## Chile

**February 2:** A group of Chilean senators on an official visit in Cuba met with dissident leader Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz to talk about the situation of civil, political and economic rights on the island. The delegation also met with Cuba's Vice-President Carlos Lage, and the President of the National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcón. (*Europa Press*, 2/2/04)

**February 22:** Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Perez, asked Chile to reverse its decision in recent years to vote to condemn Cuba's human rights record, newspaper La Tercera said. Chile, as part of the United Nations' Human Rights Commission, voted in 2000, 2002 and 2003 to criticize Cuba's record. Perez met with Cristian Barros, Chile's deputy foreign minister, during his nine-hour visit to Chile, the first visit by a Cuban official during the administration of Chilean Socialist President Ricardo Lagos. (*Bloomberg*, 23/2/04)

**March 25:** Chile's governing Socialist Party urged the administration to abstain from voting on a UN resolution concerning human rights in Cuba, while the conservative opposition Independent Democratic Union (UDI) asked it to condemn abuses on the island. Socialist Party leader Gonzalo Martner was quoted by local newspapers as saying the decision by Argentina and Brazil to abstain could influence Chile to join them when the resolution is voted on at the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. Martner suggested the Chilean government, at the time of abstention, call on its Cuban counterpart to carry out domestic reforms on the island. (*EFE*, 25/3/04)

**April 7:** In a session marred by shouting matches between lawmakers and the forcible clearing of the galleries, Chile's lower house voted to urge the government to support a condemnation of Cuba in the UN Human Rights Commission. The motion passed by a vote of 67-8, with 14 abstentions. The resolution was introduced by the Christian Democrats, putting them at odds with the Socialists, their partners in the ruling coalition. Lawmakers from the two parties exchanged

fierce barbs in the debate, accusing each other of inconsistency concerning human rights. (*EFE*, 7/4/04)

**April 13:** Chile's Socialists urged the coalition government headed by one of their number, Ricardo Lagos, to abstain on a vote to condemn Cuba before the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. Announcement of the request was made by Senator Ricardo Nuñez, chairman of the Foreign Relations Commission of the Socialist Party, which is part of the coalition that has governed Chile since 1990. (*EFE*, 12/4/04)

**April 23:** The President of Chile, Ricardo Lagos, said in Santiago that his government would support Cuba in its presentation in the UN Human Rights Commission of a request for investigation of alleged human rights violations in the US military base in Guantánamo. The Chilean leader indicated that after knowing of the Cuban proposal, "the Chilean government considered and studied it and decided to support it as it contained a legal issue. Cuba knows it could count on the Chilean vote. We are a small but honourable nation, and the Chilean foreign policy is decided here, in the Palacio de La Moneda (seat of the Chilean government), nowhere else." (*Europa Press*, 23/4/04)

## Colombia

**June 24:** Colombia and Cuba began their 6th Joint Mixed Commission in Bogota with discussions on economic, technical, scientific, educational and cultural cooperation. The consul minister of the Cuban diplomatic mission in Colombia, Ramón Arnao, said that Havana and Bogotá agree that the results of this meeting and the fulfillment of agreements will contribute to the strengthening of bilateral relations between both countries. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 24/6/04)

**July 10:** Cuba's Foreign Ministry said that it was holding one of Colombia's top drug kingpins, Luis Hernando Gomez Bustamante. Bustamante, alias Rasguno, was captured when he entered the country on a false passport. The top figure in the Northern Valle drug cartel was being held at an Interior Ministry center for crimes against state security, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement. (*CNN*, 10/7/04)

**July 10:** Colombian officials seeking the extradition of a reputed drug lord who was being held in Cuba met with diplomats at their nation's embassy. Three men and a woman in civilian clothes were seen leaving the Colombian Embassy. They declined to give their names or answer questions about the arrest of Luis Hernando Gomez Bustamante. The men did, however, confirm they had just flown in from Bogota, Colombia. "It's in the hands of Cuban authorities," Colombian Army Colonel Eleuterio Mora, who is attached to the embassy, said of the case. "They know more than anyone." (*CNN*, 10/7/04)

**July 13:** Cuba's anti-narcotics agency is actively working with Colombian authorities in their investigation of a major Colombian drug lord arrested in Havana, Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said. But Perez Roque said it was too soon to say if Luis Hernando Gomez Bustamante would be sent back to Colombia. The foreign minister said Colombian officials had not yet presented a formal extradition request. If returned to his homeland, the Colombian government would likely arrange for his extradition to the United States, where he and two other kingpins were indicted earlier this year by a federal grand jury in New York on charges of conspiracy, money laundering and drug charges. [For more on this, see US-Cuba Relations] (*AP*, 13/7/04)

**July 22:** According to Col. Oscar Naranjo, head of the Colombian Judicial Police Directorate, Hernando Gómez Bustamante, a.k.a. "Rasguño" (Scratch), a Colombian drug kingpin high on the FBI's most-wanted list who was apprehended in Cuba in early July, will not be handed over to Colombia any time soon. Cuban authorities informed that Gómez would remain in their custody while his possible activities on the island are further investigated. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 23/7/04)

**July 10:** Cuba's Foreign Ministry said that it was holding one of Colombia's top drug kingpins, Luis Hernando Gomez Bustamante. The United States has been offering a \$5 million reward for information leading to Bustamante's arrest. He was indicted last May on charges of drug-trafficking, money-laundering and racketeering. If convicted on all counts, he could face life in prison. However, there is no extradition agreement between Cuba and the United States. Bustamante also is wanted in Colombia, but it was unclear whether Cuba would agree to turn him over to that country or try him in Cuba. There were reports that if Bustamante were deported to Colombia, Colombian authorities planned to extradite him to the United States for trial. [For more on this, see Foreign Relations] (CNN, 10/7/04)

**July 13:** The US State Department said Cuba had informed it of the arrest of an alleged Colombian drug kingpin wanted in the United States, but his possible extradition from the island remains unclear. "The Cuban government has informed us by our interests section in Havana that they've arrested an individual who claims to be Luis Hernandez Gomez," department spokesman Richard Boucher told reporters. "At this point, we're looking at it as a law enforcement matter and our law enforcement agencies are studying the situation," he said. Boucher referred to the Department of Justice for any comment on his possible extradition to the United States. [For more on this, see Foreign Affairs] (AFP, 13/7/04)

**December 27:** One reputed Colombian capo is eluding capture being held in Cuba on a charge of using a false passport. Havana has been slow to move on the charge against Hernando Gómez, and Colombian authorities say they have no news on their request for his extradition to Bogotá to face charges. Some of Gómez's associates have told the press that they suspect that Gómez may have bribed his way into an extended stay in Cuba so he could avoid a Colombian prison and later possible extradition to the United States. Cuba's top anti-drug official, Gen. Jesús Becerra, told reporters in October that Gómez was "in transit" when he was captured there in early July and did not intend to use Cuba to ship drugs. Gómez is charged with carrying false documents, a relatively minor crime. There has been no official word on what jail he is being held in, or even whether he has been brought to trial and sentenced. Associates of Gómez say that his wife and top lieutenants have been allowed to visit him in Cuba. (*The Miami Herald*, 27/12/04)

## Guatemala

**January 12:** Guatemalan President Alfonso Portillo has awarded the Cuban medical brigade serving in his country the Order of Quetzal. Expressing his gratitude for the solidarity shown by the Cuban people and government, the Guatemalan president noted that the Order of Quetzal is the highest distinction granted by the Central American country. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/1/04)

**January 13:** Foreign Affairs First Vice Minister, Fernando Remírez de Estenoz, left for Guatemala, presiding over the official delegation to the inauguration of the new government. Oscar Berger, was elected Guatemalan President on December 28. (*AIN*, 13/1/04)

**January 14:** Guatemala's vice president Eduardo Stein expressed to Fernando Remírez, Cuban viceminister of Foreign Affairs, the interest of his country in increasing the current number of medical students in Cuba. Remírez headed the Cuban delegation to the presidential transfer of power ceremony in the Central American country. (*Notimex*, 14/1/04)

**March 24:** The Guatemalan Congress has requested the government of President Oscar Berger to abstain from supporting a resolution promoted by US against Cuba at the 60th UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) in Geneva. A proposal by the parliamentary group Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) was supported by 86 out of 120 deputies, which showed their solidarity with Cuba in face of the US hostility. Legislators recalled the fact that the Guatemalan Congress granted the Quetzal Order to the team of Cuban doctors who have been working in Guatemalan rural areas since 1998. The Guatemalan Congress recognizes that the Cuban doctors have made more than 10 million consultations over the five years of Cuba's

support and 157,000 of them were significant in saving the lives of Guatemalan people. (*Prensa Latina*, 24/3/04)

## Honduras

**March 28:** According to government spokespersons, the First Lady of Honduras, Spanish-born Aguas Ocana, traveled to Cuba seeking expert guidance for the creation of two treatment centres for abused women and children, respectively. (*AFP*, 28/3/04)

**April 8:** Cuba declined to negotiate with Honduras their respective maritime border in the Caribbean Sea, said Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque in a telephone statement from Havana. "Cuba will not receive the Honduran delegation which is ready to travel to Havana to initiate the negotiations on the maritime border," said Pérez Roque. (*Notimex*, 8/4/04)  
Jamaica

**June 28:** Jamaica Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister Keith Desmond St. Aubyn Knight is arriving in Cuba, leading an entrepreneurial delegation at the invitation of Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. This first visit of the Jamaican minister since taking office will strengthen the traditional bilateral ties of solidarity and cooperation established in 1903 and raised to embassy status in 1972, Granma daily reports. The economic and trade links maintained by the two countries in health, education, culture, science and tourism are likely to be raised in K.D. Knight's talks with Foreign Ministry officials and other representatives of the Cuban government. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/6/04)

## Mexico

[See also, Economy/ Foreign investments and trade/ Latin America, and General indicators/ External debt]

**January 7:** The Cuban Ambassador to Mexico, Roberta Lajous, said that Cuba-Mexico relations would become stronger this year, following a deterioration of bilateral ties during the Summit Segment of the International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Monterrey City in 2002. She added that, possibly this year, an agreement would be reached on the options available to Cuba for payment of its debt to Mexico, further strengthening relations between the two nations. (*Notimex*, 7/1/04)

**January 13:** Mexican President Vicente Fox avoided expressing his opinion on George W. Bush's criticisms of Cuba and Venezuela by stating that Mexico maintains a "solid relationship" with Cuba and respects Venezuela's sovereignty. He said that a relationship with Cuba "is, and will continue to be, part of (Mexican) foreign policy." (*AFP*, 13/1/04)

**January 13:** Mexican Foreign Secretary Luis Ernesto Derbez asserted that there is no reason for Mexico to share the US views on Cuba, "since our relation with the Caribbean state is very transparent and rooted in tradition," and we share a maritime border. (*Notimex*, 13/1/04)

