

CUBA – EUROPE DIALOGUES

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QUARTERLY BULLETIN ON RELATIONS BETWEEN CUBANS AND EUROPEANS

CUBA TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

Obama and Cuba

PHILIP PETERS

7

Difficult Times in Cuba

OSCAR ESPINOSA CHEPE

2

Editorial

SCOTT HUDSON

3

Threats and Challenges:
Stability, Security,
Democracy

JOAQUÍN ROY

5

Cuba and the 2008
Hurricane Season

FREEDOM HOUSE EUROPE

12

Reflections on Dictators
and Natural Disasters

MART NUTT

13

The Strategic Use
of Tension

MIGUEL ITURRIA SAVÓN

15

Semi-Annual Human
Rights Report on Cuba

PEOPLE IN NEED

17



People in Need

Dictators and Natural Disasters

DIFFICULT TIMES IN CUBA

By Oscar Espinosa Chepe

In January next year it will be fifty years since the Revolution began back in 1959. Moreover, it will also be the 20th anniversary of the “Special Period”, the deepest crisis in the history of our island which started after the fall of the Eastern Block that brought about the end of the huge subsidies which had been sustaining Cuban economy.

These twenty years of backward evolution that have sunk our people into

misery have brought harmful results as regards society, politics, culture, demographics and the environment, because the frustration caused by a vision that promised a lot but ended in a huge failure that has strongly undermined our spiritual values, national identity and civic self-esteem.

This desperate situation has been further aggravated by the impact of natural disasters and the world economic crisis. Cuba was smashed by

three strong hurricanes that practically destroyed the whole of the country. First there was Gustav on August 31 which caused large-scale damage at the Island of Youth and in the province of Pinar del Río. On September 8, Gustav was followed by Ike, which hit the island on the northern coast of the eastern province of Holguín, blew through Las Tunas and Camagüey and upon leaving, the hurricane swished along the southern coast and once again hit through Pinar del Río where



Jaroslav Jirčka

Chepe

it devastated what had been forgotten by its predecessor Gustav. And then the hurricane Paloma came, hitting the island on the southern coast of Camagüey on November 8 and causing serious damage, although luckily this hurricane lost some of its power when entering the country.

According to preliminary figures, the damages have been estimated at 10 billion dollars, which more or less account for 20% of overvalued official gross domestic product (GDP). There was a large-scale damage to infrastructure – to railways, transmission and communications lines, shops, schools, hospitals, and sport facilities, not mentioning serious damage suffered by farmers. The hurricanes had also significant impact having destroyed either totally or partially more than 500 000 homes, that is to say approximately 15% of the overall number of dwellings. The housing conditions in the affected areas are extremely poor due to insufficient reconstruction works and lack of new homes that would substitute the destroyed ones. The situation becomes even more serious if we consider that there had not been any recovery as regards the loss suffered during hurricanes in the previous years. Furthermore, official sources claim that the current housing deficit exceeds 500 000; yet according to estimates by independent experts, the overall figure accounts for one million units. To have an idea about the gravity of the problem it is sufficient to mention that this year, the number of newly constructed houses and flats will not reach 50 000.

These problems and the overall situation is exacerbated by the impact of the world crisis on Cuban economy. Nickel, one of the main Cuban export articles with 60% of the 2007 production being sold abroad, has lost two thirds of its value on the world market. Moreover, we have seen

EDITORIAL

When Raul told the Cuban people that they “needed to get used to not only receiving good news,” few could have predicted how right he would be. Since Raul’s speech was given on July 26th, Cuba has been battered by three powerful hurricanes, the global financial system has entered into the deepest recession since the 1930s and the Cuban economy has gotten decidedly worse. Before the summer, many Cubans were hoping that Raul was on the verge of implementing more systematic reforms, once he managed to deal with the dramatic rise in prices for oil, basic foodstuffs and other commodities. What do they think now?

Cuba has been literally and figuratively turned upside down over the last six months. Hurricanes Gustav, Ike and Paloma destroyed tens of thousands of homes, ruined over a third of Cuba’s crops, and forced the regime to accept large amounts of humanitarian aid from around the world after initially refusing to do so. Furthermore, the global financial crisis has been rapidly spreading from the developed world to everywhere else and shows few signs of abating in the near future. Throughout the various crises that have buffeted the island, Raul has worked hard to maintain the image of strength and of being in control, but how much longer will he manage to keep up the façade if things continue to get worse?

The Cuban economy is in shambles and the severe shortages of food and construction materials have become impossible to hide. The Castro regime has refused to accept any aid from the United States, unless it included with an immediate end to the embargo, which is highly unlikely. Meanwhile, the EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel, has promised aid and greater future cooperation, but has little chance of speeding up its delivery. Cubans’ expectations had already been raised by Raul’s earlier reforms and his reputation for being a more business-like, pragmatic organizer than his brother. All of which begs the question – will this series of disasters be the straw that breaks the camel’s back and forces the regime to open up or will it just be another excuse for the Castro regime to crackdown on any and all forms of dissent?

This issue of the Cuba Europe Dialogues examines the various ways in which Cuba has been affected in the short-term and the long-term by the various crises over the recent months. Oscar Espinosa Chepe and Miguel Iturria Savón offer their perspectives on how the hurricanes have devastated the island and whether or not they have affected the regime’s ability to implement future economic reforms. Philip Peters from the Lexington Institute offers his analysis on the various ways in which the recent US elections could affect future political and economic relations between the US and Cuba. And, Estonian Parliamentarian Mart Nutt reports what he found during his recent trip to Cuba. Lastly, People in Need is releasing their most recent semi-annual human rights report.

In essence, Cuba was already hurting before the hurricanes swept over the island and now things are considerably worse. The international community has been willing to offer help to Cuba without conditions, even as the regime has tried to control how it is used in the relief efforts. Authoritarian regimes have no hesitation about putting their own self-preservation about the needs of its own people. Given how difficult it has been to get through to members of Cuba’s independent society over the last few months and how many people articulated that they were too scared to write down anything, it seems like the repression is working. But will the Cuban people and the international community remain neutral if conditions don’t improve for this reason, while Fidel and Raul Castro prepare to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Revolution that brought them to power. Only time will tell.

Scott Hudson
Editor of Cuba – Europe Dialogues

decrease in mixed-capital companies because many of them left the country. According to the Ministry of Foreign Investments, their number was reduced from 362 to 314. Major difficulties are also expected in relation to lower income from tourism and from the remittances that are being sent mainly from the United States.

Apart from the fact that from the financial point of view Cuba has been traditionally classified as a less trustworthy country, new credits which are essential for sustaining the economy will now be a lot more difficult to obtain due to decreased liquidity on an international scale. Nevertheless, there is even a more serious threat which is related to the substantial funding that Cuba receives from Venezuela – if the prices of oil, which accounts for 90% of Venezuelan export, continue decreasing, this funding may be affected. And then there is president Chavez facing political difficulties which might make him change direction and influence his immense spending abroad.

Another highly important fact to be considered is that structural reforms promised by Raul Castro have been held up. Moreover, in June, we saw a severe repression against informal economy which was reinforced to extremes after the hurricanes, intimidating and paralyzing Cuban society. While it was decided that prices of the main agricultural products would be frozen at the level which applied before the hurricanes came, the price of diesel was raised by 86% and the average price of petrol increased by more than 60% on average. These absurd measures have led to an absolute lack of supply of agricultural products which has affected even the shops that sell goods for foreign currency.

Considering the above, we are dealing with some sort of anti-reforms which

are perhaps imposed by the most conservative branch of Cuban political party and government. Their authors may be worried that economic reforms might launch demands for political changes in the future which would subsequently lead to loss of the absolute power that they have been holding for decades.

Logically, the serious situation which the country is now facing, which will become even more severe in the upcoming months, requires that radical reforms are carried out. We need changes that would allow the use of available human and material resources which would help combat further exacerbation of the crisis.

Logically, the serious situation which the country is now facing, which will become even more severe in the upcoming months, requires that radical reforms are carried out. We need changes that would allow the use of available human and material resources which would help combat further exacerbation of the crisis. Yet since no reforms are undertaken, the living standard of Cuban people gets worse and this may lead to social disturbances.

As regards politics, people are more and more upset, and the unfulfilled promises of their president make them feel

disappointed and cheated. It is interesting that there have been no more talks about next convention of the communist party which was announced in April by the president Raul Castro and which should take place at the end of 2009. Many experts perceive this silence as a fear of certain circles within the organization that some active party members might sharply criticise current administration and might openly speak up in favour of change. While in autumn 2007 the committees of the communist party were analyzing the speech that the General had had on July 26 of the same year and that bore signs of open and progressive approach, its contents were supported, yet at the same time there were great many voices expressing themselves critically about the existing problems and suggesting a wide variety of proposals for transformation. Therefore, the consensus on the need of introducing radical changes is clearly visible also among great many active members of the Cuban Communist Party.

However, it is not only the convention that is steeped in silence. Nor there is any discussion about the promises such as restructuring the state apparatus by the end of the year or establishing new forms of payment as regards salaries for workers that should be remunerated in a more just way and in accord with the work they have performed. Even the controversial Decree-Law No. 259 regarding the handover in usufruct of idle land seems to be at a standstill.

After fifty years of a so called revolution, Cuba is in a disastrous situation and at risk of even more serious problems. The Cuban people do not deserve such a destiny.

Havana, 19 November 2008

Oscar Espinosa Chepe

THREATS AND CHALLENGES: STABILITY, SECURITY, DEMOCRACY

By Joaquín Roy

When Cuba was apparently getting ready to execute a few reform measures after the juridical cession of power from Fidel Castro to his brother Raúl, the country was hit by a triad of negative sudden events and traditional political patterns. First, the capitalist world that saw Cuba as a sort of communist Jurassic park in the Americas, debating between the Chinese of the Vietnamese models, went through a seismic jolt with its financial base shattered. Raúl was seen as dependent on the ambivalent support of Venezuela's Chávez, who saw the price of oil descending to unprecedented lows. Second, the forces of nature unleashed their wrath in the form of three successive hurricanes. It is ironic that the second was named Ike, possibly as a vague reference to the nickname of U.S. president Eisenhower who imposed the beginning of the embargo against Cuba in the early 60s. Gustav prepared the way and Paloma (another ironic peaceful name) did damage in areas not visited by the preceding killer storms.

