

Cuba Update - March, 2008

Suggestions and comments are welcomed. Contact atwhit@roadrunner.com, or call 207 743-2183.

IN THIS ISSUE:

News: State Department on Cuba, Response from Ireland
Miami – Cuba, Money, and Paradox
UN, Cuba fight terrorism
Cuban Five before UN Human Rights Council
Cubans abroad gather in Havana, honor U.S. solidarity group,
Cuba Signs UN Treaties
Literacy program achieves milestone
U.S. blocks Internet Access

Action Alert

Documents, Letter from Antonio Guerrero, Open letters to Secretary of State and Attorney General

Opinion, Andres Gomez on Cuban Five

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NEWS

State Department on Cuba, Response from Ireland

On March 18, the U.S. Department of State issued a statement:

“Five years ago today, the Cuban government began a week-long roundup of human rights advocates, independent librarians and journalists, and other Cuban citizens seeking peaceful, democratic change. Known as the Black Spring, 75 of these individuals were arrested, subjected to show trials, and sentenced to prison terms ranging from 14 to 30 years We join Vaclav Havel, the former President of the Czech Republic, and other voices in calling for the immediate, unconditional release of the victims of the Black Spring and all prisoners of conscience in Cuba. “

“What is this ‘Black Spring’ all about?” asks Simon McGuinness from Ireland. He writes:

“The name, like the narrative that goes with it, is mere fiction. March 2003 certainly was a "Black Spring" for the US intelligence services. Until then, the USA thought it had a good network of agents in Cuba ... until agent No.1, Nester Baguer, contracted terminal cancer. A carefully laid trap had to be sprung, prematurely. For Nester Baguer, far from the USA's No.1 agent in Cuba, was actually working for the Cuban Government. Nester, code name Agent Octavio, barely lived long enough to see the evidence he had carefully collected used to convict 75 of the 90 people arrested in the sting operation. All 75 were convicted in a constitutional court of breaking the laws of Cuba, laws written by the legitimate government of Cuba and enacted by the elected parliament of that country. The documents spoke loudly of the mercenaries' guilt including signed receipts for payments from the US government. Unsurprisingly, the mercenaries were mostly found guilty as charged.” .

The U.K. Guardian newspaper adds this: “The writers were convicted under laws brought in after the Helms-Burton law in the US was passed in 1996. This gives millions of dollars (this year \$45m) to groups that foster opposition in Cuba. This money goes to pay people to write hostile stories that are then posted on websites sited in the US.”

Miami – Cuba, Money, and Paradox,

Two South Florida Republican members of Congress, the brothers Lincoln and Mario Diaz-Balart, face significant challenges in elections this year from Democratic opponents, also Cuban American, who not only oppose the rightwing legislators' stands on the Iraq war, tax cuts for the rich, and health care access for children but also favor relaxation of Bush restrictions on family visits to relatives in Cuba. Former Hialeah mayor Raul Martinez, who is seeking Lincoln Diaz-Balart's seat and Joe Garcia, intent upon deposing his brother, are emblematic of a generation of late arriving Cuban Americans less ideological than earlier emigrants opposed tooth and nail to easing of the blockade.

The Diaz-Balart brothers, archetypal Miami-based counter-revolutionaries, carry on struggles their father Rafael once pursued in concert with dictator Batista. And Democratic Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz takes their side, even though back in Washington she is charged with helping build her party's House majority. She and fellow Florida Democratic Congressman Kendrick Meek are hands off the candidacies of Martinez and Garcia. Such is the continuing sway of rightist Cuban American orthodoxy.

In fact, Wasserman Schultz was instrumental last August in defeating legislation put forth by Rep. Charles Rangel, expected to pass, that would have simplified

payment methods for U.S. food exports to Cuba. Reportedly she promoted distribution of money to fellow Democrats from the Republican oriented U.S. Cuba Democracy PAC. It turned out that 58 of the 66 Democrats voting to defeat Rangel's amendment, one quite advantageous to U.S. agribusiness, had received contributions from the PAC ranging from \$1000 to \$11,000, Wasserman Schultz herself taking in \$22,000

UN, Cuba fight terrorism

The UN Security Council unanimously accepted a General Assembly recommendation on March 20 to create a working group aimed at aiding member states take measures against terrorism, particularly by providing "technical assistance." The Security Council stipulated that actions taken against terrorism should conform to international law and protections for human rights.