**January 13:** The Round Table, a Cuban TV talk show that features pundits' discussions of the latest political developments, labeled Mexico as the US "backyard" and criticized President Vicente Fox's actions at the Special Summit of the Americas in Monterrey. (*La Jornada*, 13/1/04)

**January 22:** The Cuban Parliament President, Ricardo Alarcón, met with a delegation from Mexico's Democratic Revolution Party (PRD). During the delegation's stay in Havana, the visitors will meet with Cuban Vice-president Carlos Lage, and with Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Perez Roque. (*AIN*, 23/1/04)

**January 26:** Leonel Godoy, leader of the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD), of the Mexican opposition, met briefly with Fidel Castro before concluding his five-day visit to the island. (*Notimex*, 26/1/04)

**February 5:** The Mexican Foreign Ministry confirmed that Fidel Castro has been invited to the Summit of Heads of State from Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union (ALCUE), which will take place in May in Guadalajara, Mexico. (*Notimex*, 6/2/04)

**February 17:** A delegation of the Mexican "Partido del Trabajo" (PT) continued its five-day visit to Cuba. The Cuban Communist Party invited the PT delegation, led by its national coordinator, Alberto Anaya, who highlighted Cuba's economic achievements without the support of the International Monetary Fund. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/2/04)

**February 20:** A delegation of the Mexican Partido de los Trabajadores (PT) is winding up a six-day visit to Cuba at the invitation of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC). The PT delegation, led by its President Alberto Anaya, met with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque who thanked them for the continued and decisive friendship of the Mexican people. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/2/04)

**February 26:** A Mexican delegation of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) has arrived in Cuba invited by the Cuban Parliament and the Island's Communist Party (PCC). Deputy Jose Alberto Aguilar, member of the National Defense, Marine and Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Deputies, leads the delegation. (*Prensa Latina*, 26/2/04)

**March 30:** Carlos Ahumada, an Argentine-born businessman with companies in Mexico, was arrested in Cuba at Mexico's request, as authorities seek his extradition on fraud charges, the Mexican Attorney General's Office said. Ahumada, who owns a newspaper, soccer team, construction company and other businesses in Mexico, had fled to Cuba after a Mexico City judge issued a warrant for his arrest on March 10 on charges he defrauded the Mexico City government, the attorney general said in a statement. (*Bloomberg*, 31/3/04)

**March 30:** The Mexican Chamber of Deputies approved by ample majority vote a motion to request President Fox's government to abstain from voting on "any condemnatory resolution against Cuba" during the 60 th session of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. (*Europa Press*, 31/3/04)

**March 31:** Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque addressed the media during a news conference in Havana, on the Carlos Ahumada case. Perez Roque said Cuba will consider an extradition request from Mexico for Argentine-born business man Carlos Ahumada, who is wanted in Mexico in connection with an alleged US\$ 3 million in missing public funds. Ahumada was arrested by Interpol in Cuba. (*Reuters*, 31/3/04)

**March 31:** Mexico's ambassador to Cuba requested that the island nation extradite a fugitive Mexican businessman implicated in several corruption scandals involving government officials. Envoy Roberta Lajous went in person to Cuba's Foreign Ministry to deliver the request for the extradition of Argentine businessman Carlos Ahumada, a Mexican diplomatic official said. In accordance with the countries' bilateral extradition treaty, Mexico now has 40 days to hand over any documentation it considers relevant to the case, the official said. (*EFE*, 31/3/04)

**April 1:** President Vicente Fox invited his Cuban counterpart, Fidel Castro Ruz, to attend the next European Union-Latin America and the Caribbean Summit, announced Mexican Ambassador to the island. Roberta Lajous informed a group of journalists that she had personally delivered the invitation for Castro to attend the III Summit of heads of state and government of the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean in Guadalajara, Jalisco. (*Notimex*, 1/4/04)

**April 5:** Cuban authorities ordered a Mexican businessman jailed without bail while investigators continue the probe his alleged swindling of the Mexico City government. Mexican fugitive Carlos Agustin Ahumada will remain in jail pending an investigation by local authorities, states an official document. Havana District Attorney Luis Lorenzo Palenzuela specifies the precautionary

measure was adopted by his office after studying the case file that includes information provided by INTERPOL and the Mexican Embassy in Havana. The text signed by Palenzuela confirms that the businessman gave false information on his immigration declaration upon arrival at the Caribbean Island, and was detained after receiving a detention request from INTERPOL. (*EFE, Prensa Latina, 5/4/04*)

**April 7:** The Attorney General's Office of the Republic of Mexico (PGR) presented Cuba four requests for judicial assistance that seeks to expand information in the case of businessman Carlos Ahumada, who is temporarily in detention on the island. The Coordinator of Foreign Relations of the PGR, Miguel Angel González Félix, delivered the requests to officials of the Cuban Ministry of Justice. (*AFP, 8/4/04*)

**April 8:** An editorial in Granma newspaper unmask an attempt by former Mexican Foreign Minister, Jorge Castañeda, to capitalize on the crisis in his country over the "Ahumada Case" to mislead his compatriots and attack his political adversaries. In the article titled "Another Low Blow from Castaneda" the daily accuses the ex-official of suggesting that Havana is using the case of Mexican businessman Carlos Agustin Ahumada, arrested by Havana on request of INTERPOL and the Mexican Embassy, to obtain a favourable vote from that country at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. (*Prensa Latina, 8/4/04*)

**April 14:** The Mexican government denied the allegation that the United States exerted pressure on Mexico to prompt its support for a resolution to condemn Cuba in the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. Agustin Gutierrez Canet, the government's international press director, told the press that there is no pressure. (*People's Daily Online, 14/4/04*)

**April 15:** Mexican President Vicente Fox defended his administration's support of a resolution criticizing Cuba's human rights record Thursday, saying it was a vote "in favor of a cause, not against a nation." "Mexico has a firm commitment with democracy and human rights," Fox said at a public event during a visit to his central home state of Guanajuato. "This is about a vote in favor of a cause not against a nation that has always deserved and will continue to deserve our respect and support," Fox said. He added that the decision was "not based on political or circumstantial considerations." "On the contrary, our vote in favor of the resolution for the defense of human rights was a vote in keeping with our principles," the president said in a speech broadcast live on Mexican news media outlets. (*AP, 15/4/04*)

**April 19:** Cuban authorities detained an assistant to Carlos Ahumada—a businessman who's also under arrest in Cuba to be extradited, informed the Mexican Foreign Ministry. A Mexican citizen, Antonio Martínez Ocampo was arrested in Havana last April 5 in relation to current investigation on the Ahumada case, adds a communiqué from the Ministry. (*AP, 19/4/04*)

**April 21:** A third figure linked to Mexico City corruption scandals has been detained in Cuba, Mexico's Foreign Relations Department announced. The department said in a news release that Cuba had reported that Enrique Arcipreste, who is accused here of fabricating documents to force a government payment, was detained in Havana and was being held at a security headquarters there. Cuban officials were already holding two other figures - businessman Carlos Ahumada and Antonio Martinez Ocampo. (*AP, 21/4/04*)

**April 21:** "No government or transitory action can affect the bonds between the peoples, legislators and NGOs [Mexico-Cuba]", Cuban Parliament Vice President Jaime Crombet said concerning current strained bilateral relations. In an interview with the press during the Inter-Parliamentary Union meeting, the legislator recognized that Mexico's submission to the United States in the vote against Cuba at the UN Human Rights Commission has injured bilateral relations and that immediate prospects are not promising. The significance of this vote, Crombet explained, is that the US uses this policy to justify its 45-year blockade on the Island and, to judge by a series of declarations by Bush, even a possible armed invasion. (*Prensa Latina, 22/4/04*)

**April 28:** The Mexican media gave wide coverage to the Cuban decision to deport the businessman of Argentinean origin established in Havana, Carlos Ahumada, summoned by Mexican courts. Radio stations read the whole text of the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs communique where the reasons leading to the decision are explained. Secretary of the Interior of Mexico, Santiago Creel, expressed satisfaction Wednesday for the Cuban decision to deport Ahumada. Creel told the program Monitor during a visit to the state of Tlaxcala that if Cuba decided to give up Ahumada, "we are going to be very satisfied. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/4/04).

**April 29:** The return of a fugitive Mexican businessman from Cuba has touched off a terse diplomatic exchange between Mexico and Cuba. Mexico's Foreign Relations Department objected to comments by Cuban authorities about the motivations behind the request to extradite Ahumada. "To insinuate that the extradition request by Mexico is part of a scandal constitutes a value judgment about an internal matter in Mexico, which is clearly discordant with (...) healthy relations between nations," said Arturo Dager, a legal consultant at Mexico's Foreign Relations Department. (*AP, El Universal*, 29/4/04)

**April 29:** The Cuban Foreign Ministry has not received any "official note" from Mexican authorities regarding the deportation to that country of businessman Carlos Ahumada. "We have not received a single official document from Mexico," said a source from the Cuban Ministry who also added that Cuba is disconcerted after information released in Mexico by spokesperson Alan Nahum saying that Mexico had sent a diplomatic note in protest to Cuba. (*Europa Press*, 29/4/04)

**May 3:** Mexico has pulled its ambassador from Havana and accused Cuba of interfering in its internal affairs as bitterness over Mexico's close relations with the United States comes to a head. In his May Day speech, Fidel Castro severely criticized Mexico's stance at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva towards Cuba, saying that the prestige Mexico once gained in Latin America and throughout the world for its foreign policies had "turned to ashes" as it began toeing the line for the United States. Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez indicated that Castro's remarks were unacceptable. "Mexico does not and will not tolerate under any circumstance any foreign government trying to affect our decisions on foreign or domestic policy," Derbez told a news conference. Mexico asked Cuba to pull its envoy out of Mexico City within 48 hours, he said. Mexico's Interior Minister Santiago Creel also said two members of the Cuban Communist Party's central committee, José Antonio Arbesú and Pedro Lobaina, had been "carrying out activities incompatible with their status" in Mexico. Creel added that the pair had dabbled in "affairs which should be dealt with by diplomatic channels in the relevant institutions," suggesting they had become involved in Mexican politics. The pair spent several days in Mexico in April and entered the country on diplomatic passports, he said. He said Mexico had declared Orlando Silva, a diplomat at the Cuban Embassy, "persona non grata," meaning he had to leave the country immediately. A spokesman for the Cuban government said Havana had no immediate comment on the Mexican decision. (*Reuters, La Jornada, AP*, 3/5/04)

**May 3:** The Cuban Government published a note in the digital version of Granma newspaper, informing on the decision taken by Mexico of declaring persona non grata a Cuban diplomat based in the DF, and the withdrawal of its ambassador to Havana. (*Granma*, 3/5/04)

**May 3:** Thousands took to the streets in Mexico City to protest against President Vicente Fox' decision to reduce diplomatic relations with Cuba on what many political observers have called insubstantial grounds. The demonstrators blocked part of the Reforma Avenue in the Mexican capital as they marched to the United States embassy with placards claiming that the US, not Cuba, was guilty of external interference in Mexico. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 3/4/04)