The third damaging phenomenon was endogenous and resided in the deep bowels of the Cuban regime. Euro-

pean persuasion, U.S. pressure, and Latin American centrist coalesced in contributing to the evolution of the Cuban regime. However, Raúl (after implementing cosmetic measures, such as allowing Cubans to buy cell phones and rent hotel rooms) disappointed optimists and confirmed the fears of the skeptical observers. He not only did not put into practice the reforms that he had announced to make the Cuban economy more efficient and competitive, but he also repeated the hard line discourse of the past in the rare and brief public appearances.

While political calculations could predict an atmosphere of doom, perceptive observers pointed out that nothing could be worse than what Cuba went through at the end of the Cold War when Soviet subsidies vanished. The United States then tried innovative measures to quash the alternative Cuban solutions put in place to diminish the damage done by the end of Moscow's backing. When U.S. subsidiaries were caught in circumventing the embargo by selling goods through third countries, Washington activated the Cuban Democracy Act (Torricelli) of 1992. When for-

eign investors "trafficked" in a bold way (as they did in the past) with expropriated properties in Cuba, the U.S. prepared the Helms-Burton law that, opening the door to law suits against foreign companies that dared to trade with Castro.

Just in case Congress and the President might drag their feet, Castro shot down two planes of the Brothers to the Rescue organization. This group had expanded its original humanitarian work of rescuing refugees at sea, by flooding Cuban air space (including the skies of Havana itself), for the irritation of the Castro government that had warned in unequivocal terms the U.S. administration. As a result, the EU, while adamantly still protesting the U. S. extraterritorial and unilateral trade and investment curtailing measures, slapped Cuba with a Common Position, conditioning a better aid deal to notable political and economic reforms.

The record shows that the U.S.-European pincer became an excuse for the Cuban regime to circle the wagons and resist with even more energy. It did not matter that the combination

of the world's pressure (including the U.S. embargo) and Cuban stubbornness produced an expected casualty in the daily lives of the Cuban people. A totalitarian system that left no windows open to breath and had managed to consolidate a national sense became the favorite weapon to survive. Foreign observers did not quite realize that the key explanations for the impressive survival skills of the Cuban regime included some other additional dimensions than a political control system of such repressive level that was unknown in Eastern and Central Europe at the height of the Cold War. The Cuban Revolution surpassed the mark of four decades of life, and counting, by a combination of three other aspects.

First, it was a full revolutionary struggle made in Cuba. It was not imposed by Soviet tanks. It effectively destroyed the weak democratic system that was corroded by periodic waves of dictatorship and corruption. It flattened the capitalist system with no other replacement than a centralized economy that left few avenues for individual initiative. Second, it was led by an inimitable personality, unmatched in the history of Latin America, who always had found the way to change course, while maintaining the basic logic of uncontested full control. Finally, the system had learned in a masterly way to use the renewable energy provided by the erratic and counterproductive policy of the United States. A reinforced nationalism, with no parallel in Latin America, was the result.

In the current circumstances, Raúl knows very well that he faces a dilemma. On the one hand, he has to tackle the internal demand and ameliorate the daily consequences of the inefficient economy that cannot produce even one third of the food needed by the Cuban people. On the

other hand, he has to decide on implementing real and bold measures that would cross the border of capitalism (small businesses, real and competitive salaries that would confirm the existence of social classes, private agricultural enterprises). He knows that this opening of the genie bottle would mean the start of a movement of not return. After the economic reforms the social restructure will follow. Then the political demands could be irresistible.

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This changing environment could mean that in a given moment internal clashes would be too formidable for the repressive apparatus to neutralize. The armed forces, the only institution with national implantation, could not be capable of coping with unrest. Seen from the other side of the straights of Florida, the threat of massive, uncontrolled and illegal migration has become a hovering nightmare in need of redress. In spite of what President Bush promised, "stability" is the code word that has replaced the well-sought democratic path to peaceful transition. Sig-

nificantly, the stubborn immobility sported by the Cuban regime, added to presenting this threat, has managed to make up for its structural weakness. The impasse would then, for the moment and no one knows until when (not before the death of Fidel, for sure), provide both sides for an eerie sense of security.

This ideal condition from a realist point of view, although it may look unfair and hypocritical in certain cases, has constituted the ultimate goal of any government and society in these uncertain and dangerous times. Ironically, a worsening of the circumstances surrounding the Cuban drama (financial crisis, hurricane damage, and political unrest) could be added to the measures aimed at avoiding drastic effects and feared developments. Internal confrontations, military repression, sea migration, corruption, unseen levels of crime, riots caused by lack of food, and foreign humanitarian occupation as a result could then present a combustible combination. This situation would be too high a price to pay at the expense of stability, even if that means the consolidation of the Cuban regime for a while. Ironically, this scenario would provide the security of Havana's and Washington's governments, thus forming a never experienced coalition.

Joaquín Roy is Jean Monnet Professor of European Integration, Director of University of Miami European Union Center and Co-Director of the Miami-Florida European Union Center of Excellence. He has published over 200 academic articles and reviews, and he is the author, editor, or co-editor of 25 books. He has also published over 1,300 columns and essays in newspapers and magazines. Among his awards is the Encomienda of the Order of Merit bestowed by King Juan Carlos of Spain.

OBAMA AND CUBA

By Philip Peters

President-elect Barack Obama campaigned in favor of changes in U.S. policy toward Cuba, but it is too soon to tell how much U.S. policy will change, or if an Obama Administration's actions will lead to significant change in relations between Washington and Havana.

There is no doubt that relations will change between Cuban Americans and the island. Obama has repeatedly called not only for a reversal of the Bush Administration's severe restrictions on family visits and remittances,

but to "immediately allow unlimited family travel and remittances to the island."

That step will not change the minds of many Cuban Americans who, out of principle, choose not to travel to Cuba until the socialist government is no longer in power.

But it will change Miami. Politically it will be a radical shift, from an Administration that sides with those who do not travel and who support restrictions on others' freedom to travel, to

one that sides with those who choose to maintain ties to the island and their relatives still there. It will be a move, to use a phrase from Professor Damian Fernandez, from the politics of passion to the politics of affection. There is no telling what impact will occur over time in Miami politics as Cuban Americans, no longer restricted to one visit every three years, board flights to Cuba whenever they like, even for a weekend.

A surge in family visits and remittances will change Cuba, too. At min-



People in Need

Cuba at Twilight

imum, it will increase the incomes of families who receive remittances and provide services such as lodging and transportation to visitors. Some in Miami may bring seed capital to allow their relatives to have a small enterprise or a more productive farm; others may help relatives to buy new housing, with an eye to the possibility that they may inhabit it someday.

Obama's intention in this regard is both humanitarian and political – there are “no better ambassadors for freedom than Cuban Americans,” he says. “It's time to let Cuban American money make their families less dependent upon the Castro regime.”

The new Administration's second policy shift involves diplomacy, and is not so clear.

Last May, candidate Obama said: “After eight years of the disastrous policies of George Bush, it is time to pursue direct diplomacy, with friend and foe alike, without preconditions. There will be careful preparation. We will set a clear agenda. And as President, I would be willing to lead that diplomacy at a time and place of my choosing, but only when we have an opportunity to advance the interests of the United States, and to advance the cause of freedom for the Cuban people.”

That statement places Cuba in the category of Iran and North Korea, where Obama argues that the Bush Administration scored rhetorical points, but did not advance U.S. interests, by declining to engage in direct diplomacy. Unlike those countries, however, Cuba has no nuclear program and poses no comparable security threat, so it is unlikely that the Obama Administration will place an urgent priority on talks with Cuba. And Obama's statements leave plenty of room to define the timing, scale, and agenda

of any diplomatic approach toward Cuba. A good place to start would be to begin or increase cooperation in areas that affect Cuba and the United States as neighbors: fighting drug trafficking, regulating immigration and curbing alien smuggling, protecting our shared environment.

The Obama approach to Cuba will be defined in the course of 2009, as his Latin America appointees take office and make decisions about the many facets of U.S. policy toward Cuba. Will it continue to fund the USAID Cuba program, which has been used to support dissidents in Cuba, to organize support networks for dissidents in third countries, and to attempt (in vain) to influence EU policy toward Cuba? Will it change the program's priorities? Will it continue to fund the unseen TV Marti? Will it continue to designate Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism? Will it continue to apply U.S. economic sanctions against banks and companies in third countries that have financial transactions with Cuba? Will it name its own “Cuba transition coordinator,” a post that rankled the national pride of Cubans, from officials to dissidents? How will it respond if Congress presses for policies to increase contacts between Americans and Cubans?

The answers to these questions will define whether Obama merely adapts the Bush policy, or creates a Cuba policy of his own.

But even if his changes in these areas are minimal, the Obama approach will be distinct because of its tone, and because its approach to direct diplomacy and Cuban American travel break with key assumptions that underpinned the Bush policy: that there is nothing to be gained by diplomacy, and that contact between our societies is to be minimized because it risks transferring hard currency to Cuba.

The Bush policy toward Cuba has been marked by macho rhetoric, grandiose plans for Cuba's future, and the idea that economic sanctions could precipitate political change. The result is a marked absence of Americans and American ideas on the island at a time when Cuba faces the prospect of a generational change in its leadership, and has not defined how it will fully confront its serious economic and social policy challenges.

President-elect Obama would do well to look at the approach that Presidents of both parties followed toward Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. We pursued diplomacy to address objectives both large and small, and we allowed unrestricted citizen contact, knowing full well that the communist governments would not reciprocate by allowing their citizens to travel freely.

In those policies, widely viewed as successful, there was nothing remotely similar to the draconian, Soviet-style travel restrictions that Washington imposes on its citizens who want to see Cuba.

The single most important step an Obama Administration could take would be to repeal the Cuba travel ban. Unrestricted travel would bring a surge in contacts between American citizens and private institutions and their Cuban counterparts, and an exchange of ideas and debate far superior to those generated by the Bush Administration's USAID-funded activities that take place largely in third countries. Cuban families would prosper, the flow of information would increase, and America would gain what it lacks now: real influence.

Philip Peters is vice president of the Lexington Institute in Arlington, Virginia and writes the blog The Cuban Triangle.

THE REALITIES OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

By Osvaldo Alfonso Valdes

In Cuba, when Fidel Castro ceded power to his brother Raul, the destiny of the island became full of questions and speculations. The new dictator, who during all of these decades has always lived in the shadow of his older brother, is considered by many to be a pragmatist that could take steps towards transformations.