The day before, Cuban Ambassador Rodrigo Malmierca Diaz and Deputy Venezuelan Ambassador Aura Rodriguez de Ortiz joined in rapping the U.S. government for failing to prosecute Luis Posada or extradite him to Venezuela. Malmierca Diaz claimed "There is no doubt today that the true intention was to prevent the details of his criminal actions under CIA orders from becoming public." Rodriguez de Ortiz insisted that Washington is bound not only by a 1922 extradition treaty with Venezuela but also by international treaties on aviation safety and terrorist bombings.

U.S. diplomat Carolyn Willson countered that her government has taken actions on Posada "consistent with international law as well as our domestic legal framework, which provides for due process and various constitutional safeguards."

Declassified U.S. intelligence documents reveal that Posada helped engineer the bombing of a Cuban airliner off Barbados in 1976 that killed 73 people. Included in a lifetime of murder and mayhem directed against Cuba are bomb attacks on hotels in Havana in 1997, admitted by Posada in conversations with a New York Times reporter. Posada, a citizen of Cuba and Venezuela, arrived without legal documents in Florida in 2005, was eventually detained on immigration charges, and finally was released by a U.S. judge in May, 2007. He and fellow anti Cuban terrorist Orlando Bosch are presently residents of Miami.

Rodrigo Malmierca Diaz reminded the Security Council that Cuba had previously provided the United Nations with detailed information on terrorist attacks against Cuba by individuals and organizations based in the United States. He condemned the unjust imprisonment by the United States of Five Cuban men intent upon defending Cuba against terrorism.

Cuban Five before UN Human Rights Council

At a meeting March 11 in Geneva of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention of the UN Human Rights Council, Olga Salenueva read a statement signed by Five Cuban men unjustly imprisoned in U.S. Jails, of which her husband Rene is one. The Cuban Five noted, and president of the Working Group Leila Zerrougi recalled, that In May, 2005, the Working Group had judged their imprisonment to be arbitrary, cruel, and illegal, the result of a flawed trial in Miami.

They pointed out in their message that "All the ploys against us, enacted in a media circus atmosphere, have sought to protect the terrorists that motivated our presence in the United States." Three years after the Working Group decision, "the farce continues," they asserted.

"The most dangerous terrorists of the Western Hemisphere walk free on the streets of Miami and receive protection while our children become teenagers or adults far from the warmth of their fathers," stated the Five. Olga Salenueva was joined in Geneva by Adriana Perez, wife of Gerardo Hernandez, another of the prisoners. Over the course of several days the two Cuban women held meetings with human rights groups based in Geneva.

Cubans abroad gather in Havana, honor U.S. solidarity group.

Joined by Cuban Minister of Culture Abel Prieto, Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque welcomed Cubans living abroad "who have an unshakeable commitment to the defense of their homeland" to a three-day meeting in Havana . Aimed at "Cubans Resident Abroad [who are] against the Blockade and Terrorism," the gathering ended on March 21.

Pérez Roque paid particular tribute to the Miami based Antonio Maceo Brigade on the thirtieth anniversary of its founding. He suggested that the Brigade "was the seed and inspiration for other organizations of compatriots that ...have sprung up over these years of hard struggle," existing now in 40 countries. He paid homage to Brigade members killed or injured by terrorist violence.

Andres Gomez, a Brigade founder, emphasized the group's collaboration aimed at freedom for the Cuban Five and at "defending Cuban sovereignty in North America." Discussions attended by 129 Cubans from 34 countries centered on topics relating to Cuban culture and national identity.