**May 4:** Cuba's ambassador to Mexico, Jorge Bolaños, left Mexico City for Havana after the Mexican government ordered him to leave and recalled its envoy from the island nation in a move reducing bilateral diplomatic ties to a minimum. "The Mexican and Cuban people will be the judges" of the decision made by the government of Mexican President Vicente Fox, Bolaños said before boarding a Cubana de Aviacion flight for his homeland. Mexican officials on Sunday gave

Bolaños 48 hours to leave the country. He was seen off by a dozen members of the "Solidarity with Cuba" civic group and accompanied by security guards and members of the diplomatic mission. (EFE, 4/5/04)

**May 4:** Cuba welcomed home its diplomatic team expelled from Mexico and denied violating any laws or the sovereignty of that nation, saying that such "fallacies will be crushed." "At the right time, we will respond to the lies. At the right time, we will crush the fallacy with the force of truth and our arguments," said Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. "The truth is the Cuban people's most powerful weapon and it will be employed," Perez Roque said at an event to welcome home expelled Cuban Ambassador to Mexico Jorge Bolaños. The entire Foreign Ministry leadership and high-ranking members of the Cuban Communist Party met Bolaños at the airport. (EFE, 4/5/04)

**May 4:** Mexican Foreign Secretary Luis Ernesto Derbez sent a letter to Cuba suggesting officials from both countries work together to improve their strained relationship. Derbez sent the diplomatic "with the clear aim of getting relations between Mexico and Cuba back on track, at least in diplomatic terms," he wrote to his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Perez Roque. "I declare my absolute belief that by re-establishing trust and dialogue between the two of us we can arrive at a relationship equal to our mutual needs." (AP, 4/5/04)

**May 5:** Cuba's foreign minister accused Mexico of fabricating a crisis with Havana as a smoke screen to divert attention from a corruption scandal brewing among Mexico City officials. Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque called Mexico's unexpected decision to expel Cuba's ambassador and recall its own envoy from Havana "unjustifiable, rash and arrogant." "Cuba considers that all this has had the purpose of deviating attention from a matter which is exclusively an internal issue for Mexico," Perez Roque said, referring to Mexican businessman Carlos Ahumada, who fled to Cuba after the release of videotapes showing him passing wads of cash to officials in Mexico City. The Foreign Minister held a three-hour news conference in which he accused Mexican officials of lies, insults, erratic behavior and diplomatic incompetence. Perez Roque also rejected Mexican charges that two high-ranking members of the Cuban Communist Party engaged in "unauthorized activities" during a trip to Mexico last month and meddled in the country's internal affairs. He said the men met with members from various political parties, as well as journalists. Perez Roque defended Fidel Castro's May Day speech, which accused Mexico of trying to curry favor with Washington by criticizing Cuba's human rights record. (Sun Sentinel, AP, 5/5/04)

**May 6:** The Mexican government offered to resume with "respect" relations with Cuba, though it used harsh terms to deny Havana's accusations that Mexico is solely responsible for freezing the century-old ties. "We're keeping our hand extended. We would like to resume dialogue with Cuba under respectful conditions," said Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez. Mexican Interior Minister Santiago Creel said he hopes bilateral relations "will return to the level where they've always been." The ministers said there will be no "break in relations," but they stressed that the dialogue must come through diplomatic channels, alluding to Cuba's tendency to vent its problems through the press. Despite the hand extended to Cuba, both officials "categorically" and in harsh terms ruled out Havana's claim that the Mexican government masterminded a conspiracy centered on the corruption case involving jailed businessman Carlos Ahumada to hurt its political opponents. (EFE, 6/5/04)

**May 7:** Mexican President Vicente Fox said Friday that his government will not take part in a new US program designed to help Cubans speed an end to the communist regime. Speaking in the Mexican city of Culiacán, Fox said his country's policy was based on noninterference in the internal affairs of other nations. "We reject all interference in this case," Fox said, referring to the report of the White House's Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba suggesting measures that would enable the United States to hasten a transition to democracy on the island. "Thus, Mexico will in no way take part in this proposal that has been made against Cuban sovereignty, and neither will we accept interference in that country's affairs by any other nation," Fox said. (EFE, 11/5/04)

**May 11:** Mexican Foreign Secretary Luis Ernesto Derbez asserted in Madrid that the Cuban crisis is best resolved, not through wars of words on the press, but through diplomatic channels, with the mediation of a Group of Friends of Cuba. He said that Vicente Fox's government does "not intend to judge the regime" of Fidel Castro, and reminded that his country has always condemned the US economic embargo on the island. "In the case of Cuba, all the elements are there. All that is required now is to establish a dialogue and respect diplomatic channels," he said. (*Europa Press*, 11/5/04)

**May 12:** Cuban Ambassador to the United Nations, Orlando Requeijo, said that Cuba would second the creation of a Group of Friends... for the United States. In response to the Mexican proposal for the creation of a Group of Friends of Cuba, a regional initiative previously implemented to deal with political crisis in other Latin American countries, Requeijo said that the nation that actually needs it is the United States. (*Notimex*, 12/5/04)

**May 17:** Cuban oppositionist Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo has called for the next EU-Latin America Summit not to endorse any hostile US policies against the island and to renew efforts for dialogue with Cuba. The ex-political prisoner and leader of Cambio Cubano revealed his organization's "Five-Point Document," that includes recommendations to the participants in the 3rd EU-Latin America and Caribbean Summit. (*Notimex*, 17/5/04)

**May 23:** The "political climate is not appropriate" for Fidel Castro to attend the European Union, Latin American and Caribbean Summit in Guadalajara, Mexico, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said. Perez Roque said the political situation stems from the "confrontation" that has resulted from "the Mexican government's unilateral decisions". Mexico and Cuba have strong historical ties, but a diplomatic crisis led Mexico to recall its ambassador in Havana and expel Cuba's representative from the country in early May. (*EFE*, 23/5/04)

**May 25:** Mexican president Vicente Fox declared that his country would attempt to resolve the current bilateral crisis with Cuba. "We are going to sit with (Cuban government representatives) and start a dialogue and work toward resuming full bilateral relations in the future," Fox told the foreign press. "This will not occur in a short time," he added. (*Reuters*, 25/5/04)

**May 26:** Fidel Castro said European complicity with the United States and the betrayal of some of his "submissive" Latin neighbors will keep him from attending the summit of European Union and Latin American leaders in Mexico. The meeting promises to be a hollow ceremony devoid of any agenda for dealing with the social problems facing Latin Americans, the 77-year-old Cuban leader said in a fiery statement explaining his absence from the summit in the Mexican city of Guadalajara. He said the expulsion of Cuba's ambassador from Mexico on May 1 and "dishonest" Mexican accusations of Cuban meddling in Mexican politics were also factors in his decision to stay home. In an open letter to the Mexican people, Castro blasted European and Latin American leaders for bowing down before to the policies of his arch-enemy, the United States. (*Reuters*, 26/5/04)

**May 27:** Cuba's foreign minister met with his Mexican counterpart, an effort to smooth over a diplomatic row that resulted in both countries withdrawing their respective ambassadors. Cuba's Felipe Perez Roque arrived at the hotel of Mexico's Luis Ernesto Derbez, but said nothing to reporters as he headed to the meeting. The day before, he said he wasn't expecting a breakthrough. "I don't know if the actual diplomatic crisis (...) can have a solution," he said. (*AP*, 27/5/04)

**May 27:** Cuba's foreign minister said his nation and Mexico agreed to return their respective ambassadors, an attempt to mend relations strained by accusations that the communist-run island was meddling in Mexico's affairs. At a news conference on the sidelines of an international summit here, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said his meeting earlier with Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez had gone well and that they had decided to restore the

ambassadors to their post. "The objective is to normalize our relations as they were before", Mr Ernesto Derbez said. "I believe there will be a solution but I don't know when. I think it will take some time." "The atmosphere and discussion [at the meeting] point to a solution to the diplomatic crisis we have lived through," said Mr Perez Roque. Mr Perez Roque did not give a date for the ambassadors' return. (*Sun Sentinel, BBC, 27/5/04*)

**May 27:** Commenting on Fidel Castro's assertion in a letter "the people of Mexico" that the EU-Latin America and Caribbean Summit answers to US interests, Jalisco governor Francisco Ramírez said that caution should be exercised and all negative and accusatory pronouncements avoided. (*Mural.Com, 27/5/04*)

**June 3:** Mexico will not accept Cuba's request to reinstate their respective ambassadors as a first step to normalize relations until the Cuban government explains the reasons why Cuba intervened in Mexico's domestic affairs. According to Mexico's foreign ministry, Cuba has not replied to a diplomatic note sent last April 29 asking for an explanation. Mexican foreign minister, Luis Ernesto Derbez, promised his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Pérez Roque, to visit Havana early in July; however, if an explanation has not been forthcoming before then, the visit will take place without ambassadors being present. (*Grupo Reforma, 3/6/04*)

**July 7:** During the visit of President of the Mexican Council for Culture and the Arts to Cuba, Minister Sari Bermúdez said she expects an increased cultural exchange between her country and the island. Bermudez, invited by Cuban Culture Minister Abel Prieto, attended a meeting with Cuban artists at Havana's Wifredo Lam Contemporary Art Center. (*Prensa Latina, 8/7/04*)

**July 13:** Mexico is prepared to normalize its troubled diplomatic relations with Cuba, but the Caribbean island will have some explaining to do first about recent disagreements, a top Mexican official said. "Once these explanations have been given, Mexico is ready to normalize relations" by sending its ambassador back to Cuba, said Miguel Hakim, Mexico's assistant secretary for Latin American affairs. (*AP, 13/7/04*)

**July 14:** The Cuban Catholic Bishop's Conference informed that a Mexican Episcopal Conference (CEM) delegation, led by its president, Monsignor José Guadalupe Martín Rábago, arrived in Cuba for a religious visit. The Mexican clergymen will meet with the local bishops, until the arrival of Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez, who will attempt to mend diplomatic fences between the two nations with his Cuban counterpart Felipe Pérez Roque. (*AFP, 14/7/04*)

**July 17:** The Mexican and Cuban foreign ministers have announced they will reinstate ambassadors to each other's countries on July 26, normalizing official relations after a diplomatic spat several months ago. The two countries still had issues to work out, but they were back on the road to reconciliation, the ministers told a press conference after their meeting. "July 26th the ambassadors will be back in their respective posts," Perez Roque said. The date marks the start of Castro's revolution and is an important Cuban holiday. "We've made progress, and agreed on the importance of working in favor of bilateral relations," said Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. Luis Ernesto Derbez, Mexico's foreign minister, called the move "positive" and said the two countries would continue "resolving issue by issue." "Not everything has been resolved by these conversations, but we believe it is a first step," Perez Roque said. (*CNN, Reuters, EFE, 17/7/04*)

