

# FOCAL's Research Forum on Cuba

## Chronicle on Cuba

### April 2010

#### Highlights

**Domestic Affairs:** A national vaccination campaign is expanded against the pandemic A (H1N1) influenza virus. Cuba's Communist Party makes calls against small-time corruption, petty theft and apathy that plague daily life. The 9th Congress of the Young Communist League (UJC) takes place in Havana. Health and education sectors are under scrutiny by Government authorities. State Security breaks up weekly marches by The Ladies in White and tightens repression against dissidents. Prominent individuals warn against corruption and on the need to apply urgent changes. Elections take place at municipal levels. Guillermo Farinas remains on hunger strike.

**Economy:** President Raul Castro lowers down expectations about the implementation of immediate changes, at same time that warns on severe economic difficulties. An acute drought affects most Cuban provinces. Cuba and Iran examine trade relations. Cuba turns over state-run barber shops and beauty salons to employees. A corruption scandal involves Chilean entrepreneurs and high-ranking Government officials. Cuba and Venezuela sign new trade and co-operation accords. After 49 years, golf courses are back in the island.

**Exile Community:** Several demonstrations take place by Cuban exiles in Spain, the US, and other countries in support of The Ladies in White. Cuban resident songwriter Silvio Rodriguez holds an unprecedented debate with exiled Cuban journalist and writer Carlos Alberto Montaner. Writer and prominent figure of the Cuban Revolution, Carlos Franqui, dies in Puerto Rico.

**Foreign Affairs:** Farinas' hunger strike and repression against the Ladies in White spark controversial reactions by international Governments and organizations, as well as by prominent individuals. The Cuban Government denounces what it calls an international media campaign against the island sponsored by the European Union and the US. The Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs visits Cuba. President Raul Castro meets with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez after participating in the ALBA Summit. The head of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti congratulates the Cuban government and health professionals working in the Caribbean nation.

**Security:** Independent sources inform of several actions taken by Government authorities to prevent against acts of civil unrest by the population. Venezuelan opposition denounces the widespread involvement of Cuban troops in President Hugo Chavez's military. A Cuban military delegation headed by the Chief of the Armed Forces General Staff visits Russia, Vietnam, North Korea, and China. President Raul Castro meets in Havana with the Angolan Defence Minister.

**US-Cuba Relations:** Cuba's foreign minister meets with a top US State Department official to coordinate medical help for Haiti. Cuban media denounces the US and the EU for organizing a campaign to destabilize the Caribbean nation. Statements made by US Secretary of State spark a new controversy between Cuba and the US. Business and human rights groups in the US urge Congress to ease the embargo on Cuba.

### **Lo más relevante**

**Asuntos domésticos:** Se expande una campaña nacional de vacunación contra el virus de influenza A(H1N1). El Partido Comunista de Cuba hace un llamado contra la corrupción, hurtos y la apatía que afectan la vida cotidiana. Tiene lugar en La Habana el 9no Congreso de la Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (UJC). La salud y la educación están bajo el escrutinio de las autoridades. La Seguridad del Estado imposibilita las marchas semanales de las Damas de Blanco y refuerza la represión contra la disidencia. Importantes personalidades advierten contra la corrupción y acerca de la necesidad de aplicar cambios urgentes. Tienen lugar elecciones a nivel municipal. Guillermo Fariñas continúa su huelga de hambre.

**Economía:** El presidente Raúl Castro disminuye las expectativas sobre la implementación de cambios inmediatos, al tiempo que advierte sobre las severas dificultades que enfrenta la economía. Una aguda sequía afecta a la mayoría de las provincias cubanas. Cuba e Irán analizan sus relaciones comerciales. Cuba pasa barberías y peluquerías del Estado a manos de sus empleados. Un escándalo de corrupción involucra a empresarios chilenos y a altos funcionarios gubernamentales. Cuba y Venezuela firman nuevos acuerdos económicos y de cooperación. Los campos de golf regresan a la isla después de 49 años.

**Comunidad de exiliados:** Exiliados cubanos llevan a cabo varias demostraciones de apoyo a Las Damas de Blanco en España, EEUU y otros países. El cantautor residente en Cuba Silvio Rodríguez sostiene un debate sin precedentes con el escritor y periodista exiliado Carlos Alberto Montaner. El escritor y prominente personalidad de la Revolución Cubana, Carlos Franqui, fallece en Puerto Rico.

**Asuntos exteriores:** La huelga de hambre de Fariñas y la represión contra las Damas de Blanco provocan reacciones diversas en gobiernos y organizaciones internacionales, así como en prominentes personalidades. El gobierno cubano denuncia lo que denomina una campaña mediática contra la isla auspiciada por EEUU y la Unión Europea. El ministro serbio de Exteriores visita Cuba. El presidente Raúl Castro se reúne con el presidente venezolano Hugo Chávez luego de participar en la Cumbre del ALBA. El jefe de la Misión de la ONU para la Estabilidad de Haití felicita al gobierno y al personal de salud cubanos que trabaja en la nación caribeña.

**Seguridad:** Fuentes independientes informan de diferentes acciones adoptadas por las autoridades cubanas para prevenir actos de desobediencia civil en la población. La oposición venezolana denuncia el aumento de la participación de tropas cubanas entre los militares bajo el mando del Presidente Hugo Chávez. Una delegación militar cubana encabezada por el Jefe del Estado Mayor de las Fuerzas Armadas visita Rusia, Vietnam, Corea del Norte y China. El Presidente Raúl Castro se reúne en La Habana con el ministro angolano de Defensa.

**Relaciones Cuba-Estados Unidos:** El ministro cubano de Exteriores se reúne con una alta funcionaria del Departamento de Estado de EEUU para coordinar ayuda a Haití. Los medios oficiales cubanos denuncian a EEUU y a la UE por implementar una campaña para desestabilizar a la nación caribeña. Declaraciones de la secretaria de Estado de EEUU provocan una nueva controversia entre Cuba y EEUU. Grupos de derechos humanos y hombres de negocio en EEUU instan al Congreso a flexibilizar el embargo contra Cuba.

## Domestic Affairs

**April 1:** A Cuban writer affiliated with the official culture union has signed the letter that asks the communist government in Havana to release political prisoners and respect human rights, petition organizers said. Ena Lucia Portela, who won the Juan Rulfo Short Story Prize in 1999, becomes the first member of the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba, or UNEAC, which distances itself from the government line, to sign the letter, according to the communique released by “OZT Yo acuso al Gobierno cubano” (OZT I accuse the Cuban government). Government-controlled UNEAC on March 16 published in Communist Party daily *Granma* an article rejecting the OZT initiative, saying that “the collection of signatures (is) a media campaign against Cuba organized by people without ethics.” “I am a member of UNEAC, but I disagree completely with the statement released some days ago by the secretariat of that organization. Please add my name, and whatever happens, happens,” Portela said in her message to OZT. “Among the names of the Cuban signers I do not see that of any artist or writer living in Cuba. It doesn’t surprise me, given the high cost that having an opinion still has in our country. But that’s enough. I have no way to gain access to that letter via the Internet to add my signature, and so I beg you to do it for me.” The manifesto entitled “Por la libertad de los presos políticos cubanos” (For the freedom of Cuban political prisoners) – posted at [orlandozapatatamayo.blogspot.com](http://orlandozapatatamayo.blogspot.com) – has been signed by more than 40,000 people worldwide in the last two weeks. The effort was launched after the February 23 death of Cuban political prisoner Orlando Zapato Tamayo following an 85-day hunger strike (*LAHT*, 1/4/10).

**April 1:** A National Vaccination Campaign against the pandemic A (H1N1) influenza virus started in Cuba during which 1,124 million vulnerable people will be immunized. Dr. Cristina Luna, national director of the Primary Health Care Program, announced that 498 sanitary areas, including those in remote sites of the island, already have the materials and staff needed to guarantee that the campaign is carried out as scheduled. In the first stage of the program due to be completed on April 20, some 80,000 registered pregnant women and those within the term of up to 42 days after labor will be immunized, said Dr. Luis Estruch, Deputy Public Health Minister in charge of Epidemiology (*ACN*, 1/4/10).

**Abril 1:** El opositor cubano Franklin Pelegrino del Toro, director del Partido Republicano Cubano en Cacocum, provincia oriental de Holguín aseguró a la agencia española de noticias *EFE* que mantendrá sin “claudicar” la huelga de hambre que empezó hace más de un mes para pedir, como Fariñas, la libertad de los presos políticos enfermos. La agencia *EFE* divulgó una entrevista que realizó en su casa a Pelegrino, de 38 años y “barbero por cuenta propia”. “Me voy a mantener, ya lo he dicho, no voy a claudicar hasta que haya una respuesta del régimen. Se que los hermanos de la oposición están preocupados, quieren que me desmonte. Ellos están

sufriendo, pero respetan la decisión que he tomado”, declaró. A la entrada de su casa, Pelegrino tiene colgada una tela negra, en señal de luto por la muerte de Orlando Zapata, quien falleció el pasado 23 de febrero tras 83 días en huelga de hambre. “Estoy pidiendo la libertad de nuestros 26 hermanos presos políticos de conciencia que están enfermos, como defensor de los derechos humanos, como cubano y patriota. Exijo al gobierno que los libere”, declaró. La esposa de Pelegrino, Berta Guerrero Segura, dijo que pidió al general Raúl Castro que atienda las demandas de su esposo, de Fariñas y de personalidades internacionales sobre la liberación de los disidentes presos que están enfermos. “No queremos más muertos -dijo-. Ya murió uno y no queremos que mueran ni Coco Fariñas ni Franklin. No quiero que mis hijos se queden huérfanos. A él lo necesitamos vivo y no muerto”, agregó (*Radio Martí*, 2/4/10).