Today, Cuba is a county in ruins, impoverished, with a discontented population whose ill will is quieted through the use of fear and consequences, which can vary from losing the job that gives them a small miserable salary or going to rot in prison condemned for decades for their ideas. Poverty has been a constant for all of these years – even when the Soviet Union was still giving large subsidies – the country's inhabitants have not enjoyed true prosperity or have lived at a level just above subsistence. It is well known that a good amount of the resources that the Soviets gave to the State and Fidel Castro during those years was used to promote subversion throughout Latin America, and in military campaigns far removed from Cuba's borders and Cubans daily interests, as was the case in the interventions in Angola, Ethiopia and other countries.

In reality, after more than two years in which Raul Castro has been in

charge of things nothing substantial has changed. The called for measures taken by the newly designated government in no way signified real changes. On the contrary, it is proves how much contempt the regime has for the people and only serves to distract the anxious public opinion by making it seem that something is moving. Making changes like the ones that gave citizens the right to buy microwaves, cell phones, computers that cannot connect to the internet, and to stay at hotels in their own country, shows how closed off Cuban society is and how far from modern life and without rights that the citizens have been living under.

In all honesty nothing in these measures has improved the lives of the people. The oppressed majority's purchasing power is still far too little to permit them from acquiring any of those products, when one considers that the average salary is below \$25 a month. On the other hand, the so-called 'achievements' of the Revolution are only well designed propaganda intended to give the totalitarian state a better image. Public education in Cuba is no more than the right for young people to attend run down schools with poorly paid teachers that have little interest in their work and where the students have to perform agricultural work as part of

"the educational process." Public health is fraudulent in the same manner. It is true that Cubans can go to see a doctor without having to pay for it, but medicines are scarce, hospitals have abysmal conditions, and for the majority of people medical specialists are less accessible due to the governmental policy of exporting doctors in exchange for economic aid, as is the case with thousands of doctors that have been sent to Venezuela.

Systematic human rights violations have been present throughout each of the last 50 years of communism. Not even the smallest democratic space exists in Cuban society, since our own constitution establishes that the Communist Party is the superior force of the society and the state. Whatever other type of political and social activism exists on the margins or opposes what the party believes is penalized. Thousands of Cubans have passed through the prisons for political reasons, thousands of others have died against the thick walls by execution, and there are still nearly 300 men and women who remain incarcerated as prisoners of conscience.

Nevertheless, in spite of the intense repression, a democratic movement still exists and it is getting stronger. Today in Cuba one can talk about the existence of Christian Democratic,

Social Democratic, and Liberal political parties, as well as civic, youth and other types of organizations, like the Independent Libraries project, that challenge the repression of the Castro regime's political police. These brave Cubans are confronted by the repression in various ways. They have to kiss goodbye their careers and workplaces, are expelled and prohibited from studying at universities, and angry mobs are sent to their homes to threaten and insult them, and with regularity, they are put in jail after cunning trials and with having received procedural guarantees.

This democratic opposition has succeeded in getting close to the population by getting around and overcoming all the limitations placed on them. Two examples are the [petition for democratic reforms] of the Varela Project with its 24,000 signatures from supporters and [FLAMUR's] proposal "With the Same Currency" that calls for all Cubans to be paid in a currency that will allow them to meet their needs. Likewise, there are growing movements of students, intellectuals and artists.

We cannot forget the "Ladies in White," those brave family women of Cuban political prisoners from the Black Spring of 2003, when 75 dissident and journalists were imprisoned and given long prison sentences. These Cuban women have managed to march regularly through the streets of the capital demanding the liberty of their beloved family members, which has earned them international respect and recognition and of those Cubans that know more and more about their demands and bravery.

A good amount of the sympathy that the Castro regime has had is due to the fact that it has known how to exploit the disagreement with the United States, a conflict that in real-

ity has nothing to do with the defense of Cuba's legitimate interests, but has been promoted to a great extent by our own dictatorship to justify its anti-democratic and repressive policies. Objectively, the main conflict that is beating down the Cubans is that they live in a communist state that systematically violates human rights and refuses to carry out the social, economic and political reforms that the country needs because it fears losing power. At the same time, the main

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blockade is the one that the dictatorship has imposed over its own people.

The regime's international relations have been guided by its greater priority, which is its unlimited power that it has flaunted for almost half a century. In the wake of the repressive wave of March 2003, for example, the world reacted to a large extent in the form of criticism in response to the crackdown. The European Union imposed a series of sanctions at that time against the regime that were a means to apply political pressure so that the regime would stop practices such as these and so that the political prisoners would be freed. Prior to that,

the European Union has approved its "Common Position", which has as its goal to bring about democratic changes to the larges of the Antilles.

Nevertheless, it should be said that the common block's policy towards the island has been plagued with ambiguities and inconsistencies, which in practice have left aside the objectives that they themselves promulgated. Today, we can see that the Spanish government's politics have brought about a new rapprochement with the dictatorship without including anything in the way of improvement in the matter of human rights. It can be said that the majority of the democratic opposition in Cuba disagrees with the way in which the imposed 2003 measures were lifted without it producing signs of opening on the island and without the repression against the democratic forces ceasing. There exist exceptions, such as the Czech Republic and Sweden, who cited that they would take a firmer stance, but the great majority has left aside a principal to which they had earlier endorsed. The reality is very clear: the human rights situation in Cuba is worse while at the same time relations between the European Union and the dictatorship are improving with Spain taking the lead. That is the frustrating reality that the Cuban fighters for democracy are seeing with disbelief.

On the other hand, the leadership of the island is openly tightening relations with other dictatorships, like Venezuela and China, and more recently Russia – whose democratic credentials are getting more and more doubtful since it has returned anew to its imperialist pretensions from the past. In all of this already there is not, of course, elements of ideological affinity that support this closeness. All is pure self-interest. Communist China is only looking for a new place where their businessmen can invest

and make money, exploiting along the same lines as they are doing with their own citizens. Russia, for their part, is looking for the possibility of having a political ally strategically located near to their rival while their former satellites become closer politically and militarily to Washington. Thus, Cuba continues to be a dictatorship that can be rented.

All the speculations about the possible changes that Fidel Castro's separation from power could initiate have dispelled themselves. The dictatorship is not giving any indication of reforming its ways. Everything that is being done is pure demagoguery; they do not want to nor are they willing to lose power.

Under what circumstances will it be possible to prevent the inevitable from happening? The discontent is greater each time that the democratic movement is strengthened, in spite of the repression, and the economic situa-

tion gets worse. The only possibility for improving the lives of the people is in undertaking democratic reforms in political, social and economic areas. Under the current order of things, it is only possible to hope that at some moment there will be a social uprising. The movement in favor of change inside and outside of the country are advocating for transformations that don't involve greater suffering for the people and that follow the path of the proposals and modes of resistance of these democratic forces.

The democratic movement needs international support and solidarity that expresses itself in every possible form. With that support, the movement will be able to contribute to the changes that are getting closer, and besides these contributions, it would become more difficult for the Castro regime to repress and to ignore these men and women, who have been internationally recognized and who demands have received such widespread support. In

the spirit of this solidarity, not only organizations and political parties should be involved, but also the democratic governments that really want to support the democratization of Cuba.

Such solidarity is vital. All of the men and women that are fighting for human rights should be supported, and in Cuba there are thousands of men and women that are fighting for such rights and that are persecuted for this reason. The future freedom of Cuba, requires the help of every possible organization, government, and those that feel committed to the values of liberty and freedom in the world.

Oswaldo Alfonso Valdes was one of the 75 prisoners of conscience swept up by the Castro regime in the March 2003 crackdown and had been sentenced to 18 years in prison for his activities. He was released early due to his poor state of health and allowed to go into exile. Presently he works as a member of editorial staff and political analyst in 'Miscelaneas de Cuba' magazine in Sweden where he has lived since 2005.



People in Need

The Realities of the Revolution

CUBA AND THE 2008 HURRICANE SEASON

Freedom House Europe

The 2008 Atlantic hurricane season produced several of the most devastating storms to hit Cuba in recent history. Independent observers from Freedom House were in Havana, Pinar del Río, Camagüey, Santiago de Cuba, Holguín and Santa Clara provinces during and after the hurricanes. Freedom House analyzed the Cuban government's response and recovery efforts to the hurricanes based on first-hand reports from the observers, eyewitness accounts, and official statements made by the Cuban government. The conclusion is that the Cuban government implemented efficient evacuation measures, but its failure to address post-disaster conditions underscored serious flaws in the island's Communist system.

DAMAGE ESTIMATES

In the eleven days between August 30th and September 9th, Hurricanes Gustav and Ike ruined one third of Cuba's crops, destroyed 63,000 homes, and damaged another 440,000 residences. Hurricane Paloma struck on November 9th, with a 14-foot storm surge penetrating more than a mile inland in the coastal community of Santa Cruz del Sur. Civil defense offi-

cials evacuated nearly 4.4 million residents during the three storms, a figure equivalent to 38 percent of the country's total population.

The combined destruction caused by hurricanes Gustav, Ike and Paloma presents significant challenges for many Cubans, particularly in hard-hit coastal and rural areas. Severe agricultural losses totaling one third of Cuba's crops have exacerbated a national food crisis. Storm damage has also worsened the longstanding national housing crisis, with damage to over half a million homes and more than 200,000 people left homeless by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Cuba faces dire economic conditions in the wake of these losses, as estimates prior to Paloma place the aggregate economic damage at \$9.4 billion, or approximately 7.5% of Cuba's Gross Domestic Product. The Cuban government now faces continued population displacement, dwindling food supplies, and the prospect of prolonged homelessness across several sectors of Cuban society.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

Most accounts verify that the Cuban government efficiently mobilized and

evacuated citizens during the 2008 hurricane season with civil defense officials relocating nearly 4.4 million residents overall. If accurate, official government casualty figures calculating only seven deaths during all three storms underscore the competency of the Cuban government's initial hurricane response system. Recovery operations appear less efficient, as shortages in recovery vehicles and fuel have considerably slowed debris removal.

The Cuban government addressed the looming food crisis by planting short-cycle crops, increasing subsidization of food staples, cracking down on private commercial activity, and implementing policies of price-fixing and rationing. Despite these efforts the price of agricultural products continues to rise, worsening food shortages. Government crackdowns on the informal economy have also deprived ordinary citizens of vital sources of supplementary income. The government's misappropriation and misallocation of international humanitarian relief resources is also cause for concern.