**July 19:** Just back from a trip to Cuba designed to patch up strained relations, Mexico's foreign minister said that the issue of respect for human rights continues "to separate" the two nations. Interviewed over Mexican radio, Derbez said the arrangement he had hammered out with Perez Roque had not been arrived at "by force," but by virtue of the two governments' shared understanding "that it would be important to clarify" their differences and restore trust in each other. The two friends can move forward while holding differing views on human rights, Derbez told W-Radio. "We both understand clearly that the issue that separates us" is human rights, in

which Mexico is not focusing on just one country but on "the idea of improving human rights" in general, Derbez said. (*EFE*, 19/7/04)

**July 25:** The ambassadors for Cuba and Mexico returned to their posts, marking the end of a three-month diplomatic spat between Cuba and the country that used to be its strongest ally in Latin America. Cuban Ambassador Jorge Bolaños and Mexican Ambassador Roberta Lajous Vargas returned to their posts on the 51st anniversary of a failed rebel attack that gave a name to Castro's cause — the July 26 Movement — and laid the groundwork for the Cuban leader's victory over the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. "I am supremely happy to return to Mexico, after a brief and involuntary absence," Bolaños said. "Cuba and Mexico are two nations that geography made neighbors, and that our histories and heroes, both Cuban and Mexican, have united forever." Mexican Ambassador Roberta Lajous Vargas returned to Havana "with the aim of working toward a new vision of the future," Mexico's Foreign Relations Department said in a press statement. (*The Globe and Mail, Det New.Com*, 25/7/04)

**September 17:** Ricardo Alarcón, the president of the Cuban parliament, said that Cuban-Mexican relations were on the mend. Alarcón was speaking at a reception, held by the Mexican embassy in Havana, to celebrate Mexico's Independence Day. He was the most senior Cuban to attend, though the minister of culture, Abel Prieto, was also there along with a swarm of junior officials. Alarcón admitted that relations between the two countries were still not perfect but said that their improvement was inevitable. He said both countries could work out their differences and pointed out that next week there will be a meeting of the Mexican-Cuban inter-parliamentary union. He also praised the Mexican ambassador to Cuba, Roberta Lajous, saying that everyone in Cuba liked and respected her. (*Latin News Daily*, 17/9/04)

**September 22:** Cuban and Mexican legislators began working to improve bilateral relations at the 7th Inter-Parliamentary Meeting, in an encounter favored by Havana's authorities, said Ricardo Alarcon, president of the Cuban Parliament. The meeting officially opened at the Nacional Hotel with the participation of 10 Mexican Senators and six Congress people, representing six political parties, and eight Cuban Assembly representatives. At the opening ceremony, Cuban Congress President Ricardo Alarcon urged participants to insist on better friendship and fraternal relations based on honest dialogue among real friends to improve bilateral ties. All Mexican political parties are represented in the delegation led by PAN Senator Marco Antonio Adame (Partido Accion Nacional). Among others in the delegation are PRD Jorge Martinez (Partido de la Revolucion Democratica), who is coordinator, and PT (Partido del Trabajo) Pedro Vazquez, president of the recently-constituted Mexico-Cuba Friendship Group. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/9/04)

**September 24:** Mexican and Cuban legislators meeting in Havana criticized the US embargo against Cuba while avoiding thorny issues that might affect bilateral relations. The final statement from the conference, the first since the crisis that had the two countries on the verge of breaking off diplomatic relations in May, does not mention issues like Cuba's debt to Mexico or the latter's criticism of the human rights situation on the island. The document said the 42-year-old U.S. economic embargo against Cuba "violates the principles of international law and norms governing relations between countries." The statement also expressed the legislators' "satisfaction" with the "normalization of bilateral relations within an atmosphere of respect and cordiality." Havana and Mexico City exchanged ambassadors over the summer after nearly severing diplomatic ties in May. In addition, it highlighted the need to expand trade and opportunities for investment to promote bilateral exchanges and proposed a treaty that would do away with double taxation. The statement did not mention Cuba's debt to Mexico, some 480 million, although both delegations agreed to refer the issue to the appropriate government agencies

**September 25:** Forced by a freedom-of-information request, Mexico's government has released a report giving a sketchy outline of its reasons for a near-break in relations with Cuba earlier this year, a newspaper reported. The newspaper *El Universal*, which obtained the document, said that roughly a fourth of the material had been blacked out by censors on national security grounds, leaving several questions unanswered. It was produced by the government intelligence agency,

which operates under the interior minister. The document said that growing activism by Cuban officials in Mexican affairs led to the May 2 expulsion of Cuba's ambassador and the withdrawal of Mexico's ambassador to the island. The ambassadors later returned to their posts. (*AP*, 25/9/04)

**November 2:** The governor of the Mexican state of Coahuila, Enrique Martínez, has expressed interest in expanding relations with Cuba. The Mexican official is visiting the island and attending Havana's 22nd International Trade Fair that opened in the Cuban capital. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 2/11/04)

**November 7:** Mexican President Vicente Fox expressed opposition to the creation of the so-called Group of Friends of Cuba, as his country already is a friend of the Caribbean nation. In a press conference, with regards to the Brazilian initiative to establish a Group of Friends of Cuba, Fox rejected the idea on the grounds that Mexico and Cuba are already long-time friends. He added, however, that "democracy and human rights are essential to any society." (*NTX*, 8/11/04)

**November 11:** Mexican undersecretary for Latin America and the Caribbean, Miguel Hakim, confirmed the replacement of Ambassador Roberta Lajous from the Mexican Embassy in Havana with Melba Pría, who is awaiting authorization from Fidel Castro's government. (*Notimex*, 11/11/04)

**November 22:** A recent bilateral diplomatic spat now a thing of the past, Mexican President Vicente Fox declared that relations with Cuba are back to normal and that Cuban President Fidel Castro has been a leader of "great importance." Fox told the media that, "with Cuba, our relations are good. The ambassadors are back at their posts." (*AP*, 22/11/04)

**December 1:** Relations between Mexico and Cuba have improved and a positive atmosphere has set in after a diplomatic scuffle between the two governments last May, said Mexico's Ambassador to Cuba, Roberta Lajous. "(Relations) have improved ... and we are now looking into the future", said Lajous to the press. (*AP*, 1/12/04)

## Nicaragua

**May 4:** Nicaragua sent Cuba a note of protest over Fidel Castro's May Day speech in Havana. Nicaragua protested because Castro said a small unit of "Sandinista troops" had been sent to Iraq to serve under the US-led occupation. The reference to the left-wing Sandinista government, which was voted out of office in 1990, has rankled Nicaraguan officials. They say the troops have no party affiliation. Castro's statements have "nothing to do with the truth (and) constitute a complete falsification of reality," the Nicaraguan Foreign Ministry said. Castro should know that Nicaragua's military is nonpartisan, Foreign Minister Norman Caldera said, though many senior army officers are veterans of the 1979 Sandinista revolution. (*Reuters*, 4/5/04)

**July 20:** Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) has decorated Fidel Castro with the Order and Medal Always Towards the Light, Towards the Truth, 25 Years of Sandinista Revolution. The decision was announced to a crowd of some 400,000 Nicaraguans who participated in the main event on the Revolution's anniversary, held in Managua's John Paul II Square. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/7/04)

## Panama

[See also, Terrorism/ Posada Carriles case]

**August 22:** The Cuban government warned Panama that it will consider relations between the two countries "automatically broken" if that country's president, Mireya Moscoso, pardons the anti-Castro conspirators convicted in her country for planning an attack on Fidel Castro. An official communique from Havana said that "in the last few hours, talk of an imminent pardon has

been building in Panama and Miami." Moscoso is supposedly willing to grant such a pardon before her term ends on September 1 st. [For more on this, see Exile Community and Terrorism] (*EFE*, 22/8/04)

**August 23:** Panamanian president Mireya Moscoso denied that she had included the four Cuban exiles on the list of people she planned to pardon before leaving office on September 1, and ordered the immediate withdrawal of Panama's ambassador in Havana, Abraham Bárcenas. She said the decision came in response to "the disrespectful and intolerable statements" by Cuban officials "against the people and government of Panama." [For more on this, see Exile Community and Terrorism] (*IPS*, 23/8/04)

**August 23:** The Panamanian Attorney's General Office will investigate that country's Ambassador to Cuba for irregularities issuing visas to Cubans, according to official statements. Panamanian authorities are investigating several Cubans who obtained Panamanian visas with fake identities. (*AFP*, 23/8/04)

**August 24:** About 200 union representatives and student group members asked President Mireya Moscoso not to pardon four anti-Castro plotters convicted of preparing to assassinate the Cuban leader. Union and student leaders marched to protest the possible pardons and delivered to Presidential Vice Minister Adalberto Pinzon an open letter to Moscoso stating their opposition to setting "such dangerous criminals" free, according to the document. The protesters asked Moscoso to "redouble measures to prevent the abovementioned terrorists from escaping from the installations" where they are incarcerated. The 200 people participating in the march included members of the Independent Union Confederation (CONUSI), the National Construction Workers Union (SUNTRACS) and several student groups which had been plaintiffs in the case against the anti-Castro plotters. [For more on this, see Exile Community and Terrorism] (*EFE*, 24/8/04)

**August 24:** Panamanian president Mireya Moscoso told journalists that Cuba would have to "apologize" to the country for threatening to rupture bilateral ties over the matter. "I'm not going to tolerate it. It's unacceptable (...) Nobody threatens Panama," she said. The recall of Panama's ambassador from Cuba, and the Panamanian Foreign Ministry's decision to formally request the withdrawal of Havana's envoy in Panama City, have heightened tensions between the two countries. Foreign Minister Harmodio Arias met Cuban Ambassador Carlos Zamora and handed him a note ordering him to leave. [For more on this, see Exile Community and Terrorism] (*EFE*, *The Miami Herald*, 24/8/04)

**August 25:** Cuba reiterated its rejection of Panama's decision to eventually pardon four convicted terrorists, saying it would lead to breaking up bilateral diplomatic relations for an indefinite period. Ambassador Carlos Zamora will leave Panama for Cuba, the statement noted. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/8/04)

**August 25:** Cuba's ambassador to Panama, Carlos Zamora, left Panama City on a commercial flight to Havana after the Panamanian government demanded his withdrawal. Before boarding the flight at the Tocumen airport, Zamora had met with a group of union and student sympathizers at the Cuban diplomatic mission in Panama and read them a statement saying that Panama had "no proof allowing it to accuse the Cuban government of the smallest intervention in the internal affairs of Panama." (*EFE*, 25/8/04)

**August 26:** Cuba warned it will consider responsible of granting impunity and of collaborating with murderers those governments giving any form of protection to four anti-Cuban terrorists, if they are finally pardoned by Panama. The Cuban Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying that, "representatives of the Miami-based Mafia are negotiating with Central American countries so that the latter authorize the passage of terrorists through their territories, or give them shelter." The statement recalled how some Central American countries had become safe havens for terrorist operations for many years, by allowing Luis Posada Carriles and his accomplices to act in total impunity. (*Prensa Latina*, 26/8/04)