The Cuban Foreign Ministry, which organized the conference, reported that 800,000 Cubans living abroad have contacted Cuban consulates, of which almost 400,000 have "normalized" their status - 314,000 permanent émigrés and 82,000 temporary foreign residents. In 2007, almost 193,000 Cuban foreign residents returned to Cuba for visits, a new yearly high.

The Ministry presented a new website - www.nacionyemigracion.cu - and a re-designed magazine - Correo de Cuba – offering consular news and other

information. Expectations were high among attendees that slow, costly, and restrictive procedures the government imposes on foreign travel would soon be modified.

Concluding, the meeting issued demands: lift the “cruel and inhumane” U.S. blockade, eliminate restrictions on Cuban Americans visiting the island, stop terrorist actions organized within the United States against Cuba, free “our five brothers, unjustly held in U.S. jails,” and, to the European Union, end anti-Cuban sanctions.

Cuba Signs UN Treaties

Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque announced at a Feb. 28 press conference at UN headquarters in New York that he had just signed two human rights accords originally introduced in the world body in 1976. Until now Cuba has been criticized for failing to sign these treaties.

Perez Roque indicated that Cuba was motivated by a UN decision in 2006 to replace its widely criticized Commission on Human Rights with a refurbished Human Rights Council. He accused the former agency of subjecting Cuba to U.S. “pressure and blackmail.”

Under the new circumstances, Cuba has agreed to allow the UN Rapporteur on Human Rights to visit Cuba for monitoring purposes, with the first visit expected in 2009. Perez Roque assured reporters that Cuba signed both treaties — the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights — as a “sovereign decision.” He pointed out that “Cuba has never and will never act under any pressures.”

Literacy program achieves milestone

Speaking to reporters, Cuban Minister of Education Luis Ignacio Gomez indicated that as of March 13 three million people worldwide have learned to read and write through the Cuban method of literacy training known as Yo sí puedo (“Yes I can”). Based on associations between letters and numbers, 14 versions of the program have been utilized in 28 countries for presentations over radio, television, and video. For implementation, Cuba has provided materials and 700 advisors at no charge. The report on aporrea.org cited testimony from Presidents Chavez, Correa, and Ortega as the crucial role of literacy in propelling social change.

U.S. blocks Internet Access

British travel agent Steven Marshall discovered last October that his 80 Cuba travel websites had disappeared. Now it seems that, responding to a Treasury Department blacklist, U.S. based eNom Corporation, a registrar of domains

carrying the “.com” suffix, had inactivated 557 companies and 3,719 domains, all Cuba related. Marshall lost business before transferring web sites to European registrars. Yale law professor Susan Crawford complained to the New York Times this week that the U.S. government is legally authorized to manipulate registrars situated in the United States, thereby controlling “a great deal of speech — none of which may be actually hosted in the U.S.” Cuba’s Juventud Rebelde newspaper saw “new aggression against the island.”

What’s to be Done

- Expected anytime is an announcement by 11th circuit Court of Appeals, full bench, of its decision in most recent appeal in the case of the Cuban Five. That’s the time, right off, no matter what the decision is, to demonstrate, make phone calls, occupy offices, and get out petitions.
- Conference on Cuban Five is being planned for East Coast activists set for New York, June 13-14. Workshops, plenary sessions, and UN reception are expected. Details to follow.
- Recruit for or participate in summer challenge trips. They are Pastors for Peace Friendshipment Caravan and Venceremos Brigade.

37th Venceremos Brigade travels June 29th-July 14th 2008. For information, contact the brigade at: vbrigade@gmail.com, or phone at Phone: (212) 560-4360, or Venceremos Brigade, PO Box 5202. , Englewood, NJ 07631-5202.