**Abril 1:** Cuatro opositores cubanos se encuentran detenidos en la unidad de operaciones de la Seguridad del Estado en Guantánamo, según dijeron fuentes de la disidencia interna en esa provincia. En la mañana del 31 de marzo, Rolando Rodríguez Lobaina, líder del Movimiento Cubano Jóvenes por la Democracia (MCJD), y los activistas Yoandry Montoya Avilés e Isael Poveda Silva ingresaron en esa sede de la policía política guantanamera, mientras que Jorge Corrales Ceballos lo hacía sobre las 13:00, hora local. Las detenciones tuvieron lugar luego de una sesión de un foro juvenil llevado a cabo en la Sierra de Gibara, Holguín, el 30 de marzo, y de la quema de un ejemplar de la Constitución como parte de la campaña “Por el derecho a mis derechos”, dijo Néstor Rodríguez Lobaina, hermano de uno de los detenidos, dirigente del MCJD y coordinador del foro juvenil. Agregó que tanto la quema de la Constitución como el foro fueron realizados de manera pública, por lo que, a su juicio, las detenciones en Guantánamo podrían ser una represalia para evitar otras manifestaciones antigubernamentales en la región oriental (*Diario de Cuba*, 2/4/10).

**April 2:** On the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the birth of the late Vilma Espin on April 7, a Memorial will be inaugurated at the house that was the headquarters of the 26 of July Movement in Santiago de Cuba. Yolanda Ferrer, general secretary of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), told the press that this building, where Vilma also spent part of her life, will contribute to spread the example of the tireless combatant of mountains and plains. The FMC will keep it as a living museum and will promote the study of the life and work of the heroine, as part of the historic generation that headed the struggle for the definitive independence of the country and was a builder of the socialist society, she stressed (*ACN*, 2/4/10).

**Abril 2:** El prisionero de conciencia Rolando Jiménez, recluso en la prisión El Guayabo, informó a través de una nota, la decisión que tomó el pasado 31 de marzo, de declararse en huelga de hambre, como protesta por la muerte de Orlando Zapata luego de una prolongada huelga de hambre. Jiménez expresa que después de la muerte de Zapata los carceleros han incrementado la vigilancia sobre los reos políticos, para evitar que realicen actividades contra el gobierno. Fidel Francisco Rangel, también prisionero de conciencia, está dispuesto a solidarizarse con Jiménez, y declararse en huelga, para reclamar el fin de las torturas físicas y psicológicas que padecen los prisioneros políticos (*Cubanet*, 2/4/10).

**April 2:** Cuba’s Communist Party is asking the island’s churches and religious associations to help it stamp out the small-time corruption, petty theft and apathy that plague daily life, state media reported. President Raul Castro and other top officials met privately with non-Catholic

religious leaders, imploring them to back the government's announced efforts to crack down on graft and inefficiency. "Together we should broaden what we do so that all of us Cubans become better, more honest, principled workers," said Caridad Diego, the Communist Party's head of religious affairs. "We have a responsibility to keep working for respect and legality, to allow Cuban believers to be part of our efforts against vagrancy, lazy people, corrupt activities or those who facilitate social indiscipline, corruption," Diego said. She addressed her remarks to Protestant and Jewish elders as well as top priests of Santería, which mixes Roman Catholicism with the traditional African Yoruba faith and is Cuba's most-followed religion. A transcript of the speech was published in the Communist Party newspaper *Granma*, which did not specify exactly what kind of help the government is asking of the leaders. The event was held on the 20th anniversary of Fidel Castro's 1990 meeting with religious leaders, after which he began to soften his government's hard-line stance against religion (*AP*, 2/4/10).

**April 2:** The delegates to the 9th Congress of the Cuban Youth Communist League arrived in Havana with high spirits after a 16-hour trip by train. The Congress' delegates will have a meeting prior to the working commissions and later in the day they will enjoy a show by the Cuban Children Company "La Colmenita" at the Karl Marx Theater. The 9th UJC Congress will take place over the week-end at Havana's Convention Centre with some 800 delegates from all over Cuba in attendance (*ACN*, 2/4/10).

**Abril 3:** Militantes de la juventud comunista de Cuba iniciaron estrategias para tomar el relevo de Fidel y Raúl Castro, con la tarea encomendada por el gobierno de encarar la crisis económica y la apatía de un sector de jóvenes desencantados con la revolución, informó la *AFP*. Bajo el lema de asegurar la continuidad del régimen socialista, la Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (UJC) celebrará el 3 y 4 de abril su congreso quinquenal, preámbulo del que debe hacer el gobernante Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC) para fijar derroteros del país, el último que por su avanzada edad encabezarán los líderes históricos de la revolución, admitió el presidente Raúl Castro, escribe Carlos Batista en el reportaje de la *AFP*. "No habrá relevo sino continuidad", reiteró el número dos de Cuba, José Ramón Machado Ventura, en las reuniones preparatorias de la UJC por toda la isla, descartando de plano cambios en el sistema socialista. La UJC, cantera del PCC (único), realiza su IX Congreso animada por Raúl Castro a trabajar duro para enfrentar la grave situación que vive el país por la ineficiencia productiva, la burocracia, la excesiva centralización de la economía —95 por ciento estatal—, la corrupción y la crisis internacional, agrega Batista. Miles de jóvenes en la isla no trabajan ni tienen interés en hacerlo, acostumbrados al paternalismo estatal o desmotivados por salarios que equivalen a 20 dólares mensuales. Considerados los "hijos del periodo especial", crisis en que cayó Cuba en los años 90 por la caída del bloque comunista, los jóvenes perciben con fuerza las penurias de la vida cotidiana, el aumento de las desigualdades y "el quebrantamiento de las expectativas de porvenir forjadas por la revolución", según un reciente análisis publicado en el diario *Juventud Rebelde*, órgano de la UJC. Las consignas y llamados desde el poder, que movieron a sus padres al comienzo de la revolución, no calan igual y suscitan cuando menos indiferencia en una parte considerable de los jóvenes, por lo que las autoridades redoblaron la formación ideológica en ese sector y el recordatorio de las gestas revolucionarias (*Cubaencuentro*, 4/3/10).

**Abril 3:** Los médicos han alertado acerca del delicado de salud del disidente Guillermo Fariñas, pero él asegura que mantendrá la huelga de hambre y sed hasta que Raúl Castro libere a 26

presos políticos que se encuentran gravemente enfermos. Ante esta situación, Fariñas deja claro que una carta que enviara a la Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos de la OEA ha sido escrita “en perfecto estado” de sus “facultades mentales” aunque “en franco deterioro físico debido a la huelga de hambre” que ha estado cumpliendo desde hace más de un mes y que lo tienen “postrado en una cama”. El disidente exhortó públicamente a ciudadanos afines al régimen a iniciar una huelga de hambre “hasta morir” como protesta contra la “supuesta campaña mediática” internacional que, según ellos, han emprendido algunos gobiernos y medios de comunicación internacionales contra La Habana tras la muerte de Zapata. Fariñas, que rechaza la existencia de esta campaña, apuntó que “si ellos se creen idealistas, deberían entonces hacer una huelga de hambre para protestar contra esa campaña internacional que ellos dicen que se ha creado” fuera de Cuba. Sin precisar nombres, el periodista opositor comentó también que ha recibido muchas llamadas de funcionarios europeos y estadounidenses que le han instado a que abandone su huelga, gestos que ha agradecido pero que no le van a convencer para dejar su protesta (*EFE*, 3/4/10).

**Abril 3:** Un singular programa gestado en la radioemisora del Centro Histórico de La Habana Vieja pone al alcance de los sordos el valioso patrimonio del remozado barrio, el más antiguo de la capital cubana. “Habana Radio es una emisora de bien público con perfil histórico-cultural, y este sector no oyente de la población nos visitaba, caminaba por estas calles, pero quedaba fuera de nuestro trabajo patrimonial. Por eso nace el proyecto Cultura entre las Manos”, dijo la coordinadora de la iniciativa, Yalena Gispert. La idea arrancó a principios de 2008, como parte de “Rutas y Andares”, un programa para las familias cubanas en el período veraniego de julio y agosto: visitas guiadas por especialistas entre los muchos sitios de interés histórico y cultural de La Habana antigua. Un intérprete de la lengua de señas cubana se encargaba de traducir las explicaciones en los sitios visitados. “Nos dimos cuenta de que había que hacer algo especial para ellos. Desde el inicio mostraron mucho interés, hicieron muchas preguntas, pero el ritmo de la interpretación enlentecía el recorrido”, explicó Gispert. Así nació Cultura entre las Manos, que ofrece cada mes recorridos históricos, además de un espacio de debate sobre temas culturales, históricos y sociales, con servicio especializado de interpretación y la participación de especialistas en los asuntos a tratar (*IPS*, 3/4/10).

**April 3:** Cuban parliament speaker Ricardo Alarcon said those who foment a “media campaign” against the communist-ruled island in the United States and Europe are responsible for the recent death of a hunger striker and any other such deaths that may occur. “I’d say that those who encourage and extol those who have lent themselves to this media campaign against Cuba are responsible for the lives of these people,” Alarcon said in an interview published by the government Web site *Cubadebate.com*. He added that the international media also share “responsibility” for the death in Havana on February 23 of political prisoner Orlando Zapata Tamayo after an 85-day hunger strike. Zapata was designated a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International, although President Raul Castro’s government described him as a common criminal. Alarcon said the media response to Zapata’s death may have several objectives, including damaging Cuba’s image and its relations with the outside world and trying to “distort the true meaning of the revolution.” “It’s outrageous to talk about the unfortunate death of Zapata as if it were Cuba’s responsibility. Nobody forced that man to declare himself on a hunger strike,” Alarcon said, adding that the death was “regrettable” and “absurd” (*LAHT*, 3/4/10).

**April 3:** The 9th Congress of the Young Communist League (UJC) began at Havana's Convention Centre with the inauguration of a photo exhibition "50 Times Cuba" by photo-reporter Kaloian Santos. The exhibition is dedicated to the Cuban flag and it is comprised of 50 snapshots immortalizing the way in which Cubans hold and perceive the national flag. During the inauguration of the exhibition, Fernando Martinez Heredia, Director of the Juan Marinello Centre for Research and Development of Cuban Culture, noted that these flags show the Caribbean island as it is, with all its nuances and colors with a predominance of red, blue and white. The 9th UJC Congress takes with the participation of some 800 delegates from all the country's territories (*ACN*, 3/4/10).

**April 3:** First Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura participated in the first day of sessions of the 9th Congress of the Young Communist League (UJC) that takes place at Havana's Convention Centre. VP Esteban Lazo and Commander of the Revolution Guillermo Garcia, as well as other State, Government and Communist Party leaders also attended the event in which nearly 800 delegates divided in five working commissions are discussing different topics under one essential idea: to preserve and continue the work of the Cuban Revolution over the last 50 years. Topics discussed include the youth's participation in the economic development and defense of the country, the strengthening of the UJC and its role in the education, political-ideological preparation and comprehensive training of youths (*ACN*, 3/4/10).