**August 26:** Cuba broke off relations with Panama in response to outgoing Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso's pardon of four Cuban-exile extremists accused of plotting to kill Fidel Castro. Cuba's reaction was swift, saying "as of this minute, 4:15 p.m., diplomatic relations between the Republic of Cuba and the Republic of Panama are broken for an indefinite time." "The president of Panama, accomplice and protector of terrorism, will carry the historic responsibility of this repugnant and treacherous action, and will also be responsible for the new crimes these assassins could commit in the future," the Cuban statement read. (*EFE, AP, The Globe and Mail, 26/8/04*)

**August 26:** Panamanian President-elect Martin Torrijos said that when he takes office on September 1 he will begin the process of reestablishing diplomatic relations with Cuba. In a communique, Torrijos said that "in accord with our intention to maintain respectful and cordial relations with all countries in the world, beginning on September 1 (we) will begin measures leading to the rapid normalization of diplomatic relations" with Havana. Torrijos said that it was "regrettable that President Mireya Moscoso and the Government and Justice minister have interrupted with a pardon the judicial process being applied to Luis Posada Carriles, Gaspar Jimenez, Pedro Remon and Guillermo Novo," the four convicted anti-Castro plotters. (*EFE, 26/8/04*)

**August 27:** Cuban dissident Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo considered the diplomatic crisis between his country and Panama, triggered by the pardon of four Cuban exiles convicted of plotting to kill Fidel Castro, a "transitory" situation. "I hope that very soon, relations will be re-established and improved," Gutiérrez Menoyo, a leading dissident who is in favour of dialogue with Cuba's socialist government, told the press. In his view, Moscoso was subject to pressure from the US to take a decision that perhaps "in her heart" she would have preferred to avoid. He said, however, that Moscoso's decision makes certain sectors of the Cuban exile community in the US "happy". "I believe this crisis is transitory" and that "very shortly, as soon as the new government begins to function, relations will improve," said Gutiérrez Menoyo. [For more on this, see Exile Community and Terrorism] (*IPS, 27/8/04*)

**August 30:** President Mireya Moscoso confirmed she spoke on the phone with former US Ambassador to Panama, Simon Ferro, to inform him she had pardoned four anti-Castro Cubans. "I called because he (Ferro) had called me asking whether or not I had pardoned the four Cubans," added Moscoso. (*EI*)

**August 31:** The Cuban government decided not to send representatives to the inauguration of Panamanian President-elect Martin Torrijos on September 1, after both countries broke diplomatic relations for an unlimited time, a new government statement says. (*Prensa Latina, 31/8/04*)

**September 1:** Martín Torrijos, the son of a former dictator, took office as Panama's president, promising better relations with Cuba. He criticized Moscoso for last week's pardon of four Cuban exiles who had been accused by the Cuban government of trying to kill Fidel Castro at a summit in Panama in 2000. "For me, there are not two classes of terrorism, one that is condemned and another that is pardoned (...) It has to be fought no matter what its origins," Torrijos said. Torrijos said he would seek to improve relations with both Cuba and Venezuela, which were angered by Moscoso's pardon of the Cuban exiles. Castro's government broke off relations, and Venezuela recalled its ambassador. (*AP, 1/9/04*)

**September 27:** Panama acknowledged that it will not be easy to restore relations with Cuba, which were broken in August after the Central American nation's outgoing president ordered that four imprisoned anti-Castro Cuban exiles be pardoned. Panamanian Foreign Minister Samuel Lewis Navarro said during a press conference that the process of restoring relations with Cuba was "not easy," but that the island had "smiled upon the steps Panama has taken" in that direction. He added that during the 59th United Nations General Assembly in New York, he had

spoken with his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Perez Roque, about the matter, saying that "now the ball is in (the Cuban government's) court." (*EFE*, 27/9/04)

**December 6:** Cuba opened its Panama consulate some three months after breaking off diplomatic relations with that country to protest the Mireya Moscoso government's pardoning of four Cubans previously convicted of plotting to assassinate Fidel Castro, the Panamanian Foreign Ministry said. Panama will reopen its consulate in Havana on December 13, the ministry added. (*EFE*, 6/12/04)

**December 13:** Panama reopened its consulate in Cuba, a measure President Martin Torrijos touted as a new step toward normalization of diplomatic relations with Havana, which were ruptured more than three months ago when the previous administration pardoned four Cuban-exile extremists. The Panamanian Foreign Ministry issued a statement announcing the reopening of the consulate in Havana with Roberto Barrow in charge. The move comes a week-and-a-half after Cuba reopened its consulate in Panama with Consul Iraida Guerrero at the helm. (*EFE*, 13/12/04)

## Paraguay

**February 23:** The Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Perez Roque, arrived in Asunción on an official visit to Paraguay to review bilateral relations. Perez Roque will hold talks with his Paraguayan counterpart, Leila Rashid. The Cuban minister will also meet with the leaders of the National Congress and the House of Deputies, as well as with senators and members of the Foreign Affairs commission. The guest will also hold talks with the Ministers of Health, Education, and the vice ministers of Culture and Youth. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/2/04)

**February 23:** Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Perez Roque, stated in Asunción, Paraguay, that the relations between Cuba and Latin America widened as part of the new situation in the region. The Cuban minister commented to reporters that Cuba's relations with the rest of the area are extending, with the exception of a few cases of governments "subordinated and accomplices to the US policy of aggression and blockade" against Cuba. In his opinion, the new regional dynamics that discredit of neoliberalism, and the appearance of new popular movements claiming for deep changes in the zone, are catalysts for the current situation. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/2/04)

**February 24:** Paraguayan President Nicanor Duarte is hosting Cuba's Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque on the second day of his visit to Paraguay, designed to improve bilateral relations and expand cooperation. Cuba and Paraguay have found common ground to strengthen trade relations. So far, there's been not much trade between the two countries due to distance and past political factors, Perez Roque said. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/2/04)

**June 12:** The government of Fidel Castro refuses to allow a Paraguayan woman and her six-month-old daughter to leave the island. The woman is married to a Cuban dissident—a doctor who defected while on a mission in Venezuela and moved to Paraguay, according to a complaint from the Paraguayan Foreign Ministry. In a letter addressed to foreign minister Leila Rachid, the victim, Nilda Graciela Oviedo Ozuna, urged the Paraguayan government to intervene. (*AFP*, 12/6/04)

**August 4:** Cuba sent 15 health specialists and medicines to Paraguay to treat the victims of the horrifying fire that killed more than 500 people in a shopping mall in the capital, Asuncion. Paraguay's ambassador in Cuba, Augusto Ocampo, said that a Cubana Airlines flight left Havana for Asuncion. Seeing the medical personnel off at the airport was Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and Cuba's ambassador to Paraguay, Irma Gonzalez. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 4/8/04)

## Peru

**May 2:** Peru withdrew its envoy to Havana after harsh criticism from Fidel Castro at a May Day speech. Castro lashed out at Lima, saying Peru was an example of the "wretchedness and dependency" left by neo-liberal economic policies. He slammed unpopular President Alejandro Toledo as a man who "does not and cannot direct anything." A Foreign Ministry statement in Lima said Peru rejected Castro's "offensive" comments and was downgrading its diplomatic representation to a business attache. "The Peruvian government energetically rejects offensive remarks made by the Cuban head of state with regard to Peru," the ministry said in a statement. It added that Castro's comment "will inevitably have consequences for bilateral relations." It is the second time Toledo's government has pulled out its envoy. (*Reuters, Europa Press, The Australian*, 3/5/04)

**May 17:** Peruvian chancellor Manuel Rodríguez explained his country's stance on human rights in Cuba to be a matter of principle, while he also questioned the US economic embargo against the island. "With regards to our ties to Cuba, which we value, this is a responsible vote. Besides, the content of the resolution is not condemnatory and should be interpreted in a context of cooperation," he said. (*Notimex*, 17/5/04)

**October 20:** Cuban teachers are working with Peruvian educational officials in the district of El Agostino, located on the outskirts of Lima, the Peruvian capital. The crusade to fight illiteracy in Peru is being supported by the Havana-based Latin American and Caribbean Pedagogical Institute (IPLAC). The initiative, expected to benefit some 5000 people who cannot read or write, was agreed upon by Cuban and Peruvian educators and recently ratified with the signing of an agreement. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 20/10/04)

## Rio Group

**August 20:** Latin American and Caribbean foreign ministers wound up a two-day meeting in Brasilia without an agreement on the best way to break Cuba's isolation from the rest of the region. The foreign ministers of the 19 countries that make up the Group of Rio began meeting to prepare the groundwork for the Group's presidential summit, which is scheduled for November in Rio de Janeiro. According to Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim, who said Brazil wanted Cuba to rejoin "the Latin American family," the ministers failed to reach a "consensus on how to begin a dialogue" to achieve this objective. The consensus was not reached because some ministers "consider this to be a very sensitive topic that requires consultations with their respective governments." "We cannot discuss Cuba in Cuba's absence," Amorim said. "What we did discuss was an eventual dialogue between the Group of Rio and Cuba." The initiative to establish this dialogue came from Brazil and has received the backing of Argentina and Peru, Amorim said. (*AP*, 21/8/04)

**August 23:** Mexico's Foreign Ministry announced that Mexico did not participate in the debate to include Cuba in the Rio Group—a proposal promoted by Brazil. Unofficial sources of the Ministry indicated that Brazil presented the proposal at the last minute and it was not very clear. (*El Universal*, 24/8/04)

**August 23:** Chile's Foreign Minister, Soledad Alvear, rejected in Santiago Brazilian newspapers reports saying it had opposed Brazil's proposal to include Cuba in the Rio Group. "During the meeting of the Rio Group, Brazil's Foreign Minister, Celso Amorim, suggested the possibility of beginning a dialogue with Cuba, which we as a nation support," Alvear said. (*El Universal*, 24/8/04)

**August 31:** Bombarded by criticism over his Rio Group proposal to help Cuba, Brazilian Foreign Affairs Minister Celso Amorim may have tactically retreated, but he remains confident in his strategy. He makes it clear that the initiative in no way entails forming "a Friends of Cuba Group" similar to the one formed for Venezuela, but rather it entails starting a dialogue. Cuba has friends, he says. The Cuban case, he Amorim says, is different from the Venezuelan. The idea there is to start a conversation, to pave the way for an international dialogue that could one day, who knows,

be instrumental in suspending the US blockade and in making progress in terms of human rights in Cuba. Amorim says: "At no time did I propose the creation of a Friends of Cuba Group. Someone fabricated that. What I am saying is that we ought to start a dialogue because the situation both in terms of the embargo and of human rights is bad for all countries. And there should be no preconditions for starting a dialogue. Otherwise, people will not come to the talks, he adds. (*O Globo*, 31/9/04)