Cuba received aid offers from 68 countries and 12 international agen-

cies in the wake of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. For example, Cuban officials accepted \$2.6 million in immediate relief from the European Union, as well as \$38.8 million in supplemental financing. China offered \$8 million in cash assistance, extended \$80 million in new loans, and agreed to reschedule Cuba's debt payments. Cuba also accepted assistance from Spain, which offered €24.5 million in reconstruction aid, extended €50–100 million in new credit and agreed to restructure Cuba's debt. At the same time, Cuba rejected assistance from the Czech Republic, Ger-

many, the Netherlands, Poland and Sweden, as well as Washington's conditional offer of up to \$6.3 million in hurricane relief.

PUBLIC SENTIMENT

Recent hurricanes provided the unique opportunity for Cubans to critique Raúl Castro's regime on a politically neutral basis. Observers report that the Cuban government's slow recovery response prompted widespread criticism at the local level in hard-hit areas. Regarding foreign aid efforts, Cubans appeared roughly

divided between those adopting the government's official anti-U.S. line and those frustrated by disputes between Havana and Washington. Observers note that Cubans express a collective sense of hopelessness, but despite worsening conditions caused by the Atlantic hurricane season the crisis produced no organized public dissent within Cuban society and appears to have left the Castro's regime unfazed.

Freedom House Europe is an active member in the Europe Cuba NGO Network.

REFLECTIONS ON DICTATORS AND NATURAL DISASTERS

By Mart Nutt

During a recent trip to Cuba, I experienced *déjà vu* when something I had heard announced on Chilean radio on November 11, 1973 was actually happening in Santiago de Cuba on that same date 25 years later. Santiago was being pummeled by a hurricane and receiving such heavy rain that people couldn't go outside. Even though the full force of the hurricane missed the city thanks to a nearby mountain range, several areas in Central and Northern Cuba were ravaged by the ironically named, Paloma.¹

It seems to me that Cuba is following in the footsteps of the former

¹ Paloma literally means dove in Spanish.

Soviet Union during the 1980s in many ways. During that time, people didn't hear much about accidents and natural disasters either. I recall that the USSR kept the Chernobyl disaster a secret for so long that students in Minsk and Kiev unsuspectingly marched through radioactive rainfall during their May Day's parades. How can disasters of such magnitude be hidden? Even though it may be impossible to hide an act of god from the people experiencing it, the ability to monopolize the means by which people get information using state sponsored censorship is far too easy. For instance, the Cuban media had been informed about the com-

ing hurricane a few days before it actually hit Cuba. In preparation, the government imposed a statewide curfew, evacuated around 1 million people and closed service offices, all of which are easy enough to explain as necessary during a hurricane. In another light, these measures can be easily manipulated as a way of highlighting how much the government cares about the people. By moving people out of harm's way and preventing potential looting from breaking out in evacuated areas, the government can emphasize the goodness of its actions and intentions and demonstrate that it takes the responsibility of protecting the citizens from

danger seriously. However, there are often other questions that are overlooked entirely.

Were the measures taken by the government proportional to the potential danger that the people were in? Did the government take advantage of the situation to restrict the amount of contact possible between people?

There were clearly unreported consequences from the government's actions. I was told that highways away from the hurricane's path were subject to the curfew. It was unclear what had happened to people once they were evacuated from the areas that were being threatened by the hurricane. Closing all of the local establishments, in a command economy like Cuba's, almost immediately created discomfort for everyone. For example, banks could not exchange money for several days, which led to a situation where many people, in particular tourists, were unable to buy food. Furthermore, the bank personnel were unable (or unwilling) to explain why the banks remained closed. Rumors spread quickly that the curfew had been specifically put in place to restrict opposition members' freedom of movement. People had no other information about the hurricane other than what was reported through state media. And, when there is a situation where independent information is not readily available, rumors are inevitable, which are often more dangerous to authorities than the truth. Unfortunately, this is the reality in Cuba today.

From what I had been told, there had also been limited and contradicting information about Hurricanes Gustav and Ike during this fall. Nobody wanted to talk about the victims. Some people praised the actions of authorities and said everything was organ-

ized as it should be. Others claimed, to the contrary, that people who had been evacuated were left hungry in streets, they were not allowed to return to their homes and that the authorities did nothing to prepare for the hurricanes' devastation. Some people said that humanitarian aid was not reaching the ones in need, but was getting lost in the halls of the state bureaucracy.

When I arrived in the center of Guantanamo there was visible destruction, even though the city that had been damaged by Hurricane Ike in September. People refused to talk about the subject, which made evaluating the actions of government more difficult. I was aware that the Cuban government had accepted hurricane relief selectively. For example, the regime accepted aid from Spain and Venezuela, but refused offers from the US. It was unclear whether or not the Cuban public was aware of this. With Venezuela's aid, the authorities had begun constructing *petrocasas*, i.e. houses being built with Venezuelan oil money, in the suburbs of Santiago to accommodate the evacuated. However, no one that I talked with had any idea, who exactly would be allowed to stay in these houses and people outside of Santiago have heard nothing about these *petrocasas*.

Domestic life in Cuba today is shaped by the dual currency system, ration coupons from each individual's *libreta* and the arbitrary powers of the police. Workers salaries are almost always paid in Cuban pesos, regardless of the fact that there are few commodities which can be purchased with Cuban pesos including food stuffs. In general, the CUC, or Convertible Cuban Peso, circulates in state run shops. This reminds me of another aspect of the former USSR. Workers salaries were paid only in rubles, even though hard to find

commodities were sold in *Berjózka* hard currency stores, where the ordinary soviet citizen had no business. Cubans are allowed to buy convertible pesos, but the average monthly salaries are equivalent to 20 CUC, which isn't even sufficient to cover basic needs. The only way around this seems to be within the underground economy, which naturally is illegal, but works under the silent consent of the authorities, since it is the only way for many to make ends meet.

The Cuban economy is a hypocritical. People are being forced to live under a dual system, where one's legal life is lived in accordance with communist ideologist slogans, but one's real life is regulated by market rules. Most services directed towards tourists are designed to allow some money to be skimmed of the top. Although Cubans technically aren't allowed to communicate with foreigners, authorities give such permits to "useful people" like prostitutes, profiteers, apartment owners, using at least some of them as spies. There is ample evidence that as much as possible is being stolen from the state. Perhaps the most frequent example can be seen in one of Cuba's best known product, cigars, which can cost 30 times less in the street than ones purchased in a legal state run store. The punishments for breaking the rules are draconian and applied according to an official's judgment, which makes the ordinary citizen fully dependent on bureaucrats. Furthermore, even if organized crime is not openly visible, there certainly are certainly traces of it within Cuban society.

Cuba's coupon rationing system has become essential to keep people alive. Basic food, which can purchased with ration coupons from the *Libreta* instead of cash, free housing and free universal education make up the backbone of Cuban socialism. Abol-

ishing the coupon system will be necessary, if Cuba wants to introduce a market economy in the future. Supposedly, Raul Castro has plans to abolish both the dual currency system and the *Libreta*, but people are naturally nervous about such a decision. If the regime conducted such a reform unwisely it could bring about famine like conditions for the majority of Cubans.

In Cuba's single party state and military dictatorship, political power functions much like it did in the USSR before 1989. There are no visible signs of a communistic oligarchy sharing power. Unlike Fidel, Raul Castro has

no real authority. Whereas Fidel talked to the people, Raul has been in hiding. Fidel is viewed still as a visionary, while Raul is seen more as a military man who acts the part. Currently, from what I saw it would seem that control over people's private lives is intensifying and Raul has no real chance of liberalizing life in Cuba even if he wanted to. The official propaganda has rationalized and explained that the widespread poverty is the result of the US blockade and many believe it. Simultaneously, it seems that authorities are rather afraid of the blockade ending, because it would strip them of their most important argument and the fact that Cuban economy is

thoroughly bankrupt would become visible to everyone. The only way for Cuba to save itself and to recover from the damage that has been done over the last fifty years is to break from the communist regime as soon as possible.

Whether the Cuban regime will collapse with a bang or a whimper is unclear, but a seamless solution is possible and is in the interests of the overwhelming majority of Cubans. But, this is a topic for future articles.

Mart Nutt is a member of the Estonian Parliament.

THE STRATEGIC USE OF TENSION

By Miguel Iturria Savón

In Cuba, the planet of politics has turned us into satellites. We rotate to the compass of the revolutionary rumba against the imperialist enemy. Our orbit is socialism. In the insular firmament of our society, the circumstances and the orders are changing, but the tension has been the same for a half century. He who dares to think for himself, against the single party, the state run economy or the unlimited power of a providential man, falls in disgrace. The fact that palace's edicts can not be appealed sums up the story of the Messiah.

Since the Messiah has a warrior's soul, he has converted the entire island into a military base. His tactics and strategies keep us in a tense place. The ten-

sion justifies keeping us off balance like zombies following the script written by our uniformed leaders.

The tension strategy's design demonstrates its effectiveness even under the most adverse circumstances, principally in the face of the natural catastrophes that are beyond the government's control, which he takes advantage of the problems as a means of halting popular outburst. Before a hurricane, for example, the state binds possible aid to the victims with political repression and promises which act as a catalyst and can avert discontent.

The „speculators“ are the redeeming graft as part of the repressive wave let loose by the Castro regime against

the Cuban people in the aftermath of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, whose winds and rains devastated part of the island and they left without dwelling to almost two million people. The police control all entries and exits from Havana, Pinar del Rio, Isla de Pinos, Camagüey and the north of the Eastern area of the country. The crusade is being directed against those who are seeking their own alternatives. They stop truck drivers with farm produce, they confiscate vehicles and merchandise, register cabdrivers, cyclists and pedestrians. The suspicion, the seizure, the accusations and the courts' sentences leave their smark on the pace of recovery, as if the population were to blame for the natural disasters.

The dictatorship knows how to administer tension when it benefits him. Thus he used this strategy in 1961, 1963, 1968, 1970, 1980, 1994, 1996, and during the spring of 2003. But unlike these famous dates, we are not in the presence of an invasion, nuclear missiles, the offensive to expropriate small land owners, the drive for the 10 million ton sugar harvest (Cuba currently produces less than 2 million tons of sugar), the massive exodus of the Mariel Boatlift toward Florida, the riot on Havana's Malecón, the light aircraft of the Brothers to the Rescue nor the repressive wave that tried to decapitate the internal opposition on the island.

So now, just like all of these other times, the authorities have not declared a state of siege, but set up patrols to stop anyone suspicious, even though there are no rebels in the mountains nor terrorists in the

cities. Traveling salesmen are pursued as delinquents; the owners of farm stands had to close due to the absence of merchandise and the imposition of extraneous prices given what can be offered and what is demanded. The demand surpasses what is on offer, the queues are growing, alongside the stress and the murmur and the anguish of the hungry.