**Abril 3:** El disidente Franklin Pelegrino del Toro, quien lleva más de un mes en huelga de hambre, fue remitido de urgencia al Hospital Lucía Iñiguez, de Holguín, informó la periodista independiente Caridad Caballero Batista, quien describió el estado del disidente como "muy deteriorado". Pelegrino del Toro, un barbero de 38 años, inició su ayuno el 28 de febrero, en solidaridad con la huelga de hambre que realiza el opositor Guillermo Fariñas para pedir la excarcelación de 26 presos políticos enfermos. Ha dicho que no dejará su protesta hasta que el gobierno le dé una respuesta. Según declaró Caballero Batista a la emisora *Radio Martí*, Pelegrino del Toro fue llevado, en ambulancia, al policlínico del municipio holguinero de Cacocum, donde reside. Tenía la presión arterial muy baja, se había desmayado y su ritmo cardíaco era lento, indicó la activista. Los médicos del policlínico le remitieron al Hospital Clínico Quirúrgico Lucía Iñiguez, de la capital provincial (*Diario de Cuba*, 4/4/10).

**April 4:** Cuban President Raul Castro rejected US and European pressure over political prisoners and said Guillermo Farinas, on a hunger strike for 40 days, and his supporters would be responsible if the prominent Cuban dissident dies. Castro's comments –his most extensive yet on recent dissident activities on the island– signalled that Cuban authorities will not budge politically to prevent the death of Farinas, who they view as an instrument of US and European efforts to topple Cuba's communist system. "Everything possible is being done to save his life, but if he does not change his self-destructive attitude, he will be responsible, together with his backers, for the outcome we don't want," Castro said in a speech to a Union of Communist Youth convention. "More than a half century of permanent combat has taught our people that vacillation is synonymous with defeat," he said. "We will never give in to blackmail, by any country or any group of countries no matter how powerful they are, no matter what happens," Castro added. "This convention had coincided with a huge campaign to discredit Cuba, organized, directed and financed from the centres of imperial power in the United States and

Europe, hypocritically hoisting the flag of human rights,” he told the young communists attending the meeting ([Speech by Raul Castro](#); *Reuters, BBC*, 4/4/10).

**April 4:** Three Cuban officials were punished for taking food to a state-run agricultural market to use as “props” for a visit by managers in the sector, only to remove it later to the frustration of members of the public who wanted to buy it, the official *Juventud Rebelde* newspaper reported. The incident occurred on March 1, in Guaimaro, a town in the eastern province of Camaguey, and it was verified by the Agriculture Ministry when it received a complaint from one of the readers of the daily, the official newspaper of the youth wing of the Cuban Communist Party. The investigation verified that food was brought to the market in preparation for a visit by top-level officials, but “after the scene had been set and the public learned of the existence of the (food), it was removed (...) leaving the public annoyed and with reason,” *Juventud Rebelde* said. The Agriculture Ministry’s representative in Guaimaro, Alberto Rodriguez, said that for using the food as “props” and then removing it the director of the state-run provisions company in the municipality, Luis Cespedes, was demoted to a lesser post and two other officials were “admonished.” The central government officials for whom the food had been brought in never even came to the market, Rodriguez said. *Juventud Rebelde*, for its part, is demanding an explanation about the matter (*LAHT*, 4/4/10).

**Abril 4:** La Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (UJC) llamó, ante el presidente de Cuba, Raúl Castro, a enfrentar la “apatía” política y “desobediencia” de parte de la juventud cubana. “No podemos desconocer la existencia de un segmento de jóvenes que aunque no representen la mayoría de nuestra juventud dañan con sus actitudes y conductas los nobles propósitos de la obra revolucionaria”, dijo la primera secretaria de la UJC Liudmila Álamo, según el telediario estatal. Álamo, que presentó el informe al IX Congreso de la UJC, señaló que se trata de conductas “como la desobediencia de las leyes, la apatía, el consumismo y la desmovilización”, contrapuestas al socialismo. Decenas de miles de jóvenes cubanos no estudian ni trabajan desalentados por los bajos salarios, equivalentes a 20 dólares, y algunos prefieren dedicarse a actividades ilegales del mercado negro o a emigrar en busca de perspectivas, aseguró. “Tenemos el deber de atender y enfrentar enérgicamente” esas manifestaciones, dijo la dirigente, de 35 años (*Cubagnet*, 5/4/10).

**April 4:** The 9th UJC Congress of the Young Communist League (UJC) approved a resolution on changes in the organization’s statutes, which among others institutes the category of “recommended” persons for children in their 9th grade, who will be given tasks that will be evaluated until the moment when the process for their incorporation to the youth organization begins. Other changes establish that youngsters from 15 to 30 years of age with the necessary requirements will be able to join the UJC, the political vanguard of Cuban youth, and that, exceptionally, those who became members at age of 30 can continue being members of the organization until they’re 32 or 33 years old (*ACN*, 4/4/10).

**April 4:** The new National Bureau of the Young Communists League was presented during the closing ceremony of the organization’s 9th Congress, held for two days at Havana’s Convention Centre. Liudmila Alamo and Ernesto Luis Corvo were ratified as first and second secretaries, respectively. The other professional members are Osnay Miguel Colina, Hilder Torres and Yamile Ramos, in the ideological and educational spheres and the Jose Marti Pioneer Children’s

Organization, in that order, while Leira Sanchez and Yoel Perez were promoted to occupy the posts of international relations and the attention of young workers and combatants. The Bureau includes another 12 non-professional members, which were elected prior to the closing session by the new National Committee of the UJC in its first meeting, presided over by José Ramon Machado Ventura, member of the Politburo of the Cuban Communist Party and First Vice-president of the councils of State and Ministers (ACN, 4/4/10).

**Abril 4:** El presidente de Cuba, Raúl Castro, atenuó las expectativas de cambios urgentes que le reclaman intelectuales, religiosos y la juventud cubana, debido a una situación económica “muy compleja”. “No ignoro que algunos compañeros a veces se desesperan, deseando cambios inmediatos en múltiples esferas (...) inquietudes que por lo general se originan en el desconocimiento de la magnitud de la tarea que tenemos por delante”, dijo Raúl Castro, al clausurar el IX Congreso de la Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (UJC). Esos cambios son “el mayor y más importante desafío que tenemos para asegurar la continuidad de la obra construida en estos 50 años”, recalcó al solicitar paciencia. “Los que piden avanzar más rápido, deben tener en cuenta el rosario de asuntos que estamos estudiando” y “debemos evitar que por apresuramiento o improvisación, tratando de solucionar un problema, causemos otro mayor”, añadió. Raúl Castro destacó que “la batalla económica constituye hoy, más que nunca, la tarea principal” de su gobierno, porque “de ella depende la sostenibilidad y preservación de nuestro sistema social”. “En asuntos de envergadura estratégica para la vida de toda la nación no podemos dejarnos conducir por emociones y actuar sin la integralidad requerida”, dijo a quienes le piden acelerar las reformas que inició desde que asumió el mando en la isla ([Discurso de Raúl Castro](#); AFP, 4/4/10).

**Abril 4:** El gobierno impuso restricciones al movimiento y las actividades de las Damas de Blanco, informó Laura Pollán, portavoz del grupo de madres, esposas y familiares de presos políticos. Dos altos oficiales de la Seguridad del Estado leyeron a las mujeres un documento con las disposiciones, indicó un reporte de *Radio Martí*. “Vinieron a plantear que las Damas de Blanco no podemos tomar las calles como lo hemos hecho hasta ahora”, dijo Pollán, esposa del disidente Héctor Maseda, condenado en 2003 a 20 años de cárcel. Añadió que los oficiales se negaron a entregarle el texto. Sólo le permitieron copiar un párrafo, que dice: “De acuerdo con la práctica internacional, sólo se le permitirá un recorrido en el área de la Iglesia de Santa Rita (...) por el paseo central, desde la calle 30 hasta 22 (en La Habana), sin afectar el tránsito, con la participación de las Damas de Blanco y solamente 10 de apoyo. En cada ocasión que se vaya a utilizar ese escenario, la responsable o la asignada, debe informarlo a la (unidad de la) Policía Nacional Revolucionaria de la calle Zanja, 72 horas antes”, leyó Pollán. “Esto quiere decir que nos están limitando nuestras protestas y nosotras, sencillamente, vamos a continuar, domingo tras domingo, asistiendo a Santa Rita, marchando por la libertad de los presos, y el día que sea necesario iremos a las calles”, aseguró la portavoz del grupo. “Las Damas de Blanco vamos a continuar caminando cada vez que sea necesario”. Este domingo, 21 Damas de Blanco asistieron a misa y posteriormente realizaron su habitual marcha silenciosa por la Quinta Avenida, en el barrio habanero de Miramar. Pollán denunció que la Seguridad del Estado impidió la llegada a la Iglesia de Santa Rita de al menos 10 mujeres que apoyan a las Damas de Blanco (*Diario de Cuba*, 5/4/10).

**April 4:** About 200 people took part in prayers on Easter Sunday in the first in Cuba and Caribbean countries Russian Orthodox church. Not only Russians and CIS nationals, living in Cuba on a permanent basis or temporarily, but other Cubans went to the church on Easter. Many of believers came not only from the outskirts of Havana, but also from other cities and regions of the country. Over 30 people arrived from central provinces Ciego de Avila and Villa Clara. Violetta Shcherbina from the coordinating council of fellow countrymen in Cuba, said the Easter holiday had been excellent. “The existence of an Orthodox church in Havana is very important for our fellow coun-trymen,” she stressed, adding that more and more people in Cuba become Orthodox Christians. According to official information, there are more than 2,000 people in the Orthodox community in Cuba. Most of them were born in former Soviet republics and live on the island on a permanent basis. There are also foreign diplomats and specialists among them. Besides, quite a lot of Cubans growing up in mixed families are Orthodox Christians (*TASS*, 5/4/10).