**November 1:** Bringing Cuba closer to the Latin American community through dialogue befits the rationale behind the Río Group (G-Río), said a ranking Brazilian diplomat. Marcelo da Silva Vasconcelos, a G-Río coordinator with the Pro Tempore Secretariat told the media that Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim's proposal to allow Cuba to enter the mechanism, rejected for lack of quorum, was consistent with the Group's principles. Da Silva Vasconcelos denied that the initiative was aimed at an immediate Cuban inclusion in the G-Río, but rather at establishing mechanisms for dialogue. (*Notimex*, 1/11/04)

**November 5:** Celso Amorim, the Brazilian foreign minister, has defended a greater rapprochement of the Rio Group with Cuba and increased dialogue with the island. "Cuba must be attracted to a higher level of dialogue within the region. Some people would like to previously define the terms of that dialogue, but we believe that Cuba would prefer to have an integral part in talks," he noted. According to the foreign minister "that is the objective that Brazil will continue to pursue, although it will do so at the most appropriate time." (*Granma Internacional*, 5/11/04)

## Uruguay

**February 25:** Uruguay will not respond to Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, who accused President Jorge Batlle of being an agent of foreign powers". "It is not for us to comment on statements made by a country with which we broke diplomatic relations", said Uruguayan Foreign Minister, Didier Operti. (*AFP*, 25/2/04)

**February 26:** Uruguayan lawmaker Jaime Trobo has been accused by Cuban authorities of participating in a plan against the island's government coordinated by "terrorist organizations" based in the US, Spain and other nations. The accusation was made in Montevideo, by Cuban journalist and legislator Lázaro Barredo. Barredo revealed the actions of the politician, also member of the National Party and close supporter of former leader (1990-1995) Luis Alberto Lacalle. (*AIN*, 26/2/04)

**March 3:** Uruguay's lower house of Congress passed a resolution denouncing Cuba's intelligence services for listening in on telephone calls made from inside the congressional building. The resolution, which passed with 41 votes of 77 deputies present, expresses "the most severe condemnation" for all acts carried out on national territory or from another territory toward Uruguay aimed at violating the legislative body's rights. Nationalist lawmaker Jaime Trobo, who reported the case, said that a visiting member of the Cuban National Assembly, Lazaro Barredo, said on February 25 that Cuban intelligence had probed the origin and destination of phone calls and email messages sent by a Uruguayan deputy from Congress. [See *Chronicle on Cuba*, Foreign Affairs, February 2004] (*AFP*, 4/3/04)

**March 16:** According to Uruguayan legislator Jaime Trobo, his parliament denounced Cuban covert eavesdropping actions against him before the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. Trobo said that the Human Rights Commission of the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino) decided in Sao Paulo, Brazil, to move the venue for its next meeting to Santiago de Chile. (*Europa Press*, 16/3/04)

**July 21:** Uruguayan Foreign Minister Didier Operti said Cuba has not met the conditions, including accepting human rights inspections by the United Nations, to restore diplomatic relations. The foreign minister responded to statements by the South American nation's leading presidential candidates, who said they would restore relations with the island if they won the

October elections. "Diplomatic relations are neither established forever, nor broken forever," Operti said, adding that "if the conditions for re-establishing links with Cuba were present today, they would be restored today." To restore diplomatic relations with Cuba, "it would first be necessary" for Havana to allow the United Nations to "verify the situation of human rights" on the island, Operti said. (*EFE*, 21/7/04)

**October 19:** The Standing Committee of the Uruguayan Parliament was called to hear a presentation by National Representative Jaime Mario Trobo about the situation of political prisoners in Cuba. However, the presentation was cancelled after representatives and senators of the leftist "Frente Amplio" hurriedly left the room. (*ProCuba Libre*, 19/10/04)

**November 1:** Cuban mass media highlighted the victory of left-wing candidate by Encuentro Progresista-Frente Amplio-Nueva Mayoría (EP-FA-NM), Tabaré Vázquez, in Uruguay's presidential elections. "Granma" newspaper lead the news in its front page, with some reports from foreign agencies supporting Vázquez and his partner Rodolfo Nin with more than 51 percent of votes. The daily also announced a special TV program on elections in Uruguay and Venezuela, which elected governors and mayors with victory of the sectors supporting President Hugo Chavez. (*Prensa Latina*, 1/11/04)

**November 1:** Our people will warmly welcome the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Uruguay and Cuba, said Uruguayan Senator Reinaldo Gargano. We bade farewell to the Cuban ambassador with a feeling of sorrow, but after relations between the two countries are reestablished, we will welcome him with joy, in accordance with the friendship and affection Cubans inspire in us, added Gargano. In his condition of president of the International Relations Commission of the Uruguayan Parliament, Gargano refuted statements by the Uruguayan foreign minister about the reasons that led to breaking relations with Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 1/11/04)

**November 10:** Uruguay's President-Elect, Tabaré Vázquez, announced that his administration will re-establish diplomatic relations with Cuba, which were severed by outgoing the chief of State, Jorge Batlle, in April 2002. The president-elect stated this decision after a meeting with main leftwing Broad Front (FA) leaders, saying that the re-establishment of relations with Cuba will be on March 1, 2005, the date he will take power. (*Prensa Latina*, 10/11/04)

## Venezuela

[See also, Economy/ Foreign investments and trade/ Latin America, and Energy/ Oil and other resources; and US-Cuba Relations/ Diplomatic activities and statements/ Venezuela-Cuba relations]

**January 12:** In his intervention during the inauguration ceremony of the Summit of the Americas in Monterrey, Mexico, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez commended Fidel Castro's government for the health care and education assistance it provides Venezuela. (*AFP*, 12/1/04)

**January 14:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez made a surprise stop in Cuba to rest after an "exhausting" hemisphere-wide summit in Mexico and to review bilateral accords with Fidel Castro, Havana's Radio Reloj reported. The station said the two leaders and friends met for several hours during Chavez' stopover to discuss their nations' Cooperation Agreement, which includes allowing Cuba to purchase 55,000 barrels of Venezuelan crude a day under preferential terms. (*EFE*, 15/1/04)

**January 20:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez has appointed his brother as ambassador to Cuba, Venezuela's foreign minister said. Roy Chaderton said that Adán Chávez, the president's older brother and close confidant, would replace Julio Montes at the Venezuelan Embassy in Havana. Montes has been ambassador to Cuba since November 2000. (*AP*, 21/1/04)

**January 21:** Cuba said that the naming of the brother of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez as the new ambassador in Havana will further fortify bilateral relations. Cuban Foreign Minister

Felipe Perez Roque commented on the appointment of Adan Chavez to the key diplomatic post. Perez Roque said that Adan Chavez "is not only the brother of the president, but also a man who has worked hard throughout the years in the Bolivarian process (...) [and] knows our country." (EFE, 21/1/04)

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**January 29:** One hundred Venezuelan intellectuals signed an open letter addressed to Cuban Minister of Culture Abel Prieto, accusing Havana of "disseminating propaganda among Venezuelan writers, exalting the virtues of the Cuban regime." Prieto is currently attending the First Cuba-Venezuela Meeting of Writers, in Caracas. Personalities from a sector of the Venezuelan intelligentsia openly expressed their criticism of a conclave to which only pro-Chávez intellectuals were invited, excluding those who oppose him. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 29/1/04)

**January 29:** Venezuela's health minister accused opponents of President Hugo Chavez of trying to bribe Cuban doctors to defect from a health program at the center of a growing political alliance between Caracas and Havana. Roger Capella was responding to local media reports that a number of the more than 10,000 Cubans working in the "Inside the Barrio" program had left their posts and were seeking asylum in third countries. Left-winger Chavez has made the program, which brings primary health care to poor Venezuelan slum dwellers, the flagship of his cooperative ties with Fidel Castro. Although Venezuelan officials declined to confirm any defections, diplomatic sources said a number of Cuban doctors had deserted the joint project. (*Reuters*, 29/1/04)

**March 20:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez said that the new integrating model of Cuba and Venezuela "worries the oligarchies of the region". Speaking in a ceremony to bid farewell to the country's ambassadors to Cuba, Iran and India, the Venezuelan leader spoke thoroughly of the current relations of cooperation and friendship that exist between the two Caribbean nations. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 20/3/04)

**March 24:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez sent a new group of medical students to Cuba on Wednesday, urging them and other compatriots to forge ahead with his "revolution." The president noted that 50 graduates from the first class of Venezuelan medical students sent to Cuba - in 1999 - would be coming home in September to join the "Barrio Adentro" (Inside the Neighborhood) mission. An air shuttle linking Caracas and Havana has allowed thousands of Venezuelans to receive specialized medical treatment in Cuba under an agreement signed in 2000 in Caracas. (EFE, 24/3/04)

**March 28:** Referring to the changes implemented in Venezuela, Fidel Castro said that they are "highly transcendent" and, as in Cuba, they "aim for social justice." "The Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez is fighting a stale oligarchy that is using every old political trick in its bag to defeat him," said the Cuban ruler. (*DPA*, 28/3/04)

**March 30:** Cuban TV reported that Adán Chávez, Venezuelan president's brother, presented his credentials to Cuban authorities as Venezuelan ambassador to Havana. Cuban vice-president, Juan Almeida headed the ceremony at the Palace of the Revolution in Havana. (*EFE*, 30/3/04)

**April 8:** New Venezuelan Ambassador to Cuba Adan Chavez Frias said in Havana that his country is carrying out important social programs with good results with the support of the Cuban people and government. Adan Chavez refused to go into detail concerning the agreement under which Venezuela sells Cuba some 53,000 barrels of oil a day, but insisted "it is false that Venezuela is giving away oil to Cuba." The new ambassador mentioned the work being done by some 8,000 Cuban doctors in Venezuela's poorest regions, which he said is benefiting 8 million people. He also pointed out that some 9,000 Venezuelan students had received scholarships to study in Cuba, most of them in medicine. In addition, Chavez announced that Venezuela's Banco Exterior will open an office in Havana in June and noted that the value of goods and services traded between the two countries has risen to some \$1 billion a year. (*Prensa Latina*, *EFE*, 8/4/04)

**April 12:** Fidel Castro said the events that took place in Venezuela April 11 through 13, 2002, were sad, glorious, unforgettable and historic, *Granma* newspaper highlighted. The statesman also underlined how important the education and social programs now in progress in Venezuela are because, he said, people cannot be tricked by propaganda when they have acquired sufficient culture. In his wide-ranging discussion encompassing Venezuelan, Cuban, and international issues, the Cuban leader also discussed the US election campaign, in which candidates spend many millions of dollars in propaganda. He also stressed his recognition of the ethical behavior of the US people when they know the truth. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/4/04)

**May 5:** More than 1,000 Venezuelan doctors are slated to join "Barrio Adentro Mission" next month, replacing some of the Cuban physicians who currently provide health care in Venezuela's most impoverished areas, officials said. Under the program - unprecedented in Venezuela - the nation's poorest citizens receive outpatient-type treatment in their own homes. President Hugo Chavez has reported that the program, currently staffed by more than 10,000 Cuban doctors and aides, is benefiting 14 million people. (*EFE*, 5/5/04)