The courier of my block has been detained twice in the middle street. He had to show his documents and to justify the state origin of each piece of bread. Other old people are suffering the inspections of their carts while the clients are waiting, children are going to school without having breakfast and police agents are prowling marketplaces in search of thieves and speculators.

This is how things are in every Havana neighborhood. The officials

are augmenting their control and are presenting themselves to their state supervisors as if they are the only trustworthy supplier in the middle of our food crisis – an act of absurdity that has been galloping along furiously like a horse out of control.

In reality, it has more to do with another mask concealing the fear of the elites that have power over our island's destiny from the government's stratosphere. The police officers that hound the people are unable „to stop the hoarders“ of the nomenclature, who represent the worst aspect of the hurricanes.

Miguel Iturria Savón is an independent Cuban journalist, whose articles appear regularly in Cubanet and other independent websites dedicated to Cuban news.



People in Need

Cuba in Ruins

SEMI-ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT ON CUBA (JUNE – NOVEMBER 2008)

People in Need

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. General Overview
- II. Prisoners Dying in Custody
- III. Detained and Condemned People
- IV. Violent or Inhumane Treatment of Prisoners
- V. Actions against the Free Flow of Information
- VI. Repression against Peaceful Dissidents, i.e. Detentions, Interrogations, Physical Acts of Aggression and Acts of Repudiation
- VII. Repression or work exploitation
- VIII. Restrictions and Repression against the Population
- IX. Religious Persecution
- X. Fines for Dissidents
- XI. Recently Released Political Prisoners

I. GENERAL OVERVIEW (JUNE 2008 – NOVEMBER 2008)

PIN's semi-annual Human Rights Report on Cuba is comprised of various reports sent directly from the island by five different independent Cuban human rights groups that gather information and verify all of the charges.

June

During the month of June, at least four common criminals hung themselves in prison and three dissidents were prosecuted or imprisoned. In addition, 53 peaceful activists were detained at police stations, received summons or were victims of other hostile acts.

July

July was an extremely repressive month this year. More than 500 human rights defenders have been affected across the entire country. State security used various methods, includ-

ing detentions at police stations for up to 24 hours, home arrests, deportations from Havana to the interior provinces, cutting individuals' telephone service, summons to police stations, visits to the homes of human rights defenders, taking away identity cards, threats of imprisonment, acts of repudiation and others.

There were 117 police station arrests and 56 home arrests documented during this month. Three dissidents were imprisoned and one common criminal died in the provincial prison of La Canaleta in Ciego de Ávila due to neglect and negligence by prison authorities.

August

During the month of August, at least nine dissidents were processed or imprisoned, three common criminals died due to the harshness of prison conditions, 57 peaceful activists were detained at police stations and many more received summons or were victims of other hostile acts. These groups were not able to provide all of the names, surnames, addresses and telephone numbers of each of the victims and witnesses.

September

During the darkest hours of our natural tragedy, Círculos Democráticos Municipalistas, the Municipal Democratic Circles, made an urgent plea for help to the international community and especially to Cubans. The groups that contributed to this report worked tirelessly in every district to put together lists of names, surnames, addresses and acts of hostility committed against dissidents, whom the Cuban government denied assistance in regaining their homes and property following the hurricanes. Ike caused more than 20 deaths and, in some areas such as Holguín and Las Tunas, it destroyed upwards of 80% of all homes.

At least eight dissidents were processed or imprisoned, six common criminals died due to prison harshness, 52 peaceful activists were detained at police stations and many were summoned and victims of other hostile acts.

October

October was characterized by the harshest police tactics and judicial repression against the Cuban people in 2008. Hundreds of modest people were condemned to prison sentences of one to three years for simply trying to survive, for 'illegally' transporting food that they had privately produced in amounts small enough to only be sufficient to feed one family, such as less than 60 eggs, 46 kilograms of manioc or a little less than 20 pounds of cheese. The regime's actions not only terrorized the people, but the elimination of the small amounts of free commercial activity exacerbated the overall lack of supplies in stores and markets and worsen the plight of tens of thousands of those affected by the hurricanes that managed to survived without any help from the state.

At least 14 people were processed or imprisoned for political reasons and 103 peaceful activists were detained at the state security police stations, many were summoned and were victims of other hostile acts and three common criminals died in prison as a result of subhuman conditions.

II. PRISONERS DYING IN CUSTODY

- On June 5, 2008, **Fiss Casa Fábrega** (35), a common criminal, hung himself in a wretched solitary confinement cell in Cerámicas Rojas prison in Camagüey. Edberto Ángel Escobedo, a prisoner of conscience, said he was only found early in the morning, because the cell is so isolated that guards generally don't go there, it is walled in, and without light. Sometimes they stop bringing food and leave these convicts naked or only clothed in underwear. Prisoners with AIDS and members of the Plantados movement are often held here. Often these prisoners are screaming for hours and can barely be heard at a 10 meter distance. He added that Fiss had been on a hunger strike for nine days.
- On June 15, 2008, **Juan Aparicio González** (60) hung himself in Las Mangas de Granma prison. According to the information provided by a prisoner of conscience, José Luis García Paneque (75 years), Juan was found hung early in the morning.
- On June 24, 2008, **Leonardo García Rivero**, a common criminal, hung himself in his prison cell in Kilo Ocho prison in Pinar del Río.
- On June 26, 2008, **José Antonio Delgado Cabrera**, a prisoner, hung himself in a solitary confinement cell in the provincial prison of Canaleta in Ciego de Ávila. He had been beaten by the guard for demanding medicine, the right to a telephone and family visits.
- On August 19, 2008, **Santo Abelardo Toledo Pérez** (40) hung himself with bedclothes in a bathroom of Arizas prison in Cienfuegos, according to a report by Luis Cueto Echevarría, a dissident and prisoner.
- On August 22, 2008, **Alexánder Márquez Consuegra**, a common criminal, died in Kilo Nueve prison in Camagüey early in the morning. His jailors had denied him his right to a medical examination, reported by telephone Faustino Cala Rodríguez, a dissident and prisoner, who said that Márquez Consuegra was found dead by other inmates and that the prison management claimed that he had died of heart attack.
- On August 31, 2008, **Sixto Herrera Casamayor** died in sector 2, section 2 in Ariza 2 prison in Cienfuegos around 11 p.m. as a result of an asthma fit, as reported by prisoner of conscience Yosbani Socarrás González, who reported that the prison guards had suggested that there were no means of transport to take him to hospital. In the past eight months, 14 inmates have died in this prison, mostly due to ill treatment or heart attacks resulting from the cow suet which they get as fat in meals.
- On September 13, 2008, **Gabriel Sánchez Sánchez** (22), a common criminal, died in Kilo Siete, Camagüey at noon, after falling from the roof of the building where he worked as part of a prison working unit. His brother, Odelio Rodríguez Sánchez, said he lacked physical protection and that they were reconstructing parts Camagüey that had been destroyed by Hurricane Ike.
- On September 14, 2008, **Yoagy Franco Fernández** (19) died in section 3 in Ariza 2 prison in Cienfuegos on 14 September.
- On September 17, 2008, **Misael García Medina** (33), a common criminal, was shot dead in Combinado del Este prison in Havana, as reported via telephone by his brother Adalberto García Mena, who added that the prison guards shot him before crossing the first cordon, a zone where the use of fire arms is forbidden.
- On September 17, 2008, **Juan Reyes Montero** (38), a common criminal, died of heart attack in the provincial prison of Las Mangas de Granma. Yoandri Gutiérrez Vargas, a prisoner of conscience, reported that Reyes Montero had complained about severe chest pains at 2 a.m., but the jailors refused to take him to hospital with the excuse there was no means of transport despite the fact that the prison doctor recommended his transport to an emergency unit, because she diagnosed possible heart attack.
- On October 1, 2008, **Juan Carlos Padilla Cabrera** hung himself in the provincial prison of Ariza in Cienfuegos, as reported by Luis Cueto Echevarría, a prisoner and dissident.

- On October 16, 2008, **Alberto Martínez Sotolongo** was stabbed to death by the prisoner Frank Magdiel in Pre prison in Santa Clara in the afternoon, as reported by the prisoner of conscience Javier Delgado Torna.
- **Evelier Rojas Mendoza** hung himself in the provincial prison of Las Tunas, reports José Daniel Ferrer García, a prisoner of conscience from the Group of 75.