**Abril 4:** Alrededor de 2 mil fieles de diferentes iglesias salieron a las calles de la ciudad de Santa Clara, en el centro de la isla, para celebrar el domingo de resurrección. En la procesión predominaron los miembros de las iglesias pentecostés, metodista y bautista, quienes la noche anterior alabaron al Señor con himnos y canciones. Los fieles se reunieron en calle Rafael Tristá y Juan Bruno Zayas, caminaron dos cuadras y le dieron una vuelta al céntrico parque Leoncio Vidal. Los participantes portaban carteles con frases alegóricas a la resurrección de Cristo. También corearon frases como ¡Cristo salva este pueblo! ¡Viva Cristo el rey! ¡Dios sea con nosotros!, entre otras. La procesión se llevo a cabo sin incidentes, bajo la mirada atenta de la policía. Según la opinión generalizada, en los últimos 50 años no había ocurrido una procesión de tal magnitud (*Cubanet*, 7/4/10).

**Abril 5:** Elsa González, esposa del prisionero de conciencia del Grupo de los 75, Víctor Rolando Arroyo, quien había dejado de ingerir alimentos el 30 de marzo debido a que le imponían que utilizara las bandejas metálicas del comedor (algo perjudicial para su salud, según los médicos), informó que su esposo recibió en su celda la visita del jefe de la prisión, quien le dijo que la decisión de las autoridades había sido un error y que podía comenzar a utilizar sus vasijas plásticas nuevamente. Arroyo comenzó nuevamente a comer el 2 de abril, según confirmó González (*Cubanet*, 5/4/10).

**Abril 5:** La oposición cubana, entre ellos Guillermo Fariñas, en huelga de hambre desde hace 40 días, afirmó que intensificará sus reclamos por la liberación de presos políticos, pese a la advertencia del presidente Raúl Castro de que no cederá al “chantaje”. “No me tomó por sorpresa esta actitud intransigente de Raúl”, porque “siempre hemos dicho que el gobierno cubano ha demostrado históricamente que actúa de manera irracional”, declaró telefónicamente a la *AFP* Fariñas, desde el hospital provincial de Santa Clara, 280 km al este de La Habana, donde fue hospitalizado el 11 de marzo. Fariñas, sicólogo y periodista independiente de 48 años, inició su ayuno el pasado 24 de febrero, un día después de que muriera el preso político Orlando Zapata tras una huelga de hambre de casi tres meses en demanda de mejoras en las condiciones carcelarias. El opositor, que exige la liberación de 26 presos políticos enfermos, dijo haber asumido como “un reto” la advertencia de Raúl Castro. “Ahora más que nunca es que hay que continuar la huelga de hambre y le aceptamos el reto y vamos a morir con toda la dignidad”, añadió, al denunciar la “crueldad y falta de humanismo del régimen”. El grupo Damas de

Blanco, de madres y esposas de presos políticos, consideró que la reacción del gobierno “era de esperar” porque, según una de sus líderes, Bertha Soler, “se siente acorralado”. “No es un chantaje ni estamos presionando a nadie, estamos haciendo cosas para que sean un poco más comprensivos y humanos” y “vamos a seguir protestando pacíficamente hasta que liberen a nuestros presos”, declaró Soler. Para el opositor Elizardo Sánchez, quien dirige la ilegal pero tolerada Comisión Cubana de Derechos humanos y Reconciliación Nacional (CCDHRN), la posición del gobierno “es una forma completamente irresponsable y mezquina de actuar” (*El Nuevo Herald*, 5/4/10).

**April 5:** A batch of 160,000 tablets made from anamu, a new immune stimulant herbal drug, will be tried on patients with cancer and AIDS in Cuba. The drug will be produced by the Pharmaceutical Laboratories Oriente in Santiago de Cuba. The 400-mg tablet, which is completely natural, will be used initially in the oncology service and also on patients with AIDS virus to prove its effectiveness. The pills are made from leaves and young stems of anamu, a wild grass growing on the island. The tablets are supported by ethnomedical reports of the plant and researches related to its traditional use and benefits. Alexander Batista, director of the Centre for Toxicology and Biomedicine in Santiago, said the overall effectiveness of the drug has been demonstrated in preclinical and toxicological tests (*Xinhua*, 5/4/10).

**April 6:** A Cuban dissident who traveled to Miami in 2005 but was blocked when he tried to return legally to the island has drowned during an attempt to sneak back into the island aboard a boat, friends said. Adrián Leiva had long demanded the Cuban government allow its people to leave and return as they wished, arguing at one point that migration was “a dagger plunged into the heart of the Cuban nation.” He told friends he was going to slip back into the island by boat on March 22, and his sister Eva recognized his body at a Havana morgue on April 5, said Miguel Saludes, a longtime friend in Cuba and Miami. Leiva had returned to Cuba in 2008, but was expelled after his three-month permit expired, Saludes told *El Nuevo Herald*. He tried again last year, and was turned back at Miami International Airport (*El Nuevo Herald*, 6/4/10).

**April 6:** The Vilma Espin Memorial, that will open its doors on April 7 at her native city of Santiago de Cuba, on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of her birth, will bring the Cuban people closer to the life and work of the remarkable revolutionary. The centre’s director, Margiola Sanchez, who was a leader with the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) in Santiago de Cuba province, highlighted that the museum will have six rooms, where the details on the experiences of this heroine of mountains and plains and her devotion to the tasks of the Revolution will be shown. The Memorial will also have other areas, like a hall to host events; another one with digital information on her life; and yet another one to exhibit the work on fine art creators (*ACN*, 6/4/10).

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another one with digital information on her life; and yet another one to exhibit the work on fine art creators (ACN, 6/4/10).

**Abril 6:** El cantautor Silvio Rodríguez dijo que si estuviera en sus manos “habría amnistiado a esos cien presos que algunos llaman ‘de conciencia’”, al comentar las recientes declaraciones de Pablo Milanés sobre el tema. “Creo que hay que superar la lógica de la Guerra Fría y que nuestra política no debería articularse con la política de nadie. No me importaría que dijeran que los liberé por presión (...) Hay que cambiar la vieja lógica, porque no podemos ser prisioneros eternos de nuestro pasado, porque hay más mañana que ayer esperándonos”, dijo el cantautor en una entrevista para el diario argentino *Página 12*. Rodríguez, quien recientemente pidió “cambios” en una rueda de prensa en la que también estaba el ministro de Cultura, cuestionó a la prensa oficial de la isla por “ser muy recatada y triunfalista”. “Hemos criticado mucho eso, pero hasta ahora no ha aparecido la voluntad de superarlo. Mi posición es que todos tengamos derecho a la información, a crearnos una opinión personal de cada cosa y a comentar lo que sea, sin limitaciones”, añadió. El cantautor también cuestionó que “a cada instante se habla peor de Cuba, la mayoría de las veces sin fundamentos, sólo porque lo desean los que pagan, los dueños de la llamada Gran Prensa y del 90 por ciento de Internet”. “(Son) los mismos sinvergüenzas que hace 50 años nos tienen bloqueados de todo, menos de su sacrosanta información”, señaló (*Diario de Cuba*, 6/4/10).

**Abril 6:** El gobierno hace circular por centros de trabajo de la isla un “Plan contra alteraciones del orden y disturbios contrarrevolucionarios”, que reactiva las llamadas “Brigadas de Respuesta Rápida”, surgidas en los años noventa, y las autoriza a golpear con “palos, cabillas y cables” para responder a supuestas provocaciones de los opositores. El documento, dado a conocer por la bloguera Yoani Sánchez, autora de *Generación Y*, a través de su Twitter, establece las pautas de actuación. “Se considera que pueden ocurrir manifestaciones contrarrevolucionarias” que tendrían como objetivo “actuar contra la seguridad integral de nuestros trabajadores y nuestros clientes con el fin de causar incertidumbre en los mismos y afectar nuestra economía”, dice el texto. Ordena a los trabajadores “observar ininterrumpidamente las zonas de posibles alteraciones del orden y disturbios contrarrevolucionarios” y rechazarlos. “Para el cumplimiento de las misiones, se organizan los trabajadores que se encuentren trabajando y, si la situación lo necesita, en la medida de las posibilidades se visa al resto de los trabajadores que franquean”, indica el texto. Explícitamente, enumera como a “armamento” a utilizar “palos, cabillas y cables”. El documento incluye varios anexos, que establecen las “acciones a ejecutar” ante diferentes “manifestaciones”. Así, por ejemplo, ante “acciones o expresiones en contra de la Revolución o cuadros del partido o del gobierno a cualquier nivel”, las misiones de los integrantes de las brigadas, que ahora el régimen llama “Destacamentos de Respuesta Rápida”, son “responder con argumentos, solidez convincente y enérgicamente (...) y dejar claro que no se permiten tales hechos”. Ante “acciones que puedan calificarse como contrarrevolución”, los trabajadores tendrán que responder con las “medidas que sean necesarias (...) para impedir a toda costa que se materialicen”. Entre los anexos se incluye un acta de constitución del Destacamento de Respuesta Rápida de cada centro laboral, que deberán firmar los trabajadores y que los compromete a “rechazar con firmeza cualquier manifestación contrarrevolucionaria (...) vengan de donde vengan y en la cuantía que sea” (*Diario de Cuba*, 6/4/10).

**April 7:** The Association of Cuban Educators (APC) in the central province of Camagüey generalizes the initiative “I’m going with you” in secondary schools and support changes in the education system. Ángel Luis Gómez Cardoso, APC president in this province, told the press that they extended the initiative to senior high schools, in order to provide the students with better tools to face the challenge the college entrance tests represent to them. “I’m going with you” is a movement born from the need to help new teachers to implement the changes the Cuban education system is undergoing. As part of this initiative retired teachers return to the classrooms and pass their experiences to youngsters, thus enhancing their training. A research done a year ago showed, according to Gonzalez Rodriguez, there were inefficiencies in the education system, especially on the evaluation sphere. “We did an investigation in 292 junior high schools in four provinces, and interviewed over 3000 people, including teachers, students, officials and relatives of the children” (ACN, 7/4/10).

**April 7:** A cultural gala was carried out at the mountain range of Santiago de Cuba province to mark the 80th anniversary of the birth of Vilma Espin, which included poems dedicated to her and songs she liked. On top of the Micara hillock, where her mortal remains rest at the Mausoleum built to the martyrs of the Frank Pais Eastern Second Front, students recited verses. Art instructors from the Jose Marti Brigade, the artistic mountain ensemble, the Son Corazón Sextet, the Renacer Quartet and soloists interpreted love and patriotic pieces like “Sin ti” and “El Mambi”, which made many of those attending the special presentation to remember her and brought tears to their eyes. Then, relatives of the remarkable fighter, members of the National Secretariat of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) and top leaders of the organization in the eastern provinces, paid tribute to Vilma before the tomb that keeps her ashes (ACN, 7/4/10).