19th Friendshipment travels June 14-28 -Educational presentations, aid collection, US and Canada; June 29 – July, Participant orientation in Texas; July 3-4, Border crossing and travel to Tampico, Mexico; July 5-12, Travel to Cuba, program in Cuba; July 13-14, Tampico to border crossing. For information, contact: IFCO/Pastors for Peace, 418 W. 145th St., New York, NY 10031, or Phone: 212-926-575, or Email: cucaravan@igc.org

- Prepare for summer picnic, fiesta, or big time party to mark July 26, birthday of the Cuban revolution.
- Obtain signatures for open letters, one to free the five prisoners, the other on behalf of Olga Salenueva and Adriana Perez’s right to visit their husbands in jail, a right denied for almost ten years. Letters can be found below, under “Documents.”
- Distribute and obtain signature for petitions on freedom for the Five and for family visiting rights. Possible petitions may be found under “Documents.”
- Mount educational programs on Cuba. Films are available. Call Tom at (207) 743-2183 or Email at atwhit@roadrunner.com for loan. Partial listing:

Mountain of Light, Cuban doctors abroad, 90 minutes, *Salud!* Cuban and Global Health 2007 93 minutes,

Sicko, Michael Moore, Cuban health care, *In the Foothills of the Himalayas*, Pakistan earthquake 32 min.

The Trial – the Untold Story, 60 minutes, *Mission against Terror*, 48 minutes, both on Cuban Five

The Silent Invasion: Posada Carriles, Terrorism made in the United States, 90 minutes

The Cuban Five, Noam Chomsky, Geoff Bottoms, Bernie Dwyer, speaking at MIT, 2007

Commandante, Oliver Stone, 2002, *Fidel* - Estella Bravo 2001 90 minutes

Cuba – the Accidental revolution, on Cuban agriculture

The Power of Community – How Cuba survived Peak Oil one hour

Bloqueo, “Looking at U.S. Embargo against Cuba, Friendshipment 2002

El Che – Investigating a legend 90 minutes

- Write to the Cuban Five. Express solidarity and support. Their addresses are:

To write to Fernando Gonzalez please address the envelope as follows:

Rubén Campa, No. 58733-004, FCI Terre Haute, P.O. BOX 33, Terre Haute, IN 47808

Gerardo Hernandez, NO. 58739-00, USP Victorville, PO BOX 5500, Adelanto, CA, 92301

Antonio Guerrero Rodríguez, No. 58741-004, USP Florence, PO BOX 7000, Florence, CO 81226

To write to Ramón Labañino address the envelope as follows:

Luis Medina, #58734-004, U.S.P. Beaumont, P.O. Box 26030, Beaumont TX 77720-6035

Rene Gonzalez Schwerert, No. 58738-004, FCI Marianna, P.O.Box 7007, Marianna, FL 32447-7007

Documents

Letter from Antonio Guerrero

Letter of Dec. 07

Dear friends in the CPUSA,

Thank you for your words full of encouragement and brotherhood. The year 2007 is coming to its end and in one way or another we all make an appraisal of our achievements and failures, as well as, of our joys and sorrows in these 12 months. We know that time is relative, but we cannot avoid to measure it and within it to trace new goals, our near and far away dreams. There is something that clearly comes to view in our evaluation of this year: it is the incessant growing of the solidarity with our struggle for justice and freedom. Of course, we know that still we have much to do in order to reach the truth to all corners and with it to open the door to justice, but we can count on the tenacity that each one of our friends has demonstrated, on your indestructible attachment to reason and honesty and on your immense love to Cuban people and its Revolution. Most of the time my answer to

your letter comes with delay because I have so many commitments and I am involved in various projects, but you should know that you are and will be forever in the hearts of the Five.

Happy New Year 2008! We wish you health, peace, and love. And strong embrace from the Five. Hasta la Victoria Siempre!

Antonio Guerrero R.

Antonio also writes in a separate note

Greetings to our comrades in the CPUSA
I am sorry it has taken me so long to answer you, but I should say that you are constantly in our thoughts, in our actions, in our hearts.

It is very encouraging to see all the progress in the international campaign for our freedom. One of the examples is the recently unveiled Free the Five Billboard in Los Angeles. This year will give us new victories in the struggle for a better world of justice, solidarity, and peace.

With eternal appreciation and admiration I send you a strong embrace from the 5.

Very best wishes, Venceremos!

Antonio Guerrero R.