III. DETAINED AND CONDEMNED PEOPLE

- Since December 2, 2007, **Vladimir Alejo Miranda** has been in Agüica prison in Matanzas waiting for a trial when he was beaten and arrested in the Guanabacoa Park for having raised a poster calling for freedom.
- On March 25, 2008, activists **Adel Ramón López Nápoles** and **Santo del Pozo Rodríguez** were sentenced each to three years' imprisonment by the Municipal Court of Isla de Pinos accused of the alleged crime of illegally leaving the national territory.
- On April 3, 2008, **Israel Sagarra Martínez** sentenced by the Municipal Court of Aguada de Pasajeros to three years of correctional work without internment, accused of being 'socially dangerous with a disposition to commit a crime' for being in contact with dissidents Juan Alberto de la Nuez and Pedro Larena Ibáñez.
- On April 7, 2008; **Norges Vázquez Suárez** was condemned in a summary trial with the exclusion of his family to four years in prison for being 'socially dangerous with a disposition to commit a crime'. Arrested together with Jesús Cordero Suárez by the state security agents and interrogated at the Dragones police station after having gone to the streets of Havana to protest with posters against the confiscation of some 120 bike-taxis and repression in general. Both are activists of the Fundación Cubana de Derechos Humanos (Cuban Foundation of Human Rights) and leaders of the Sindicato de Bici Taxis-tas Independientes (Trade Union of the Independent Bike Taxi Drivers).
- On May 2, 2008, **Gilberto Martínez Martínez** (43 years) condemned to four years' imprisonment by the Municipal Court of Artemisa that accused him of being 'socially dangerous with a disposition to commit a crime' for being friends with Héctor Cruz Hernández and his family.
- On May 28, 2008, **Yunier Blanco Fernández**, a dissident, was imprisoned in Artemisa. His conditional release was revoked by the state security agents. He had been condemned to five years' imprisonment for attack in early 2006. He worked in state companies, but refused to pay the trade union and on a public meeting in the local cinema, he told the examining magistrate, Madelín Pereda, that he opposes the government of Fidel Castro.
- On June 4, 2008, the young dissident **Yosbany Socarrás González** was condemned to two years in Ariza 2 prison in Cienfuegos by the Municipal Court in Aguada de Pasajeros for being 'socially dangerous with a disposition to commit a crime' and imprisoned on 14 August. During a public hearing without the presence of state security agents, he was charged of meeting antisocial elements, but he said he is always in the company of Alberto de la Nuez and other human rights defenders.
- On June 19, 2008, **José Rolando Cásare Soto**, a dissident, was sentenced by the Municipal Court of San Juan y Martínez in Pinar del Río to one year of correctional work without internment, accused of being 'socially dangerous with a disposition to commit a crime'. According to Cásare, the hearing was not public and lacked process guarantees.
- On July 7, 2008, **José Alberto Heira Oviedo**, a dissident, was notified by the Municipal Court of Plaza de la Revolución that he would be tried for the crime of disrespect for wishing death to Fidel Castro. According to an independent journalist, Jaime Leygonier, the prosecutor's request says as follows: The detainee started to shout: If only the comandante died, I am tired of all those lies. As a consequence, he was detained by some people when shouting: Long live human rights, The Police are terrorists. On July 2nd, Heira was visited at his place by two security officers who threatened him that if he would not drop his activities, he would go to prison. On July 3rd he received the prosecutor's request, which substituted a one year prison sentence for correctional work without internment.
- On July 11, 2008, six members of a Sancti Spíritu family were imprisoned following a peaceful protest against the government in front of the local tribunal that had condemned and punished one of the family members to one year in prison for being 'socially dangerous with a disposition to commit a crime'. **Alberto Naranjo Rodríguez, Margarita Naranjo Rodríguez, Diamelis Rodríguez Naranjo**, her husband **Lidier Rodríguez Vandón, Pedro Rodríguez Doscurre** and **Diana Bernal Rodríguez** were detained. All of them were advised by the authorities to find defense lawyers, because they would be tried for their crime.
- On July 13, 2008, **Orlando Almenares Reyes**, a common criminal, requested a new trial after the Supreme Court confirmed his sentence. He maintains his innocence. Reyes telephoned the Consejo de Relatores (Council of Reporters) to lodge a complaint with international organizations and accused Fidel, Raúl as well as the Cuban government of imprisoning innocent people, since he claims to have been sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment for murder without having committed any crime.

- On July 17, 2008, **Edilberto González Pérez** was sentenced by the Municipal Court of Playa Havana, to one year of correctional work without internment after being accused of disrespect and offending Fidel Castro.
- On July 26, 2008, **Benito Ortega Suárez** had his conditional release revoked due to his activity in support of human rights. He was sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment for attacking and disrespecting Fidel Castro. He is in La Pendiente prison in Santa Clara. He is a member of Coalición Central Opositora (Central Opposition Coalition).
- **Jorge Ramírez**, a dissident, was sentenced by the Municipal Court of Trinidad in Sancti Spíritus, where he lives, and sent to Nieves Morejón prison, accused of attack.
- On August 6, 2008, **Hugo Damián Prieto Blanco**, a prisoner of conscience, had his conditional release revoked and was imprisoned in Combinado del Este prison in Havana, as reported by his wife Lázara Bárbara Cendiña Recalde, who said security officers arrested him at his home and told him he would stay in prison until May 2009 because of his counterrevolutionary activities.
- On September 3, 2008, human rights defenders **Yordis García Fournier** and **Isael Poveda Silva** were sentenced by the Municipal Court of Guantánamo to one year and one year and four months, respectively, for resistance. They had been arrested on August 31st. Jorge Ceballos Corrales, who reported this, said it was an offensive by the political police designed to eliminate the Movimiento Cubano Jóvenes por la Democracia (Cuban Movement of Youth for Democracy).
- On September 3, 2008, an activist from the Fundación Cubana de Derechos Humanos (Cuban Foundation of Human Rights), **Yaser Puides Jiménez**, was sentenced to three years of correctional work without internment and fears he will be taken to prison. He was subject to a summary trial by the Municipal Court of San Miguel del Padrón, Havana, after being accused of being 'socially dangerous with a disposition to commit a crime' due to his human rights activities.
- On September 17, 2008, young dissident **Erick Jesús Valdés Álvarez** was tried by the Provincial Court of Santiago de Cuba after being accused of procuring goods illegally. His mother, Teresa Álvarez Sierra, claims that her son is innocent and that the whole thing is revenge for his activities as a member in the opposition movement group, Jóvenes por la Democracia (Cuban Movement of Youth for Democracy). She said he had been imprisoned on 25 April 2008 when his sentence to three years of correctional work without internment was revoked. In October 2007, he was subject to a summary trial for being 'socially dangerous with a disposition to commit a crime'.
- The Supreme Court confirmed the sentence of five years' imprisonment for dissident **Raumel Vinajera Estive**. He was supposed to go to prison on September 17th at 8 a.m., but he locked himself in his home in protest. On September 16th his wife, Tania Montoya Vásquez, said that, in February, he had been sentenced by the Court of Palma Soriano in Santiago de Cuba for a fabricated crime of felony assault due to his opposition activity and said it was the state security that sent him to prison. Raumel Vinajera Estive is the director of Círculos Democráticos Municipalistas (Municipal Democratic Circles) in Palma Soriano.
- On September 26, 2008, **Juan Miguel Valdés Mayor**, a common criminal, was notified of 15 more years of imprisonment, accused of "disorder in a penitentiary centre" and two attacks. The proceedings were held without defending lawyer, because when he was in Taco Taco prison, he climbed to the ceiling shouting, among others, "Away with Fidel", "Long live human rights" and "Down with tyranny".
- On September 30, 2008, **Jesús Santo Cruz**, a human rights defender, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment by the Municipal Court of Plaza de la Revolución, Havana, accused of being 'socially dangerous with a disposition to commit a crime'.
- On October 2, 2008, **Orestes Paino Viera**, a peaceful activist, was imprisoned in Kilo Cinco y Medio prison in Pinar del Río at 11 a.m. after being arrested and beaten by state security officers. He repeatedly denounced harassment to which he was subject, including seven arrests this year and three beatings due to his human rights activity.
- On October 7, 2008, the Holguín Provincial Court confirmed in appellate proceedings the sentences of the Veguita Mine protesters imposed by the Municipal Court a week earlier. The sentences were reported as follows: **Yoandri Rivas Flechas**, nine months of house arrest, **Rafael Labañino Toirá** two and a half years' imprisonment, **Marcial Mendoza** two and a half years in a forced labour camp, **Maryoris Mendoza** and **Bárbara Pena**, six and nine months of house arrest and **Yolainis Matos** one year of house arrest. The condemned people were arrested on September 26, 2008 after taking part in the Veguito Mine protest. The protesters were calling for the environmental contamination to be stopped and for living conditions to be improved. They managed to block the road for six hours, paralyzing transport of the mineral. The protest was broken up by riot police who dispersed the protesters violently, resulting in injuries being inflicted on both sides and several arrests.
- On October 9, 2008, **Abel López Pérez**, director of the Movimiento de Derechos Humanos Resurrección Mar-

tiana (Human Rights Movement Martian Resurrection) and representative of the Consejo de Relatores de Derechos Humanos de Cuba (Council of Cuban Human Rights Reporters) in Guantánamo, stitched his mouth with a wire to protest against having been accused of an attack. He had been returned to prison on April 21, 2008. He had been sentenced to four years in prison in 2005 for disrespect, but had received a conditional release due to severe health conditions that included hepatitis B, chronic renal failure and osteoarthritis.

- On October 15, 2008, **Rafael Moulán Vargas** was sentenced by the Municipal Court of Jobabo, Las Tunas, to 18 months' imprisonment during a closed hearing.
- On October 30, 2008, **Julián Antonio Moné Borrero**, a prisoner of conscience, went into convulsion and lost consciousness several times, before recovering. He had been on hunger strike for more than a month. He was arrested on 30 September and taken to the state security police station in Guantánamo where he was accused of attack and faces a sentence of up to five years' imprisonment. He is the president of Movimiento de derechos humanos Miguel Valdés Tamayo (Miguel Valdés Tamayo Movement for Human Rights) and he had actively denounced human rights abuses since he was released several months ago.
- In October, the president of Consejo de Relatores de Derechos Humanos de Cuba (Council of Cuban Human Rights Reporters), Margarito Broche Espinosa, made an appeal to the international community and public opinion regard-

ing the life of prisoners of conscience **Abel López Pérez**, **Orlando Zapata Tamayo** and **Julián Antonio Moné Borrero**, who went on hunger strike to protest against the injustice that they, peaceful activists and human rights defenders, face on a daily basis from state security officers, prosecutors and prison guards.

IV. VIOLENT OR INHUMANE TREATMENT OF PRISONERS

- On June 11, 2008, the Cuban government moved **Juan Antonio Bermúdez Toranzo**, a prisoner of conscience, from Valle Grande prison in Havana, to Canaleta in Ciego de Ávila, more than 400 kilometres from his home.
- **Aurelio Antonio Morales Ayala** (from Holguín) and **José Ángel Simón Rodríguez** (from Santiago de Cuba), dissident prisoners, were taken to Guamajal in Villa Clara and Guanajay in the Havana province, respectively, more than 1000 kilometres from their homes.
- On June 20, 2008, **Miguel Ángel López Herrera**, a prisoner of conscience, stitched his mouth in protest against unjust imprisonment of Cuban prisoners of conscience. He said that the guards had beaten prisoners 57 times in the past months and that 396 were suffering from malnutrition due to the lack of food.
- On July 8, 2008, **Eduardo Díaz Fleita**, a prisoner of conscience, was taken by wardens at Cinco y Medio prison in Pinar del Río and put into solitary confinement after



People in Need

The Revolution Turns 50

complaining about being denied medical assistance and despite his poor health.