**April 7:** Cuban dissident Franklin Pelegrino del Toro told the press that he has ended the hunger strike he began 40 days ago to press for the release of political prisoners. “The demand and the clamor of the internal opposition, my family, who needs me, and even the churches and the brothers in exile, convinced us that I’m needed here alive, to fight for Cuba,” the barber and activist said by telephone from the eastern city of Holguin. Pelegrino, 38, thanked other dissidents for their “solidarity and support” and said his fast was a gesture in favor of human rights, not an attempt at “blackmail,” as Cuban President Raul Castro labeled it in a speech. “The only thing I requested was the right of freedom for the political prisoners,” Pelegrino said from the home of friend and fellow dissident Maria Antonia Hidalgo. Pelegrino said he was already ingesting dextrose solution and would soon begin taking liquid nourishment. He launched his protest February 28, five days after the death of political prisoner Orlando Zapata Tamayo following an 85-day hunger strike. “It’s an illogical thing for me to continue in this strike because we could see, on the part of Raul Castro, who already let us know he won’t accept any blackmail,” Pelegrino said (EFE, 8/4/10).

**Abril 7:** El periodista independiente Guillermo Fariñas, en huelga de hambre y sed desde el pasado 24 de febrero, afirmó que respeta la decisión del opositor Franklin Pelegrino de abandonar su ayuno, pero dijo de que él llegará “hasta las últimas consecuencias” para reclamar la libertad de los 26 presos políticos enfermos, informó *Europa Press*. “Respetamos esa decisión”, indicó Fariñas, de 48 años, en una entrevista telefónica con *Europa Press* desde su cama en el Hospital Arnaldo Milián Castro, de Santa Clara. Señaló que los días que duró la

huelga de hambre de Pelegrino “conmovieron” a diversos sectores y añadió que entiende su postura de “continuar la lucha pacífica por otras vías”. Sin embargo, Fariñas declaró que no se plantea dejar su huelga de hambre y que mantiene su intención de llevarla “hasta las últimas consecuencias”, especialmente después del discurso pronunciado por Raúl Castro el 4 de abril (*Diario de Cuba*, 8/4/10).

**April 7:** The First Vice President of the Cuban councils of State and Ministers, Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, called for a more rational use of material and human resources in the public health care sector. During a visit to the easternmost province of Guantanamo, Machado Ventura spoke with executives and workers of the health care sector there and said that it is vital and urgent to be efficient in this sector to which the State earmarks a large part of the national budget. The high-ranking official called for an appropriate use of diagnosis equipment in hospitals, policlinics and other health care centres and noted that it is also essential to improve the quality of services. Machado Ventura was accompanied by the First Secretary of the Cuban Communist Party in the territory, Luis Torres Iribar, and they visited the Martires de Jamaica policlinic, re-inaugurated last December after an ongoing expansion process in which almost three million dollars and more than 250,000 Cuban pesos have been invested (*ACN*, 7/4/10).

**Abril 7:** Cuba responde con música a la “campana mediática” que según las autoridades se ha desatado a raíz de la huelga de hambre del opositor Guillermo Fariñas. Bajo el título “En defensa de Cuba” el 10 de abril se celebrarán sendos conciertos en La Habana y Santiago de Cuba para manifestar “su rechazo a la campana mediática que en estos momentos pretende denigrar la realidad cubana”, escribió *Granma*. Los conciertos contarán con la participación de trovadores como Amaury Pérez y Vicente Feliú, y escritores como Miguel Barnet y Nancy Morejón. Intelectuales y artistas cubanos se pronunciaron el mes pasado en contra de la declaración “Yo acuso al gobierno cubano” suscrita tras la muerte del preso Orlando Zapata luego de una huelga de hambre de dos meses y medio (*ANSA*, 7/4/10).

**Abril 8:** Cuba está ahora en la retaguardia del cine, con una política cinematográfica de estilo “soviético”, anquilosada como un “fósil”, afirmó el cineasta cubano Pavel Giroud, quien estos días presenta en la capital española su película *Omertá*. “La manera en que está diseñada la cinematografía en Cuba es como estaba forjada la soviética. Hoy es inoperante. Fue un dinosaurio fiero y ahora es un dinosaurio viejo, un fósil, que también es el reflejo del país, de la situación que se vive allí”, explicó Giroud en una entrevista. Giroud (1972), que se reconoce deudor de autores tan distintos como los hermanos Coen y Almodóvar, es el director y guionista de *Omertá*, un filme del 2008 que ahora presenta la Casa de América de Madrid. “La crítica oficial machacó la película. Los órganos de prensa oficiales le dieron con todo, incluso al argumento, a la producción artística. Sin embargo, en el circuito de críticos jóvenes, alternativos, en los blogs de reflexiones sobre cine, sí tuvo muy buena acogida”, afirmó. Para este joven autor cubano (reconocido internacionalmente por su anterior filme, *La edad de la peseta*), al contrario de lo que ocurre en Latinoamérica, donde el cine “se encuentra en su mejor momento, sobre todo por su pluralidad”, Cuba, en cambio, “ahora está en la retaguardia”. “Está fallando la política cinematográfica de la nación cuando en su momento fue su bien máspreciado. Es simplemente la crisis y decadencia de un sistema”, subrayó. Según Giroud, lo que más daño ha hecho a Cuba ha sido “el enfrentamiento entre dos posiciones muy radicales, entre las que nunca va a haber negociación posible” (*EFE*, 8/4/10).

**Abril 8:** Las autoridades cubanas distribuyeron más de 50,000 ejemplares del tabloide “¿Qué hacer en caso de un sismo?” en la oriental ciudad de Santiago de Cuba, con el objetivo de “reducir las vulnerabilidades y corregir la conducta de la población en caso de un terremoto de gran intensidad”, informó Bladimir Moreno, director del Centro Nacional de Investigaciones Sismológicas. Esa zona y todo el oriente de la nación caribeña fueron sacudidos por un sismo de 5,5 grados en la escala de Richter el pasado 20 de marzo (*IPS*, 8/4/10).

**April 8:** Cuban singer songwriter Silvio Rodriguez will open the Concert for the Homeland to be staged at the Anti-imperialist Square in Havana on April 10. Rodriguez will be the first of a large number of artists who will sing in defense of the Cuban people’s life and right to maintain their independence, read a report posted on [www.lajiribilla.cu](http://www.lajiribilla.cu). According to *La Jiribilla*, Rodriguez’ statements during the presentation of his latest album “Segunda Cita” were manipulated by several foreign media outlets which questioned the artist’s stance regarding the Revolution. His decision to participate in the concert shows his confidence on the transformation process in Cuba that started 50 years ago, said *La Jiribilla*. Rodriguez expressed his rejection to any sort of foreign interference in the island’s domestic affairs by signing a manifesto entitled In Defense of Cuba issued by Net of Networks in Defense of Mankind. The document has been endorsed by thousands of people across the world, including cultural personalities (*ACN*, 8/4/10).

**April 8:** Cuban education authorities announced that university quotas will be in correspondence with the country’s economic needs and will decrease their number this academic year. Rene Sanchez, Head of Enrolment and Labor Department at the Ministry of Higher Education, said they are offering some 100 000 places, a lesser figure than previous year’s, in all sort of specialities. Sanchez referred at a press conference that somewhere around 140 to 150,000 Cuban youngsters will apply to enrol at the university this year and will take the tests for that purpose.

He pointed out that the main specialities to be offered are those of agriculture, basic sciences and pedagogical ones, while humanity ones will decrease. Applicants must score over 60 percent in the different test which include Math, Spanish and Cuban History. They will take the same tests all over the country at the same time and date in May, Sanchez added (*ACN*, 8/4/10).

**April 8:** Cuban dissidents proposed that the public vote on whether the island’s political prisoners should be freed, while Cuba said its enemies are using human rights to “demonize” it. The dissidents acknowledge their idea is unlikely to be accepted, but said they suggested it to end an impasse between the government and dissident hunger striker Guillermo Farinas, who is seeking the release of 26 ailing political prisoners. “Why not leave the solution of this matter in the hands of the people?” Francisco Chaviano said in a press conference held by dissident group Agenda for the Cuban Transition. He said the referendum, which would be unprecedented in Cuba where the Communist Party is the only legal political party, could be held in conjunction with upcoming municipal elections. Voters could be offered three options, he said: free all of Cuba’s estimated 200 political prisoners, free just the 26 supported by Farinas, or keep all of them behind bars (*EFE*, 8/4/10; *The Washington Post*, 9/4/10).

**April 8:** Cuba will use its annual May Day march as a huge show of popular support for the Castro government, its latest attempt to defend itself from criticism over human rights on the

island. An editorial in the Communist Party newspaper *Granma* titled “We defend the truth with our morals and principles” blasted the US government Thursday, saying “the empire and its allies have launched a new crusade to demonize Cuba.” The editorial was similar to several opinion pieces in state-controlled newspapers recently that have blamed the foreign press, Washington and governments in Europe for glorifying dissidents Orlando Zapata Tamayo and Guillermo Farinas. “On May 1, you will receive from our people and workers a resounding and unequivocal answer in support of the revolution,” proclaimed the editorial, which took up the entire front page. Cuba traditionally marks International Workers’ Day with hundreds of thousands marching through Havana’s Plaza of the Revolution — though Fidel Castro no longer speaks since undergoing emergency surgery and disappearing from public view in 2006. The demonstration is always a pro-government celebration, with many islanders waving pictures of Fidel Castro and his younger brother Raul skyward. But *Granma* formally declaring it as such is unusual and reflects mounting tensions (*AP*, 8/4/10).

**April 8:** Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, first vice-president of the councils of State and Ministers made a call to consolidate the new works erected in Guayabal, a coastal town eastern Las Tunas, hit in 2008 by Hurricane Paloma. During a tour of this community of Amancio municipality, Machado Ventura appreciated the 112 houses built in a little over a year at almost two kilometers from the coast, for families who lost their homes as a consequence of the storm. During his conversation with locals, Machado Ventura, who is also a Politburo member of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), highlighted the importance of preserving and taking care of the new and comfortable two-story buildings. He also knew of other new works already in operation, among them a drugstore, a doctor’s office, a dentist’s office, a rehabilitation room, a vegetable garden, and the Pedro Plaza primary school, where 200 children are studying (*ACN*, 8/4/10).