**May 9:** Venezuela's president has condemned the United States as a "terrorist state" for toughening sanctions against Cuba. Hugo Chavez vowed that his government would increase its trade and cooperation with the Communist island. "That's called state terrorism, inciting people to kill President Castro, to overthrow him, inciting violence," Chavez said. (*AlJazeera*, 9/5/04)

**May 9:** Heightening US concerns, President Hugo Chavez has posted dozens of Havana "advisers" to his intelligence services and key ministries, foreign diplomats and former Venezuelan government officials say. The deployments mark a significant expansion of Cuba's influence over security and government affairs in Venezuela, which already includes an estimated 10,000 Cuban doctors working in poor neighborhoods and scores of sports coaches. Former officials of the Chavez government said most of the dozens of Cuban advisers have been spotted at the following government agencies: Venezuela's main civilian intelligence agency, the Directorate of Intelligence and Preventive Investigations, known by its Spanish acronym, DISIP; the Department of Military Intelligence, or DIM; the Central Bank; the Interior Ministry, in overall charge of domestic affairs; and the immigration department known as DIEX. (*Monterrey County Herald*, 9/5/04)

**May 20:** A group of 69 Venezuelans suffering from various illnesses on Wednesday traveled to Cuba to receive free medical care provided by the communist regime. The group brings to 6,499

the number of Venezuelans who have gone to Cuba since 2001 for medical care. Authorities say that 20,752 more are waiting to go to be treated and will visit Cuba soon. Jhonny Romero, coordinator of the healthcare program, spoke with journalists about the plan, which was set up three years ago and is part of the Cooperation Agreement signed in 2000 by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and his Cuban counterpart, Fidel Castro. (*EFE*, 20/5/04)

**May 28:** Cuba issued a call to defend Venezuela, following US Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roger Noriega's "insolent and threatening declarations" against president Hugo Chávez's government. During a gathering in "solidarity" with Cuba at Guadalajara State University, Cuban chancellor Felipe Pérez Roque said that it was time to defend Bolívar's Venezuela. (*AFP*, 28/5/04)

**July 9:** Cuban and Venezuelan Culture Ministers exchanged views on cultural policies in both countries with participants at the 24th Caribbean "Fire Festival" in Santiago de Cuba. The Cuban minister of Culture, Abel Prieto, and his Venezuelan counterpart Francisco Sesto, together with Venezuelan Ambassador to Cuba, Adán Chávez, met with foreign and local scholars and artists. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/7/04)

**July 26:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez commended Cuban aid in helping his country develop educational and health care programs for the benefit of long-excluded social groups, Cuba's Granma newspaper published. Chavez acknowledged the Cuban medical staff's substantial cooperation, saying they have already assisted over 64 million cases for free in little more than a year, as part of the "Misión Barrio Adentro" (In the Neighborhood Mission), a campaign sponsored by the president himself. (*Prensa Latina*, 26/7/04)

**August 1:** Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez highlighted contributions by Cuban sports coaches working in his country, saying they have already won the people's hearts, according to Cuba's Juventud Rebelde daily. The newspaper said that during a speech to inaugurate the Misión Barrio Adentro Deportivo (Neighborhood Sports Mission), an enthusiastic Chavez told his Cuban guests: "You have been well rewarded with the endless love and the most sincere gratitude from the Venezuelan people." In the last weeks, over 5,057 Cuban sports coaches have arrived in Caracas. Addressing Havana's ambassador in Caracas, Germán Sánchez Otero, the Venezuelan leader said: "Give President Fidel Castro once more our most sincere thanks, and convey our praise to the Cuban people, government and Revolution." (*Prensa Latina*, *AFP*, 1/8/04)

**August 1:** Thousands of people filled the Paseo de los Próceres in downtown Caracas for the so called "Voices for Unity" concert that brought together artists from across the Caribbean. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez himself took to the stage as Cuban singer-songwriter Silvio Rodríguez, on his second visit to the country, began his performance. The Venezuelan president praised the presence of Silvio with what he called "his most powerful weapon: his guitar" and then joked that they would form a new duo called Silvio and Hugo before reciting a poem dedicated to the Liberator Simón Bolívar. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 2/8/04)

**August 2:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has voiced gratitude for the Cuban medical staff participating in the "Barrio Adentro" grassroots health care program, as well as to Fidel Castro's personal support to the successful endeavor. Addressing a rally at Caracas's Teresa Carreño Theater, Chavez added that the health care mission represents a turning point for a new model of integration, likely to spread throughout the Latin American and Caribbean countries. (*Prensa Latina*, 2/8/04)

**August 12:** Daily Cuban radio and TV program, The Round Table, focused on the latest developments in Venezuela in connection with the upcoming plebiscite. The Round Table panelists noted that the true battle of Chavez' Bolivarian Revolution has been against the government of the United States, which "has not ceased its brazen efforts to overthrow the constitutional order in Venezuela". The Round Table also made note of what it described as

"desperate, last minute actions by the oligarchic, wealthy opposition", such as a public rally they sponsored, which was countered by hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans who showed up before the government's Palacio de Miraflores headquarters in support of President Chávez. (AIN, 12/8/04).

**August 17:** Cuba has called the victory of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez "a historical lesson of true democracy and national sovereignty." A government statement published in daily Granma points out that Chávez has won electoral contests eight times in the past five years -- a fact that demonstrates the unquestionable legitimacy of the Venezuelan government. Cuba says that the results of the referendum constitute a victory for the Venezuelan people, many of whom have been traditionally deprived of their rights. And Havana strongly criticized the opposition to Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution for falsely accusing the National Electoral Council of fraud and refusing to accept the clear mandate of the people. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 17/8/04)

**September 1:** A group of 27 Cuban believers, including some evangelic leaders and Catholic laymen, traveled to Caracas, to attend the second meeting with Venezuelan counterparts. Raul Suarez, director of Havana-based Martin Luther King Center, told the press that the meeting's purpose is to reflect on biblical and theological unity, reconciliation, peace and justice. The gathering will also be an opportunity for exchanging views on the church's mistakes and reflect on revolutionary movements' flaws in their relation with religion. (*Prensa Latina*, 1/9/04)

**September 29:** The planes owned by state-run oil giant Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA) have made unusually frequent flights to Cuba. Cuban ministers, diplomats, relatives, and officials are frequent beneficiaries of the so-called "colitas". On several occasions the Cuban Vice President, Carlos Aurelio Lage Dávila, has arrived in Venezuela aboard a Falcon 50 airplane owned by Flight registers for PDVSA airplanes show that the aircrafts have frequently flown to the Caribbean island, carrying ministers, diplomats, political leaders, and relatives of top Venezuelan officials. (*El Universal*, 29/9/04)

**October 2:** More than 800 tonnes of construction materials, machinery and heavy equipment were sent to Cuba from Venezuela as donation in the wake of the damages caused by hurricanes Charley and Ivan on the island. The aid came aboard the "Los Llanos 64" vessel, which had been seen off the "La Guaira" port by Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez. (*AFP*, 2/10/04)

**October 2:** Fidel Castro has called for Latin American unity as a way for the region to defend itself and guarantee its independence. "If Europe has united after four or five centuries of fighting and speaking very different languages, what can the Latin American and Caribbean peoples do? Remain in pieces, in the midst of huge powers, in the midst of huge communities?" Castro asked. "Unite. And that is the idea of the process being carried out today by the Bolivarian people in the broadest and most modern sense of the word, and that is something that is humane, political and intelligent," Castro said as he received Venezuelan humanitarian aid that arrived in Cuba for victims of the recent hurricanes. (*EFE*, 2/10/04)

**October 7:** Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jesús Arnaldo Pérez announced in Havana that his country and Cuba are slated to sign cooperation agreements in the fight against drug trafficking. The Venezuelan official told the press that different projects have shown improvements, such as the granting of visas and the treatment of prisoners from both countries. He added that new agreements will be signed during a meeting between foreign ministries. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 8/10/04)

**October 9:** Venezuelan Foreign Minister, Jesús Arnaldo Pérez, concluded an official visit to the island after meeting with Fidel Castro. "We talked about the situation in our country, international issues, new cooperation projects, the *Milagros Mission*, the contributions of the Cuban government, people and doctors, and the progress of the Cuba-Venezuela cooperation agreement", said the diplomat. (*EFE*, 9/10/04)

**October 12:** The Cuban dentistry scheme is just one element of the deepening social, economic and political bilateral relationship between the governments of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez. More than 17,000 Cuban medics, plus thousands of literacy teachers, sports trainers and security advisers are operating in Venezuela, the largest overseas deployment of Cuban professionals since the country's Angola expedition in the 1970s. For the more paranoid opponents of Mr Chávez, such activities are alarming evidence that the militaristic populist is bent on imposing the Cuban communist revolutionary blueprint on democratic Venezuela. In contrast to the Cuban-backed insurgency that was quashed in the 1960s, today aircraft-loads of Cubans receive red-carpet treatment as they disembark at Caracas international airport at the presidential exit. The depth of the relationship is evident. Cuba's ambassador to Caracas, Germán Sánchez Otero, is dubbed "el vice-presidente" by other diplomats because of his political activism. (*Financial Times*, 12/10/04)

**November 8:** Fidel Castro appears to be recovering well after shattering his left kneecap and breaking his right arm in a fall last month, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said after visiting the Cuban leader. Cuban television showed Chavez talking with a relaxed-looking Castro, who was in a wheelchair and had his right arm in a sling. His left leg was elevated and appeared to be resting on a pillow. "We've spent some time soul-sharing," Chavez said after the meeting, which began Sunday evening and lasted through the night. He praised the 78-year-old Castro's "extraordinary" strength, health and "clarity." The meeting with Castro also included Vice President Carlos Lage, Central Bank President Francisco Soberon and Foreign Investment Minister Marta Lomas, Cuba's Communist Party youth newspaper reported. (*AP*, 8/11/04)

**November 30:** Some 7,623 Venezuelan patients have received treatment for free in 45 Cuban health care centers as part of the agreements signed by both nations in the sector. The health care project -that started four years ago- is benefiting patients with low income wages. Patients from 23 Venezuelan states have traveled to the island to receive the treatment they need. Pedro Llerena, coordinator of the project in Cuba, showed the press some statistics of the number of cases treated by Cuban specialists. The cases include nervous, ophthalmologic, osteomuscular and skin diseases. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/11/04)

**December 12:** The official visit Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez was to pay to Cuba has been delayed one day due to unexpected work reasons, the local press reported. The Venezuelan Head of State will carry out an official, friendly visit to Cuba on December 13, at an invitation by his Cuban counterpart Fidel Castro, according to Juventud Rebelde newspaper. (*EFE, Prensa Latina*, 12/12/04)