- **Santos Armando Martínez Rueda**, a prisoner of conscience, is schizophrenic and suffers from severe nerve disorders. He was accused armed infiltration for entering the country to fight the communism using violence and was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment on 31 October 1996, a sentence he is serving in the severe provincial prison in Las Tunas.
- The life of **Aurelio Antonio Morales Ayala**, a prisoner of conscience, is at risk in the Guanajay prison in the Havana province, as he reported by telephone on 19 June in the morning. He said: Yesterday I had to knock on the padlock and shout at the top of my lungs "Away with Fidel", because they keep me in a small cell with a dangerous murderer who stabbed soldiers and who keeps threatening me that he will tear me into pieces. I'm tired of calling the state security and the guards, but they laugh at me, because they are the actual authors of torture and are responsible for it. It is revenge for my protest against the conditions in Combinado prison in Guantánamo.
- On June 26, 2008, **Héctor Raúl Valle Hernández**, a prisoner of conscience, was violently moved from his cell into solitary confinement in the extremely harsh prison in Guanajay, the Havana province. He was transported at noon after having shouted slogans against injustice and demanding medical assistance.
- **Carlos Rojas Álvarez**, a common criminal, completely lost his sight after a beating from the guards in Taco Taco prison in Pinar del Río.
- **Jorge Cervantes García**, a political prisoner, went on hunger strike to protest conditions in Guantánamo's Combinado prison. His brother, Agustín Cervantes, reported that Jorge's protest is the result of being denied a conditional release and not receiving two month salary for construction work. He is also protesting the continuous harassment to which he is subjected to and the violation of his human rights. Jorge Cervantes García serves his sentence of 15 years' imprisonment for disrespect, attack and evasion. He was born in Contra Maestre in Santiago de Cuba.
- **Rámdol Roca Mursulí**, a prisoner of conscience, has been interned in a punishment cell in the provincial prison of Canaleta in Ciego de Ávila for more than 120 days. He has been deprived of all his belongings and sleeps on the floor among insect and mice. He has also been denied telephone communication, correspondence, time outside in the fresh air and other penitentiary rights. Rámdol Roca Mursulí was imprisoned in 2002. He has been accused of being 'socially dangerous with a disposition to commit a crime' and evasion and sentenced to nine years' imprisonment for throwing stones at an exchange office shop-window and drawing posters saying, Down with Fidel.
- **Pedro Argüelles Morán**, **Adolfo Fernández Sainz** and **Antonio Ramón Díaz Sánchez**, all prisoners of conscience, went on a three day hunger strike in the provincial prison of Canaleta in Ciego de Ávila in protest against the fact that the authorities confiscated Adolfo's Spanish newspapers and ecclesiastic literature.
- A member of the Damas de Blanco, **Reina Luisa Tamayo Danger**, the mother of Orlando Zapata Tamayo, went on a hunger strike for more than a week demanding that her son be immediately moved from the Cuba Sí prison in Holguín where he had been attacked by very dangerous common criminals and beaten by guards. She explained Zapata had been on hunger strike since October 1st and his deteriorating health is putting his life at risk.
- **Ariel Sigler Amaya**, a prisoner of conscience from the Group of 75, is in extremely poor health condition in a provincial hospital in Cienfuegos. His wife, Noelia Pedraza Jiménez, a member of Damas de Blanco stated that he has been confined to a wheelchair in a provincial hospital in Cienfuegos since September 22nd suffering from polyneuropathy according to doctors from the Interior Ministry. Ariel also suffers from gastrointestinal disorder, gallstones, calculus in the left kidney and chronic gastritis. He was in perfect healthy when imprisoned on 18 March 2003.
- **Yordis García Fournier** went on an 18 day hunger strike demanding that he be released from Combinado Prison in Guantánamo. **Isael Poveda Silva** was more than a week on hunger strike in the same penitentiary centre requiring he be moved from 2B sector, since his life was being threatened by murderers working for state security.
- On October 10, 2008, state security officers and guards in Cinco y Medio prison in Pinar de Río have allegedly taken revenge against political prisoner **Pável Hernández Manfarrol**. Nelson Molinet Espino, a prisoner of conscience from the Group of 75, reported that, on October 10th ten officers handcuffed Manfarrol, threw him on the floor violently, took his clothes off and put him in a common criminal uniform. Subsequently, the guard Chala, el gordo, threatened him saying that "if he should take the uniform off, he would pull out his teeth."
- **Aurelio Antonio Morales Ayala**, a prisoner of conscience, went on hunger strike for several days, because he had been harassed by the guards in Cuba Sí prison in Holguín and was severely beaten at the beginning of October.
- On 24 October at 8 a.m., **Orlando Almenares Sánchez** was punched by guards, who split his lip, in the provincial prison of Canaleta in Ciego de Ávila for shouting anti-government slogans when transported to the provincial hospital. Almenares shouted: "Down with Fidel",

"Away with dictatorship" and "I am innocent". Orlando Almenares Sánchez has been serving 30 years' imprisonment, accused of an alleged participation on the murder of a deputy prosecutor in the Cienfuegos province. He has been imprisoned for three years and more than 100 days in a punishment cell and solitary confinement for shouting anti-government slogans and writing them in the penitentiary centre.

- On October 30, 2008, political prisoner **Orestes Yumar Julián Gómez** reported by telephone that he has been totally abandoned in the provincial prison of Nieves Morejón in Sancti Spiritus, despite his physical disability. Julián said: "I have been imprisoned for my complaints about human rights violations committed by the police on a daily basis. I have been beaten, insulted and denied the medical examination necessary to get a conditional release. I have not received medicine despite my severe health condition. There is not even aspirin here and I only managed to get painkillers thanks to other inmates. After a tracheotomy, I have a cannula that forces me to breathe through my throat. I am epileptic and suffer from thousand other problems that I cannot even describe here. One day they'll find me dead. I have been abandoned like a dog."
- **Omelio Lázaro Angulo Borrero**, an ex prisoner of conscience, is now in a provincial hospital in Camagüey in severe health condition waiting for a surgery. On 26 October, he explained by telephone he suffers from urethra swelling as a result of tumour, fever and high creatinine level, that he suppurates heavily and feels like dying.

V. ACTIONS AGAINST THE FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION

- On June 11, 2008 at 5 p.m., independent journalists, **Roberto de Jesús Guerra Pérez, Álvaro Llero Felipe and Osmani Ricardo Segura García**, were arrested on the corner of L and 27 street in Vedado, Havana, to be prevented from a dissent activity in Melena del Sur, the Havana province. They were interrogated and threatened for two hours at the Capri police station. They were told they would go to prison under Act 88. Guerra was arrested five times in June.
- **Francisco Blanco Sanabria**, an independent journalist, has been suffering harassment by the state security in Cienfuegos, as he reported on 26 October 2008. Blanco said he had been arrested and threatened with imprisonment several times in the past weeks. On 16 October, Lázaro Rodríguez Campo, a major of the security opened him a file saying they would apply Act 88 on his case. He filmed him at the Cruces police station.

- **Leticia Ramos Herrería**, a reporter of this information centre, has been constantly harassed by the state security, as she reported by telephone on 10 October. She said top-level officers of this repressive body detained her at a local police station jail threatening her with 30 years' imprisonment, because they are tired of her reports for Radio Martí and other foreign-based media. Her husband and other relatives were also imprisoned. She is also deprived of electricity supplies and, since several months, she has been charged electricity rate exceeding 750 pesos. They also restrain her freedom of movement to the capital and slander her in front of the neighbours saying she is crazy. Leticia Ramos Herrería is also a member of Movimiento Femenino Marta Abreu (Women's Movement Marta Abreu) and is a coordinator of Círculos Democráticos Municipales (Democratic Municipal Circles) in the district.

VI. REPRESSION AGAINST PEACEFUL DISSIDENTS, I.E. DETENTIONS, INTERROGATIONS, PHYSICAL ACTS OF AGGRESSION AND ACTS OF REPUDIATION

- On June 2nd and 4th, **Marielis Castro Fernández Rubio**, an activist, was summoned to the state security station in Guantánamo where she was interrogated and threatened that she would be charged with disrespect. **Leonor Padilla**, a dissident, was also interrogated.
- On June 4, 2008, 15 activists were arrested in Havana to prevent them from commemorating the victims of Chinese military repression at Tiananmen Square. The event was organized by the Movimiento Cubano Jóvenes por la Democracia (Cuban Movement of Youth for Democracy) at the monument to the Chinese erected in the capital. The site was surrounded by political police, who detained 15 opposition activists, held others at the National Bus Terminal and sent them back to the interior of the country. The affected were: **Idania Yáñez Contreras, Yesmi Elena Menas Urbano, Yuniesky García López, Jorge Luis García Pérez Antúnez, Iris Pérez Aguilera, Ana Margarita Perdigón Brito, Bienvenido Perdigón Pacheco, Blas Fortún Martínez, Benito Ortega Suárez, Nitza Rivas Hernández, Ernesto Medero Arrosarena, Roberto de Jesús Guerra and Cristian Toranzo Fundichelli**.
- On June 4th and 17th, eight activists of the Partido pro Derechos Humanos de Cuba (Cuban pro Human Rights Party) affiliated with the Andrei Sakharov Foundation were interrogated at the Güines and San José de las Lajas police stations in the Havana province. They were summoned or arrested for the interrogation. Luz Marina Barceló, the source of this information, said the state security threatened them with imprisonment if they do not drop their opposition activities.

- On June 8th and 12th, respectively, **Juan Enrique Medina García** and **Arcenio Torres Salazar**, opposition activists, were summoned and threatened at the San Luis police station in Santiago de Cuba. They belong to Fundación Cubana de Derechos Humanos (Cuban Human Rights Foundation).
- On June 10, 2008, **Silvia Reguera Guada** and **Miguel Alpízar**, activists, were summoned to the Cruces police station in Cienfuegos and threatened by state security. Silvia, the source of this information, said they had been told they would be charged with being 'socially dangerous with a disposition to commit a crime', denied an exit visa to prevent them from leaving the country legally.
- On June 13, 2008, **Néstor Rodríguez Lobaina**, a dissident leader, was detained at the Dragones y Zulueta police station where he was beaten by several policemen. They stomped on him while he was on the floor and released him hours later. Lobaina said they wanted to fabricate a charge of foreign currency trafficking against him for having changed CUCs at 10 registered state exchange offices.
- On June 18, 2008, Rosa Rodríguez, a niece of **Conrado Rodríguez Suárez**, a prisoner of conscience, was fired from her job. Rodríguez said they also took away her telephone line which she used as an extension.
- On June 20, 2008, six opposition activists were beaten and arrested for 15 hours in Matanzas: **Jorge Luis García Pérez Antúnez**, **Idania Yáñez Contreras**, **Iris Pérez Aguilera**, **Yesmi Elena Mena Urbano**, **Benito Ortega Suárez** and **Blas Fortún Martínez**. They challenged the state security and protested against imprisonment in far-away provinces and penitentiary abuse by Cuban authorities.
- On June 20, 2008, **Máiky Martorell Mayans** and **Roberto Tamayo López** were detained at the Third police station in Las Tunas and threatened with prison if they do not drop their civic activities.
- On June 29, 2008, **Blas Fortún Martínez**, a dissident, was grabbed by the neck by two state security members, who threatened to kill him, as reported to Radio Martí by Jorge Luis García Pérez Antúnez.
- Eleven activists were detained at Palma Soriano police station in Santiago de Cuba after protesting against the arrest of a member of their organization. Their identity cards were taken away and they were told by a captain that they deserved to be shot because they are traitors and counterrevolutionaries. The detainees were: **Rauml Vinagera Estibe**, **Alexis Cuán Jérez**, **Yordis García Fournier**, **Jorge Corrales Ceballo**, **Yuniesky Domínguez González**, **Ángel Lino Isaac Luna**, **Raudel Ávila Losada**, **Michael Osorio Ramírez**, **Fabricio Bustamante Trujillo**, **Eduardo González Jeréz**, **María Serafina Jérez Gutiérrez** and **Rubén Adrove de Arma**.
- **Héctor Raúl Valle Hernández**, a prisoner of conscience from the Group of 75, was denied adequate medical assistance in Guanajay prison in Havana.
- On August 5, 2008, the relatives of **José Antonio Mola Porro**, a former prisoner of conscience, were forced to get off their plane at José Martí airport in Havana, despite



People in Need

After Ike

being with a little girl and a physically disabled person after having travelled more than 500 kilometres and giving away their clothes and personal belongings.