**Abril 9:** Julio Beltrán y Lázaro Joaquín Alonso, miembros de la dirección del ilegal Partido Republicano de Cuba, fueron detenidos y deportados de la provincia Pinar del Rio por agentes de la policía política el 1ro de abril, según comunicaron ambos a la prensa independiente. Beltrán y Alonso fueron interceptados y conducidos al cuartel de la policía por dos agentes, cuando abandonaban la vivienda de Idalberto Abascal, en Pedro Rodríguez número 3, en el municipio San Juan y Martínez. También fueron detenidos Idalberto Abascal, miembro del PRC, y Pedro González, delegado del partido en San Juan y Martínez. Ambos fueron puestos en libertad a las 8 de la noche. A la una de la madrugada del siguiente día, Beltrán y Alonso llegaron a la terminal de ómnibus, acompañados de dos policías, y allí abordaron un ómnibus interprovincial que los condujo a la capital (*Cubanet*, 9/4/10).

**Abril 9:** Por primera vez en Cuba sesionará un foro de Acceso Abierto a la Información, como parte del Congreso Internacional de Información - Info 2010, en el Palacio de las Convenciones de la capital cubana del 19 al 23 de abril. Carmen Sánchez, directora del Instituto de Información Científica y Tecnológica y presidenta del comité organizador, expresó que el foro fue antecedido por la semana mundial de Acceso Abierto a la Información, en octubre pasado. El coordinador del evento, Ricardo Cásate, declaró que el Movimiento de Acceso Libre a la Información tiene como objetivo eliminar los obstáculos a las consultas de materiales científicos en formato digital. Más de 500 delegados de 20 países confirmaron su participación en el Congreso Info 2010, que

sesionará con el lema central La Sociedad del Conocimiento y sus aspectos críticos (*Radio Reloj*, 9/4/10).

**Abril 9:** Fidel Castro celebró la “estocada profunda” de su hermano Raúl Castro a Estados Unidos y Europa, a cuyos gobiernos acusó de una campaña contra la revolución por las huelgas de hambre de opositores. “Fue una estocada profunda en las entrañas del imperio y sus cínicos aliados”, afirmó Castro en un artículo publicado en la prensa, al referirse al discurso de Raúl Castro en el Congreso de la Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (UJC). Advirtiendo que no cederá al “chantaje”, Raúl acusó a Washington y Bruselas de orquestar una campaña contra Cuba con las huelgas de hambre de los opositores Orlando Zapata, fallecido el 23 de febrero tras casi tres meses de ayuno en prisión, y Guillermo Fariñas, sin tomar alimentos desde hace 44 días para exigir la libertad de presos políticos. Fidel Castro dijo que en 51 años de revolución Cuba ha estado “asediada por repugnantes mentiras y calumnias”, pero “sigue en pie decidida a resistir”. Castro, de 83 años, señaló que por ello es necesario “superar y vencer todo lo que conspire contra el desarrollo sano de nuestra economía” y luchar contra “el oportunismo y la traición”. “Los reaccionarios, los mercenarios, los que anhelan consumismo y rehúsan el trabajo y el estudio, tendrán cada vez menos espacio en la vida pública”, dijo el líder comunista, al coincidir con varios problemas sobre los que su hermano -dijo- puso “los puntos sobre las íes” en el discurso ([El IX Congreso de la UJC](#); *AFP*, 9/4/10).

**April 9:** Almost 200,000 Cuban citizens were immunized against the A-H1N1 influenza virus during the first week of an ongoing nationwide vaccination campaign that began on April 1. Deputy Public Health Minister Luis Estruch said on Thursday that 80 percent of pregnant women and children have received their vaccine doses. In the first stage of the campaign, scheduled to end on April 20, some 80,000 registered pregnant women and those within the term of up to 42 days after labor will be immunized. A second stage of the vaccination program will be held from May 3 to 15 for children from six months to nine years of age (*ACN*, 9/4/10).

**Abril 9:** El cantautor Silvio Rodríguez defendió la existencia de un “gobierno de ancianos” en Cuba, justificó los fusilamientos de la revolución que lideró Fidel Castro en 1959 y afirmó que la disidencia “no tiene pueblo”, en un nuevo capítulo de su debate con el escritor Carlos Alberto Montaner. “No me molesta un gobierno de ancianos. En muchas culturas antiguas tener edad, por la sensatez inmanente, era un requisito para gobernar”, afirma Rodríguez en un artículo publicado en el sitio digital oficial *Cubadebate*. El cantautor pide a Montaner que recuerde que también él adquirió sus juicios morales y su percepción de la realidad y los conflictos sociales hace medio siglo. “No pretendas venderte como prospecto de la generación del dos mil, que no te queda bien”, agrega. Sobre los fusilamientos, dice que “se originaron en los primeros meses de la revolución, contra criminales de guerra del batistato: torturadores y asesinos probados en los juicios que el pueblo de Cuba miró sobrecogido”. “La guerra despiadada que nos impuso la CIA obligó al gobierno a mantenerla como medida persuasiva”, añade Rodríguez, pero reconoce que “con los años” se ha dado cuenta “de que la pena de muerte es algo que debiera abolirse en todo el mundo, por incivilizada”. “La oposición, en las prisiones, enfrenta el mismo drama que en las calles: no tienen pueblo, sus posiciones los alejan de las masas”, sostiene el cantautor, y niega que haya malos tratos en las cárceles de la isla. Sobre las marchas de las Damas de Blanco, familiares de 75 opositores presos, le parece “lógico que las madres y esposas de los presos se preocupen por sus familiares y que lo manifiesten”, pero no “que reciban ayuda económica de

otro gobierno y mucho menos de connotados terroristas, como parece ser el caso de ciertas señoras”. “No estoy de acuerdo con los actos de repudio -eufemismo para las contramanifestaciones gubernamentales-, pero otros cubanos se indignan hasta el punto de cometerlos. Los cubanos de Miami hacen lo mismo. Debe ser la parte triste de nuestro karma”, afirma Rodríguez. El artista reconoce que hay censura en Cuba, pero matiza que también en otros países. “En algunas entrevistas y canciones, a través de una trayectoria de más de 40 años, he señalado lo que he considerado criticable del proceso revolucionario. En otras he apoyado este proceso, sin caer jamás en el servilismo o el panfleto”, aseguró ([Correspondencia íntegra entre Rodríguez y Montaner](#); *El Nuevo Herald*, 10/4/10).

**April 10:** A surprisingly small crowd sweated and sang along to performances by Cuban rock, folk and salsa stars, at what the communist government billed as a politically important “concert for the homeland.” Organizers had said the show would be headlined by Cuba’s most famous folk singer, Silvio Rodríguez. But instead Cuban writer Nancy Morejon was the first to take the stage reading a letter that defended the single-party communist system. Rodríguez read a piece inspired in verses by writer Berthold Brecht — and then left without performing. “If this government is so bad, where has such a good people come from?” he asked. “If an amnesty truly hurts us so bad, why there is no explanation about it, Rodríguez asked in what seemed a reference to dozens of political prisoners in the island. Rodríguez is a folk legend. Days before, he surprised many by releasing a new album with lyrics suggesting that removing the “r” from “revolution” would lead to “evolution.” Immediately after the 63-year-old Rodríguez’s appearance were performances by top artists from the “Nueva Trova” movement, a genre that mixes folk music and pro-Castro politics. But many in the already sparse crowd drifted away, missing later performances by other musicians and poetry recited by Cuban film stars. State-controlled media said the concert would prove Cuba’s artists and intellectuals support the government. But the approximately 1,400 Cubans who turned out to watch were nothing compared to the thousands who routinely jam the plaza for free concerts, including a show in March by Puerto Rican rockers Calle 13 (*AP*, *Cubadebate*, *La Jiribilla*, 10/4/10).

**April 11:** Police broke up a weekly march by wives and mothers of imprisoned Cuban opposition leaders, forcing them onto a bus and driving them home as a pro-government crowd screamed insults. Uniformed police and plainclothes security agents blocked a sidewalk along Havana’s Fifth Avenue, stopping five members of the “Damas de Blanco,” or “Ladies in White,” from following their traditional march route, said Bertha Soler, one of the group’s leaders. “There was a mob of government people shouting things,” Soler said when reached by phone later at the home of Laura Pollan, who co-founded the group. Soler’s husband, Angel Moya, is in jail for dissident activities. The “Ladies in White” traditionally attend Sunday Mass at Santa Rica Church in the upscale Miramar neighborhood, then march silently down the swank boulevard to demand the release of their relatives — top political activists, community organizers and independent journalists. They have marched every Sunday for years and are usually allowed to do so without incident. Pollan said a state security official visited her home Sunday morning to warn the group not to demonstrate, saying they did not have government permission. She said the group would demonstrate as usual next Sunday unless the government produced a document stating that they are not allowed to do so. “I don’t understand why we have to ask permission to march,” Soler said. The Cuban government had no immediate comment (*Diario de Cuba*, 11/4/10; *AP*, 12/4/10).

**Abril 11:** La Seguridad del Estado lanzó en la ciudad oriental de Banes una nueva operación de acoso contra las Damas de Blanco, entre ellas Reina Luisa Tamayo. Las mujeres asistieron a misa para orar por la liberación de los presos políticos cubanos y por el alma del fallecido disidente, Orlando Zapata Tamayo. Durante la ceremonia, se escuchaban los gritos de las turbas pro castristas en las afueras de la iglesia Nuestra Señora de la Caridad. Cuando las Damas de Blanco salieron para iniciar una caminata de forma pacífica, gritaron “Zapata Vive”, y en ese momento fueron interrumpidas y desplazadas por las turbas organizadas por el gobierno comunista de Cuba. Marta Díaz Roldón, una Dama de Apoyo al mencionado grupo de mujeres, fue arrestada el día anterior y puesta en libertad el domingo (*Radio Martí*, 11/4/10).