**December 13:** Fidel Castro welcomed his Venezuelan counterpart Hugo Chávez Frías at his arrival in Cuba on a friendly and official visit, the Granma newspaper reported. The Venezuelan president's trip comes 10 years after his first stay in Cuba, on December 13 and 14, 1994, the paper adds. Chavez' agenda includes an official welcoming ceremony at the Revolution Square where both governments' delegations will hold official talks. To mark the 10th anniversary of Chavez's first time in Cuba, a cultural gala will take place at Havana's Karl Marx Theater. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/12/04)

**December 15:** Cuba and Venezuela rejected a US-inspired pan-American free trade zone saying that it would only make Latin American countries more dependent on the United States. Cuba's communist leader Fidel Castro instead signed an accord backing a rival trade zone sponsored by his leftist-populist Venezuelan ally, President Hugo Chavez. Cuba has been excluded from talks for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which the United States has strongly promoted. Venezuela has refused to join the process. The FTAA "is the most complete expression of the desire for domination over the region and, if it comes into action, will constitute a deepening of neo-liberalism, creating unprecedented levels of dependence and subordination," Castro and Chavez said in a statement. (*AFP*, 15/12/04)

## OCEANIA

### Fiji

**April 3:** Fiji hopes to establish human resource and sports capacity development through its bilateral relations with Cuba. These are among key areas to be pursued as Fiji's Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) and the country's first Ambassador to Cuba, Colonel Isikia Savua. Mr Savua was in Havana recently and presented his diplomatic credentials. Mr Savua said he would also pursue relations in trade, sugar, tourism and technical cooperation. (*BBC*, 3/4/04)

## ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS)

**March 12:** The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) expressed its concern about the deterioration of the rule of law in some countries of the region, including Cuba. At the end of the Commission's 119th regular session, José Zalaquett, president of the IACHR referred specifically to the situation in five countries: Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Haiti and Venezuela: "The grave human rights situation in Cuba has not changed, according to information received by the IACHR, due to the general violation of public liberties, particularly the right to freedom of expression, and due to the systematic repression of dissidents and independent journalists. The Commission will continue to study the general human rights situation in that country, not only in its general reports, but also as it considers individual cases and petitions, and issues precautionary measures", Zalaquett said. (*IACHR Press Release*, 12/3/04)

## ORTHODOX CHURCH

### Greek Orthodox Church

**January 21:** Fidel Castro received the leader of the world's estimated 300 million Orthodox Christians, Patriarch Bartholomew I, upon his arrival in the Cuban capital. Bartholomew I is making his first trip to Latin America to this country, which for decades was officially atheist, to consecrate a tiny cathedral for a faith representing fewer than one in 5,000 of the island's residents. The many flashbulbs going off as journalists took pictures of the two men spurred Castro to remark jokingly, "It looks like the bombing of Baghdad." Neither Castro nor the patriarch made any official statement at the airport and from there they rode in the same car to the Palace of the Revolution, where an official welcoming ceremony had been scheduled. (*EFE*, 21/1/04)

**January 22:** Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I toured the new Byzantine cathedral that he will consecrate on Sunday, the purpose of his first visit to Latin America. Accompanied by City Historian Eusebio Leal, the spiritual leader of the world's 300 million Orthodox Christians walked through the small sanctuary and later stopped outside to look at an Eastern-style mosaic of himself and Fidel Castro plastered on the side of the church. "I'm very grateful for the construction of the temple of St. Nicholas," said Bartholomew. The religious leader was attending a concert of Greek music. (*AP*, 22/1/04)

**January 23:** Cuban dissidents have expressed their hope that the visit by Patriarch Bartholomew, leader of Orthodox Christians around the world, will occasion the release of dissident prisoners. It is often during such visits that Castro does make such gestures. They are usually politically motivated. Indeed, during the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1998, 200 prisoners were released, an event that marked a period of relative political liberalisation on the island and brought about improved relations with EU states, amongst others. (*WMRC*, 23/1/04)

**January 23:** The Ecumenic Patriarch Bartholomew I met with Roman Catholic Cardinal Jaime Ortega, archbishop of Havana, and other Latin American and US religious leaders. The meeting

between Bartholomew, who is the spiritual head of some 300 million Orthodox Christians, and the head of the Catholic Church in Cuba was "very cordial," according to the Orthodox prelate's spokesman, Benjamin Leavenworth. Bartholomew is the leader of Greek Orthodox Christians and is considered "first among equals" of 14 patriarchs representing Orthodox Christian congregations in eastern Europe and the Middle East. Local Orthodox clergymen as well as from other religious groups also took part in the meeting between Bartholomew and Ortega at the Rivera Hotel. (*EFE*, 23/1/04)

**January 23:** Bartholomew I, Fidel Castro, and 23 others dined at Havana's posh landmark Hotel Nacional, said Benjamin Leavenworth, spokesman for the Orthodox patriarch. "It was an extremely successful dinner," he told the press, without elaborating.

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

**January 25:** The spiritual leader of 140 million Orthodox Christians called the US embargo of Cuba a "historical mistake". Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I expressed the view during his sermon at the new Orthodox Church in Havana. The Orthodox leader said: "The blockading of peoples and countries by society in general from other nations on earth is a historical mistake." "And the problems between nations and countries, like those between people, are resolved through dialogue." In the four-hour ceremony filled with centuries-old pageantry, the head of Greek Orthodoxy also consecrated the tiny limestone Cathedral of Saint Nicholas. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, in turn honoured Mr Castro with his church's Cross of St Andrew the Apostle, which is given to supporters of the Orthodox faith. Former Greek King Constantine and his family attended the consecration, along with wealthy Greek American businessmen and hundreds of Orthodox Christians who travelled to Cuba for the event from the United States and Greece. There are only a handful of Orthodox Christians living in Cuba, and most are Russians. Fewer than 50 Greek Orthodox followers call the island their home. (*Aljazeera.Net, AP*, 25/1/04)

**January 26:** The Ecumenical Patriarch His Holiness Bartholomew I, leader of over 300 million Orthodox Christians from all over the world, concluded his six-day visit to Cuba. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 26/1/04)

**January 28:** A formal invitation will be extended to Fidel Castro to visit Mt. Athos, by Ecumenical Patriarch Vartholomeos, in his letter thanking him for the warm welcome during his historic visit to Cuba, which opened up new horizons for Orthodoxy and Hellenism, both in this island country of the Caribbean, and throughout the American continent. In a discussion with the press shortly before the landing of the "Olympic Airways" flight in Istanbul, the Ecumenical Patriarch mentioned the unexpectedly warm welcome he received from the Cuban government and Fidel Castro, as well as the pressures of the US. (*Macedonian Press Agency*, 28/1/04)

**February 20:** Contrary to widely circulated reports, His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew did not confer the Order of St. Andrew upon Fidel Castro, nor did he present him with the Cross of St. Andrew. According to Dr. Anthony J. Limberakis, National Commander of

the Order of St. Andrew, who accompanied the Patriarch on his recently concluded historic trip to Cuba, "His All Holiness gave to the Cuban leader a simple cross bearing the seal of the Patriarchate, as an expression of gratitude to the people of Cuba for the return and reconstruction of St. Nicholas Cathedral in Havana." "Fidel Castro, despite his government's recent act of generosity to our Orthodox Church, does not espouse the Christian faith, and was never considered for this high honor," Limberakis added. (*Archon Aktouarios & National Commander*, 20/2/04)

## Russian Orthodox Church

**January 30:** The Russian Orthodox Church harshly criticized the visit to Cuba by Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. "The Patriarch of Constantinople has no more than 50 followers" in Cuba, yet Bartholomew I "has been able to open a church in the middle of Havana," said the Russian Orthodox hierarchy in a press release. They added that the Cuban authorities, however, "have not allowed the Moscow Patriarchs a single church, not one room, leaving them no choice but to hold service at the offices of the Russian Commercial Mission. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 2/2/04)

**March 29:** A house of prayer of the Russian Orthodox Church will appear in Havana. "We hope construction will start even within the year," says Archpriest Nicholas Balashov, Secretary for contacts between Orthodox Christian communities at the Moscow Patriarchate Department of External Church Relations, Father Nicholas has just come back to Moscow from a trip to Havana. There are many Russian nationals in Cuba, and it is high time to build a Russian Orthodox church for them. It has to be a big place as a congregation of up to three hundred gathers for festive liturgies in Havana. Meanwhile, the Russian trade representation has to host those liturgies in its hall. That has been so since 2001. (*Novosti*, 29/3/04)

**November 2:** A Russian Orthodox church will be built in the center of Havana and its groundbreaking ceremony should be held in mid November, the Foreign Church Relations Department (OVCS) of the Moscow Patriarchate said. Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexy II and Eusebio Leal, a deputy of Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power (parliament) and a well-known historian, discussed the construction at St. Daniel's Monastery in Moscow. "On behalf of head of the Cuban state Fidel Castro, Professor Leal presented the Holiest Patriarch church project," the OVCS said. The project was developed at Mr. Leal's architecture office and is based on Moscow architect Vorontsov's drafts. The project includes housing for clergymen and areas for parish work. (*Novosti*, 2/11/04)

**November 14:** Fidel Castro met with Metropolitan Kiril, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church's foreign relations, who laid the first stone for the construction of a Russian orthodox church in the island. During his stay in Cuba the metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad officiated a religious service at Saint Francis of Assisi's Minor Basilica, in Old Havana, as well as met with Caridad Diego, chief of the Religious Affairs Office at the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, and Havana's historian Eusebio Leal. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/11/04)

## THE VATICAN

**March 30:** Pope John Paul II named Italian Archbishop Luigi Bonazzi papal nuncio to Cuba, the Vatican said. The 56-year-old Italian prelate had been the papal nuncio in Haiti until now. (*EFE*, 30/3/04)

**May 17:** Upon arrival to the Cathedral of Havana, newly appointed papal nuncio Luigi Bonazzi received a welcoming ovation from Cuban clerics and churchgoers, prior to officiating mass. Bonazzi, former Vatican Envoy to Haiti, entered the building, prayed to Jesus Christ, and presided over the Eucharist. 300 people were in attendance at the ceremony, during which the nuncio communicated John Paul II's blessings for the country. (*AP*, 18/5/04)

**October 21:** The Papal Nuncio in Havana, Luigi Bonazzi, wished Fidel Castro a speedy recovery from the two fractures he suffered as a result of a fall. "We wish Fidel Castro a speedy recovery and express to him our regards", said the Vatican representative. The statement was made in the presence of Cuban Cardinal Jaime Ortega, dignitaries of the Catholic Church, members of the diplomatic corps and officials from the Religious Affairs Section of Cuba's Communist Party (PCC). (*AFP*, 21/10/04)

**December 23:** The Council of State of the Republic of Cuba has appointed Raul Roa Kouri as its new ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary to the Holy See, according to an official note. Before his appointment, Roa Kouri was chairman of the Cuban National Commission for the UN Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO). Cuba and the Vatican City established diplomatic relations on June 7, 1935. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/12/04)