Letter to Secretary of State on visits

U.S. Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520
202-647-4000

Dear Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice:

I respectfully request that you grant temporary visitation visas to entry into the United States to the following persons who are Cuban citizens and live in Cuba, in order to be able to visit their husbands, currently incarcerated in U.S. prisons:

Adriana Pérez O'Connor, wife of Gerardo Hernández, reg. #58739-004, who is currently in USP Victorville, California.

Olga Salanueva Arango, wife of René González, reg. #58738-004, who is currently in FCI Marianna, Florida.

The two women should be able to visit their husbands on humanitarian grounds. People in the United States, as well as around the world, are aware of their situation. Their case is under appeal, and there is no justifiable reason to deny these families the right to visitation. Gerardo Hernandez has not seen his wife in 9 years and Rene Gonzalez has not seen his in 7 years.

I hope you will review this matter favorably and grant entry visas into the United States

Sincerely,

Letter to Attorney General on Cuban Five

U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Michael B. Mukasey

I am writing to you regarding the unjust incarceration of five Cuban citizens — Gerardo Hernández Nordelo, René González Schweret, Ramón Labañino Salazar, Antonio Guerrero Rodríguez and Fernando González Llort. They were arrested in 1998 and tried in Miami. These five men did not violate any U.S. Laws; *(They did of course violate some laws.)* their mission was to infiltrate and monitor the activities of violent groups of Cuban exile in order to report their planned threats back to Cuba. The information gathered by these men regarding acts of terrorism against Cuba being planned by these groups was given to the FBI right before their detention. But instead of arresting those who were planning violent acts against Cuba, the FBI arrested these five Cuban men.

On August 2005, the 11th Circuit three-judge panel unanimously overturned all the Five's convictions and ordered a new trial. But after former US Attorney General Alberto Gonzales' direct intervention on the government's behalf, the 11th Circuit full panel set aside the 3-judge panel opinion and confirmed the Five's Convictions.

Their prison sentences have already been declared illegal by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions of the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations. For almost ten years these five men have been held in maximum security prisons; they have been held incommunicado in isolated cells for long periods of time and two of them have been denied the right to receive the visit of their wives.

Again, and for the third time, on August 20, 2007, oral arguments took place in the Atlanta 11th Circuit Court of Appeals. This has been a very long process and in the mean time, children are growing without their parents, wives without their husbands and mothers without their sons. More and more people around the world and here in the United States are becoming aware of this case and are supporting their release.

I sincerely hope that you, as the new US attorney general, immediately intervene and release the Cuban Five, to end this injustice and restore our faith in the judicial system of our country. We need to believe that the fight against terrorism means just that and not incarcerating those who fight

against it. These five Cuban men must go back to their families and continue to be productive members of society.

Sincerely,

Opinion

What's happening with the Five?

(Andres Gomes, head of the Antonio Maceo Brigade of Miami and editor of the internet publication Areítodigital, recently examined the prisoners' situation in an article appearing in Cubadebate. Excerpts follow below. WTW translated.)

Many people ask me, what's happening with the Five. And we have to be worried because with the Five what's happening has been the objective of the federal government from the beginning – an interminable appeals process.

The Appeals Court panel at the hearing in August 2007 (the third such hearing spaced over four years) asked the prosecutors to provide the court with access to potentially exculpatory documents never seen by the defense. They were finally delivered only in December 2007.

Questions arising from perusal of this material might entail yet another hearing. Whatever happens in this tangled process is nothing more or less than a judicial sham. How can one not think otherwise when in the midst of a worldwide campaign against terrorism directed by this country's government, the federal government prosecutes with false accusations and applies "hard time" to five men whose work was to find out about plans terrorists of the extreme Cuban right forged right here in Miami, and by contrast guaranteed liberty for those terrorists guilty of horrible crimes, as all of us in this city know.

We've said it before that this merciless rage is directed not only at the Five, but is another cruel manifestation of the policy of permanent aggression maintained against the Cuban people. Our watchword is: We don't slacken in our commitment until we see them free.