**Abril 11:** El periodista independiente Oscar Sánchez Mádam fue excarcelado este domingo tras cumplir su condena. “Los tres años que pasé en cautiverio fueron los peores años de mi vida”, dijo el disidente en declaraciones a la emisora desde Matanzas, donde reside. “Vi golpizas, vi a presos comunes cortarse las venas, los tendones, en señal de protesta, e incluso un motín del destacamento de menores, algo horrible”, recordó. Sánchez Mádam fue sentenciado a tres años en abril de 2007, bajo el cargo de “peligrosidad social predelictiva”, que las autoridades suelen utilizar para encarcelar opositores. Dijo que continuará “ejerciendo el periodismo libre y promoviendo la defensa de la Declaración Universal de los Derechos Humanos”, y que no abandonará la isla “bajo ningún concepto”. “Si los comunistas quieren, que me asesinen o que me vuelvan a encarcelar, pero continuaré defendiendo la libertad de expresión y la de todos los cubanos”, advirtió (*Radio Martí*, 11/4/10).

**Abril 12:** El médico opositor cubano Darsi Ferrer, preso sin juicio desde julio de 2009, depuso la huelga de hambre que mantenía desde hace tres semanas, luego de que las autoridades atendieran su demanda, pero el disidente Guillermo Fariñas sigue su ayuno de casi 50 días, según sus familias. Darsi, de 40 años, pedía “un juicio justo y atención estomatológica para sepsis bucal que presenta, y ambos reclamos fueron atendidos”, informó su esposa, Yusnaimy Jorge, vía teléfono a la *AFP* tras precisar que el disidente depuso la huelga el 11 de abril. “El jefe del penal donde está recluido (en el oeste de La Habana) le prometió que ya lo van a llevar a juicio y, una vez satisfechos sus reclamos, decidió abandonar la huelga que inició el 20 de marzo”, añadió. De tres opositores en huelga de hambre, Ferrer es el segundo en levantar su protesta luego de que lo hizo Franklin Pelegrino, un obrero de 38 años, tras 40 días de ayuno en apoyo a Fariñas, sicólogo y periodista de 48 años. Fariñas, que reclama la libertad de 26 presos políticos que están enfermos, inició su protesta el 24 de febrero, un día después de la muerte del preso político Orlando Zapata, tras casi tres meses de una huelga de hambre por mejoras de las condiciones carcelarias (*El Nuevo Herald*, 13/4/10).

**April 13:** The Cuban Civil Defense reported that a 4.4 earthquake in the Richter scale took place near the southern coast of eastern Cuba, and was felt all over that region. The Cuban National Seismologic Service station network recorded the epicentre of the quake at the 19.63 North, 76.65 West, some 35 kilometers (22 miles) southeast La Plata town, in Santiago de Cuba, at a 10 kilometer depth. There were reports of people feeling the tremor throughout the eastern region. This is the 23rd felt in 2010 (*ACN*, 13/4/10).

**Abril 13:** La salud del disidente Guillermo Fariñas, en huelga de hambre y sed desde hace mes y medio, ha empeorado en los últimos días debido a una posible bacteria que le ha generado fiebres muy altas, además de una gran debilidad que se ha acentuado desde el 11 de abril cuando los médicos decidieron retirarle la alimentación parenteral, reportó *Europa Press*. Clara Pérez Gómez, esposa de Fariñas, informó a esa agencia de noticias que el periodista independiente “se queja” constantemente de dolores articulares en todo el cuerpo. “No puede ni abrir los ojos y no quiere hablar”, alertó. La familia está a la espera de los resultados del hemocultivo, aunque temen que pueda tratarse de una bacteria contraída por el catéter, similar al “estafilococo aureus” que hace unas semanas le provocó una “infección severa”, que Fariñas atribuyó en su momento a las condiciones sanitarias del Hospital Provincial Arnaldo Milián de Santa Clara, donde se encuentra ingresado desde el pasado 11 de marzo. Los médicos que le atienden en el centro de salud decidieron retirarle el catéter por donde le suministraban los sueros y la hidratación, debido a su alta temperatura corporal. “Desde el domingo por la mañana Fariñas no recibe alimentación”, acotó su esposa. El activista “se niega” a abandonar la huelga de hambre y sed que comenzó el pasado 24 de febrero para condenar la muerte del preso de conciencia Orlando Zapata Tamayo y exigir la liberación de 26 prisioneros políticos que se encuentran enfermos (*Diario de Cuba*, 13/4/10).

**April 13:** A total of 373,438 Cubans have so far been immunized against the pandemic A H1N1 virus, which represents 33.3 per cent of the over one million citizens who will receive this vaccine on the island. The doses has been administered to 67,026 pregnant women and women who have recently given birth, out of the 77,674 that will be protected against this new virus. Also receiving the vaccine, besides pregnant women, are mainly young adults, children and people of all ages suffering from chronic diseases, that is, those people considered to be in higher risk. In statements published by *Granma* newspaper, Maria Josefa Llanes, head of the National Program of Acute Respiratory Diseases of the Public Health Ministry, said that no serious adverse or lethal reactions have been reported as a consequence of the vaccine. She added that the symptoms heading the list –headache, fever and weakness- have been mild, and pointed out that the country is still in the “flu season”, during which various strains circulate, mainly that of the A H1N1 (*ACN*, 13/4/10).

**Abril 13:** El cantautor Silvio Rodríguez sugirió que no continuará la polémica epistolar con el escritor Carlos Alberto Montaner y evitó responder a la propuesta que éste le hiciera de formar un comité conjunto para buscar el fin del embargo de Estados Unidos. La respuesta de Silvio tiene un sólo párrafo. El trovador dice que no puede pasarse la vida polemizando y pide a Montaner que “abandone” la guerra fría y luche “contra el bloqueo”. La polémica entre Montaner y Rodríguez, figura emblemática de la cultura oficial en la isla, ha provocado un amplio interés internacional desde hace dos semanas. El 30 de marzo, Rodríguez preguntó en el sitio digital *kaosenlared.net* si Montaner firmaría una carta hecha por los cubanos que perdieron familiares en atentados patrocinados por la Agencia Central de Inteligencia (CIA) ([Tercera respuesta de Montaner a Silvio](#); [Silvio se retracta](#); *El Nuevo Herald, Diario de Cuba*, 14/4/10).

**April 13:** The vice president of the National Electoral Commission, Ruben Perez, praised the high quality of nationwide preparations for the April 25 partial elections. The official told *ACN* that members of the electoral body recently visited 130 municipalities where they were able to see first- hand the excellent organization of the process at the municipal and provincial levels.

“The organization is excellent and it is particularly outstanding in the mountainous municipalities of Sierra Maestra and other regions where they have implemented all the necessary mechanisms to guarantee communications and the flow of information,” Perez said. He also praised the fine training of all electoral authorities which, added up to all the experience from previous votes, guarantees the success of the process that will be preceded by a dynamic test on April 18. On April 25, more than eight million Cubans will choose their local government representatives. A second round of the vote for districts that need it is scheduled for May 1 (ACN, 14/4/10).

**April 15:** Corruption at the highest levels of government — not the meddling of a small band of dissidents — is the greatest threat to Cuba’s communist system, a leading academic said in a highly unusual opinion posted on a state Web site. The article by Esteban Morales — a historian who has written extensively on race and relations with the United States — crossed a number of red lines in tightly controlled Cuba, including openly discussing corruption rumors surrounding the dismissal of a top government aviation official who had fought alongside Ernesto “Che” Guevara and the Castros in the 1950s. Morales said some top Cuban officials are preparing to divide the spoils if Cuba’s political system disintegrates, like the shadowy oligarchs that emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. “In reality, corruption is much more dangerous than so-called internal dissent,” Morales wrote in the piece, which appeared on the Web site of the state National Artists and Writers Union of Cuba. “The latter is isolated (...) but corruption is truly counterrevolutionary because it comes from within the government and the state apparatus, which are the ones that really control the country’s resources.” Morales is a prominent intellectual who only three days before appeared on a state television program defending the government on another topic. Morales never singled out Fidel or Raul Castro for blame, but he said cronyism is rampant in the system that has developed 51 years after their revolution won power and said some officials are waiting for a chance to grab the country’s resources. “It has become evident that there are people in government and state positions who are preparing a financial assault for when the revolution falls,” Morales wrote. “Others likely have everything ready to produce the transfer of state property into private hands, like what happened in the former Soviet Union.” In his scathing opinion piece, Morales brought up another prominent case — the abrupt March 9 firing of veteran revolutionary Rogelio Acevedo, who had overseen the country’s airlines and airports since the 1980s. The government gave no reason for his dismissal, but the island has been awash with speculation that he has been placed under house arrest for corruption. “Whether it be to vindicate or condemn Acevedo, the people must be told what happened,” he said (*La Voz de Houston*, 15/4/10; *AP*, 16/4/10).

**April 14:** Cuban dissident Marta Beatriz Roque told *Efe* she has been granted Spanish citizenship thanks to efforts of relatives in the Canary Islands. Roque, 64, said she received the news at the Spanish Embassy in Havana. “It’s a citizenship authorized by choice, given by my parents, who came (from Spain) to Cuba very young and died in Havana,” the former political prisoners said. She emphasized that, besides her relatives, other people supported her for a long time during the procedure, among them former Canarian regional president Fernando Fernandez. Although she still has not received her Spanish passport, she is planning to travel to the Canary Islands for medical “treatment and return to Cuba.” Roque was the only woman among the 75 dissidents rounded up and jailed in the “Black Spring” crackdown of March 2003. “I’ve never thought of leaving the country,” Roque, who suffers from hypertension and diabetes, said. “My

health is affected. You only have to look at me,” she told Efe. “My family wants me to get myself a medical checkup in Spain, that’s the objective” (*EFE*, 15/4/10).

**April 15:** Cuban authorities have freed a dissident journalist who was jailed for three years on charges that he was suspected of committing a crime, opposition leaders said. “They have let him go as he had completed his sentence. But he was completely innocent. It was barbarous,” said Elizardo Sanchez, spokesman of the Cuban committee for human rights, an illegal organization tolerated by Havana. Oscar Sanchez Madan, 48, was sentenced in April 2007 to four years in jail after “a summary” trial according to the rights group. He was charged with “pre-crime social dangerousness,” a charge often used against dissidents, because he was seen by Cuban authorities as posing a potential risk to society. His sentence was later reduced to three years. Sanchez regularly wrote for the dissident website *Cubanet*. “While welcoming his release, we point out that it was neither an act of clemency nor a sign that the regime is relaxing its repressive policies,” the media rights watchdog Reporters Without Borders said. It added that 24 journalists still remained behind bars in Cuba. There are just over 200 political prisoners on the island, according to the Cuban Human Rights and National Reconciliation Commission (*AFP*, 15/4/10).