- On August 10, 2008 at 10 p.m., Ramiro Machado Victoria, a state security collaborator, threw stones at the house of his dissident neighbours **Lázaro González Adán** and **Marilyn Díaz Fernández**. Machado Victoria later injured Adán with a machete. On 11 August, González Adán reported by telephone that Machado Victoria threw a big slab of cement at through the curtains of the children's bedroom. He added they were repeatedly forced to leave the house as a result of constant intimidation. The above mentioned agent blocks their house with his truck and subjects them to very loud music 24 hours a day, along with endless beating and killing threats and offences. González and Díaz are important members of Consejo de Relatores de Derechos Humanos de Cuba (Council of Cuban Human Rights Reporters) and are held hostage by the Cuban government which has denies them exit visas to prevent them from being able to leave the country legally.
- On August 14, 2008, the Interior Ministry denied an exit visa to **Maura Iset González Jurquet**, a leading human rights defender. González said the immigration officers required a release from the public health service, where she worked as a nurse over 15 years ago and with whom she has nothing to do with anymore. She accused the state security of political revenge. Maura Iset González Jurquet is the former president of the FLAMUR (Latin American Federation of Rural Women) and led the Single Currency campaign. She has been subjected to several acts of repudiation.

VII. REPRESSION OR WORKPLACE EXPLOITATION

- On August 10, 2008, over 20 bike-taxis were confiscated by police officers in Havana, according to Jesús Cordero Suárez. He added that over 300 bike-taxis had confiscated this year in Havana. Expropriations continued throughout the year, leaving a number of families (who were denied operation licence by the government) without means to earn their living.
- On August 22, 2008, **Alberto Suárez Vega**, a dissident was fired for wearing a T-shirt saying: With a Single Currency.
- At least 28 inmates are being exploited as prison labor in a shoe plant being financed with Mexican capital. The plant is located inside of Havana's of Guanajay prison. According to José Ubaldo Izquierdo Hernández, a prisoner of conscience from the Group of 75, inmates work 10 hours a day between Mondays and Saturdays with the obligation to produce about 260 pairs of Hércules brand, a number which they daily exceed by more than 90.

VIII. RESTRICTIONS AND Y REPRESSION AGAINST THE GENERAL PUBLIC

- On August 14, 2008, the Ávila Rivera family went on hunger strike in front of the municipal seat of the Communist Party in Sagua la Grande, Villa Clara. They had been forced to abandon their refuge by the police and they remained without a place to stay, because their house was likely to fall down. The young couple **Anet Ávila Rivera** and **Alaín Benítez Fleite** are dissents that belong to the Frente Democrático Independiente (Independent Democratic Front). They said they were accompanied by three other family members: **Eraisis Ávila Torres**, **Adriana Rivera Suárez** and **Alexánder Rivera Suárez**.
- **Jorge Luis García Pérez Antúnez** and **Idania Llanes Contreras** went on a long hunger strike in protest against violence of the state security officers against members of Coalición Central Opositora (Central Opposition Coalition) and their relatives.
- On October 13, 2008, six members of Círculos Democráticos Municipalistas (Municipal Democratic Circles) and Fundación Cubana de Derechos Humanos (Cuban Human Rights Foundation) were summoned to the Cruces state security station in Cienfuegos, interrogated and threatened with prison. Silvia Reguera Guada, the source of this information and one of the affected persons, said the officers accused them of being mercenaries working for Yankee imperialism, told them they would not be allowed to get together to make contra revolution, because the country is in a sort of war and threatened them that Act 88 on independence and national sovereignty would be applied to their case. Intimidated activists include: **Francisco Blanco Sanabria**, **Miguel Alpízar San Martín**, **Ernesto Ramón Domenech Espinosa**, **Jorge Luis Cásares Duarte** and **Pedro Rodríguez Ucha**.
- On October 21, 2008, **Sonia Fariña Orta** with her three little ill children was forced out of her home in Mantilla, Havana.
- On October 25, 2008, **María del Carmen Jérez Guevara**, a member of Damas de Blanco, reported that she was recovering from a blow to her back caused by Ramoncito, a policeman, when he was trying to arrest a citizen in a queue. She challenged him and was detained at a police station, fined 150 pesos and threatened with prison; the policeman told her he does not believe in human rights.
- **González Acosta**, a former prisoner of conscience and coordinator of Círculos Democráticos Municipalistas (Municipal Democratic Circles) in the western region, said he had been arrested four times recently and has been prevented from working at his mother's garden.

IX. RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

- On June 18, 2008, **Yogli González Pérez**, a Christian shepherd, reported by telephone that he had been forced out of his home by the police and the housing authority. He said that “the police hid in neighboring houses and when I opened the door they jumped over me taking all my belongings and throwing them on a truck. Then they forced me to get out and stamped my house where I lived for 15 years and which I inherited from my uncle. I don’t know where to go.
- On July 9, 2008, **Adalberto Ramírez Rodríguez**, a Methodist church with up to 150 members reported that their space will be confiscated by the Communist Party and local authorities.
- The repression against the Apostolic Church of Central Elia in Las Tunas continues. **Tomaza Victoria Ayala**, the shepherdess, denounced that she had been given an ultimatum by the authorities to abandon the house by the end of July. As a consequence, her husband and her filled the walls of the house, which serves as a church at the same time, with protest posters saying, “This Is Our House”, “Long Live Jesus Christ” and others. She said they had been living in the house legally since 28 years and paid it up in 2007.

X. FINES FOR DISSIDENTS

- On June 23, 2008, Ricardo Pupo Sierra and Ariel Dueña Fonseca, peaceful opposition activists, were arrested. They were fined 30 pesos each and their cameras were confiscated.
- On August 20, 2008, **Iris Tamara Pérez Aguilera**, a peaceful opposition activist, was tried and condemned by the Municipal Court of Placetas. A fine of 500 pesos was imposed on her for the alleged crimes of resistance and disobedience. Around 40 human rights defenders were present at the hearing despite a big state security squad placed on site and the arrest of some activists.
- On August 29, 2008, **Gorki Ávila**, leader of the band Porno para Ricardo (Porn for Ricardo) was sentenced by the Municipal Court in Playa to pay a fine of 600 pesos.
- On September 1, 2008, **Lázaro de Arma Urra**, a peaceful opposition activist, was imposed a fine of 600 pesos by the Municipal Court of Arabos in Matanzas for an illegal sale of refreshments. In addition, he had his tricycle confiscated, he reported by telephone. He said it is revenge by the state security for supporting Antúnez in his recent protest in front of the provincial prison of Matanzas. He is convinced they are trying to ruin him economically, because he cannot work now. He is 51 years old and belongs to the Movimiento Independiente Occión Alternativa.
- On September 11, 2008, Fidel García Roldán, a former prisoner of conscience, was fined 1000 pesos by state security and police officers and subsequently released.

- On September 19, 2008, four human rights activists were imposed a fine of 500 pesos upon their release. Niúvel García Fournier, Pastor García Fournier, Rosaida Ramírez Matos and Rogelio Tabío López remained four days in custody of the state security in Guantánamo after chanting anti-Castro slogans in an appellate hearing against their friends and relatives Yordis Garcías Fournier and Isael Poveda Silva.
- On October 9, 2008, Fidel García Roldán, a former prisoner of conscience, denounced he was condemned by the Municipal Court of Holguín for refusing to pay a fine of 1000 pesos imposed by the state security in September. The court confirmed the fine deducting 100 pesos for the days he remained in custody. He was arrested on 5 September at 9 p.m. after chanting anti-Fidel and anti-Raúl slogans from a taxi station wall in San Fiel in Holguín, at which moment he was heavily beaten and dragged away by three policemen.
- The president of Movimiento Cubano Jóvenes por la Democracia (Cuban Movement of Youth for Democracy), Néstor Rodríguez Lobaina, was imposed a fine of 2000 pesos by the political police after a 48 hour arrest.

XI. RECENTLY RELEASED POLITICAL PRISONERS

- On June 16, 2008, Tomás Ramos Rodríguez, a prisoner of conscience, was released having served 18 years of 20 years’ imprisonment for rebellion, enemy propaganda and other acts against the state security. He had been imprisoned on 16 October 1990 and had been in the Havana prison Combinado del Este.
- On July 1, 2008, Virgilio Mantilla Arango, a prisoner of conscience, was released on 1 July after serving his seven years’ sentence in Kilo Nueve in Camagüey.
- On July 4, 2008, Juan Luís Rodríguez Desdín, a prisoner of conscience, was released having served his two years’ sentence. He was accused of being ‘socially dangerous with a disposition to commit a crime’ for belonging to Fundación Cubana de Derechos Humanos (Cuban Human Rights Foundation).
- José Relvis Estepe Bernal, a prisoner of conscience, was conditionally released. He lives in Tunas de Zaza, Sancti Spiritus. He had been sentenced to six years’ imprisonment for enemy propaganda.
- On August 27, 2008, Eduardo Pacheco Ortiz, a prisoner of conscience, served his sentence of two years’ imprisonment in Canaletas, Matanzas.
- On October 22, 2008, Dioselis Blanco, a prisoner of conscience, was released in the morning. He said that he feels healthy, even thought he has been kept in a closed forced labour camp of Briones for three years and a month out of five years.

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