**April 16:** Raul Castro, President of the Cuban councils of State and Ministers, presided over the ceremony of investiture of Dario Delgado as Attorney General of the Republic of Cuba. Delgado committed himself to comply with and ensure that the Socialist Constitution is enforced, as well as current legislation and the Code of Ethics of State Leaders; hold his position with austerity, probity and responsibility and honor it. After the swearing-in, he signed with Raul the corresponding minutes. Before taking up his post, the new Attorney General and Juan Escalona, who held that position for 17 years, signed the minutes of the commission of transfer, which -in compliance with the provisions made by the Council of State on March 22, 2010- worked tirelessly for 18 days in the process of transfer. Delgado, who before his designation occupied the post of Deputy Attorney General, said it was a pride and a challenge for him to replace Escalona, a professor of district attorneys and revolutionaries, and ratified his commitment of dedicating all his efforts and energy to fulfil this task, adding that he will never disappoint the confidence of Raul, the Communist Party and the people. Also attending the ceremony were Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, First Vice-president of the councils of State and Ministers; Ricardo Alarcon, President of the Cuban Parliament, and Gladys Bejerano, Vice-president of the Council of State (*ACN*, 17/4/10).

**April 16:** Thousands of Havana residents, representing the Cuban people, attended the rally held on the corner of 23rd and 12th streets of Havana’s Vedado neighborhood, where Fidel Castro proclaimed 49 years ago the socialist nature of the Revolution. Pioneer children, students, workers, housewives, combatants, artists and intellectuals, and retirees from the Playa, Plaza de la Revolucion and Cerro municipalities, assembled at the historic place, also to denounce the defamatory media campaigns launched by the imperialism and its European allies. The rally was presided over by Misael Enamorado, member of the Politburo of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC); Victor Gaute and Olga Lidia Tapia, members of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the PCC, and Lazara Mercedes Lopez, first secretary of the Party in the capital (*ACN*, 17/4/10).

**April 16:** The Ladies in White, relatives of 75 Cuban dissidents jailed in 2003, were harassed by government supporters who gathered around the home of their leader, Laura Pollan, shouting slogans and insults. The women had one of their usual meetings at Pollan's home in downtown Havana and had not planned a march through the streets, but they came out to protest after an incident occurred when one of them was arriving. The harassment began immediately, said Berta Soler, one of the group's spokeswomen. Soler said that starting the night before state security forces organized an "operation" around the house, with plain-clothes agents and police blocking off several streets and detouring traffic. According to Soler, an unidentified man was aggressive to one of the members of the group on Saturday when she tried to get to the meeting, and after that incident, 25 women went into the street to protest to the agents surrounding the residence. She said that suddenly dozens of people "appeared" with Cuban flags and forced them back into the house, which the hecklers surrounded shouting insulting slogans. The Ladies in White, winners of the Sajarov Prize from the European Parliament, had previously reported that police did not allow them to carry out their usual Sunday march after attending Mass at a Havana church, and forced them to return home. She also said that a state security official told them that they could not march without a "permit" from the police. "The government is desperate. Things aren't going to be easy, but we will continue marching," said Soler. (*Diario de Cuba*, 17/4/10; *LAHT*, 18/4/10).

**April 17:** Cuban tobacco legend Alejandro Robaina, known in international cigar circles for producing the best of his country's famous tobacco leaves, died at the age of 91, a family friend said. Robaina, the only Cuban grower with a cigar bearing his name, had been in ill health after being diagnosed with cancer last year and had declined in recent days, said friend Sergio Hernandez, a cigar distributor living in Havana. He died at his modest home on his 40-acre (16 hectare) farm near the town of San Luis in Cuba's Vuelta Abajo tobacco region near the western city of Pinar del Rio. A frail Robaina celebrated his 91st birthday at his farm on March 20 surrounded by two dozen friends and family. He sat quietly in a chair smoking one of his famous cigars. He told *Reuters* in a brief interview that the secret to growing the best tobacco was simple. "You have to love the land and care for it," he said. "I had a very strong conversation with Fidel 18 or 20 years ago," Robaina said in 2008. "He asked if I would join a big cooperative since I had so many workers, and I told him no. "For me tobacco growing had to be in the family, done with love. Because in the big cooperatives, everyone's the boss, nobody worries as much as the grower" (*Reuters*, *CNN*, 17/4/10).

**April 18:** Cuban security agents denied the wives and mothers of jailed dissidents permission to hold their weekly march, setting off a long, strange standoff under the hot Caribbean sun that ended with the women being led away by officials. After seven years of peaceful — mostly uneventful — Sunday protests, officials first stopped the women, known as the "Ladies in White," on April 11, and informed them they would need permission to hold future demonstrations. The group, comprised mostly of the wives and mothers of some 75 dissidents arrested in a 2003 crackdown, had been the only one whose protests were tolerated by Cuba, and they had never requested or received permission before. Three state security officials waited for the women — just nine protesters in all — as they emerged from a Mass at the Santa Rita de Casia church in Havana's leafy Miramar neighborhood. Officials shut down traffic along Fifth Avenue, one of the city's main arteries. "Excuse me, Mrs. Laura Pollan," one of the security officials said politely, addressing the "Ladies in White" leader. "You did not inform us, so there

will be no march.” The official, who wore a red shirt and a black baseball cap with a picture of Ernesto “Che” Guevara” — would not give his name. Pollan responded that she would only stop the protest if the government could produce a desist order in writing. “You need to show us a legal document,” she said. “You have been advised,” the official said, and with that he waved his hand in the air. Within seconds, two groups of counter-protesters descended on the women from both sides of the street, yelling and holding up a large Cuban flag. “Down with the worms!” “This street belongs to Fidel” they shouted, encircling the women and making it impossible to hear their shouts of “Freedom.” After an hour, two Ladies in White and one pro-government protester were unable to continue because of the heat, and a short while later a third Lady in White was led to a waiting ambulance. The women refused to get on a bus sent by the Ministry of the Interior to take them away. Finally, a passenger bus was redirected onto Fifth Avenue, officials ordered the Ladies in White to get on it, and the protest was over. It was not immediately clear where the women were taken, but in the past they have been released back at their homes (*AP*, 18/4/10).

**Abril 18:** Un total de 160 obras de 30 países, entre ellos Estados Unidos, Brasil, Colombia y Chile, competirán en el Festival Internacional de Cine Pobre, que comienza en la localidad cubana de Gibara (noreste de Cuba), informaron sus organizadores. “Mañana arrancamos con un festival muy potente, con la mejor calidad de proyecciones, con cinco exposiciones de artes plásticas, conciertos. Va a ser un festival muy intenso” que concluirá el sábado, declaró el director Sergio Benvenuto a la televisión local. Destacó que la octava edición del Festival, fundado en 2002 por el cineasta cubano Humberto Solás (1941-2008), coincide con un momento de desarrollo de la tecnología digital, lo que permite hacer cine de bajo coste y explica la alta cifra de participantes en la cita anual. “Es ahora cuando un cineasta adquiere la libertad de un pintor, puede hacer una película muy económica, y eso está ocurriendo en este momento a nivel mundial”, apuntó. Diez largometrajes de ficción, 21 cortos y 31 documentales aspiran a los premios, en su mayoría subvenciones monetarias de organismos internacionales y ONG interesados en brindar apoyo a realizadores independientes y con escasos recursos (*AFP*, 19/4/10).

**April 19:** An article published on April 12, in the Writers and Artists Union website, warning of corruption in high places, had disappeared by the end of the week, perhaps because it dealt too boldly with subjects deemed by the authorities to be too sensitive. The article was written by Esteban Morales Domínguez, an expert on US studies at the University of Havana. One of the references that may have rankled the government involved General Rogelio Acevedo González, director of civil aviation, who was removed from his post on March 8 with no public explanation. Corruption was suspected. In his article, Morales said that “what is making the rounds in unofficial circles about the reasons for [González’s] ouster is enough to keep people awake at nights.” There may be some truth in the gossip, Morales said, “because this is a very small and familial country. The affair still has not had an exhaustive public explanation, as the people expect, because – if it’s like the rumors say – the people’s money and resources were squandered.” Then, in a rhetorical exhortation to the authorities, Morales wrote: “So, either to vindicate Acevedo or to condemn him, you have to explain it to the people.” Government investigators may have felt that Morales was stepping over the line and possibly asked that the article be pulled. Or maybe Morales reconsidered his views and recalled the article. Hard to tell (*The Miami Herald*, 19/4/10).

**Abril 19:** El ex presidente de Cuba Fidel Castro afirmó que su país no cederá nunca ante “el chantaje y el terror mediático”, en un artículo divulgado por medios oficiales. Cuba “nunca ha cedido ni cederá ante el chantaje y el terror mediático. Son hechos históricos más que demostrados”, escribe el todavía primer secretario del Partido Comunista cubano en la última de sus “Reflexiones”. Castro dedica el grueso de su nueva columna a Venezuela y a su presidente, Hugo Chávez, con quien se reunió durante tres horas, revela en su artículo, si bien no ofrece detalles de los temas tratados en ese encuentro ([La hermandad entre la República Bolivariana y Cuba](#); *EFE*, 19/4/10).

**April 19:** Cuban grass-roots organizations are urging all voters to participate on April 25 in the nationwide partial elections to elect representatives to the Municipal Assemblies. A call published by *Granma* newspaper urges all members of the Cuban Women’s Federation (FMC), the Committees in Defense of the Revolution (CDR), the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), the Association of Combatants for the Cuban Revolution and the people in general to cast their direct and secret vote to choose those they consider should represent them before the municipal government’s legislative body. “All Cubans shall exercise their right to vote as an expression of their support for our Revolution, which is based on the unity of the people with Fidel and Raul at the helm,” the text reads (*ACN*, 19/4/10).

**April 19:** The results of the election test run in preparation for the April 25 Municipal Assembly elections showed that La Habana Province is ready for this important process. David Yero, president of the Provincial Electoral Commission, told *ACN* that on this occasion there were less incidents as compared to the election test run carried out for the previous elections, and referred to some 17 telephone interruptions that were immediately solved. The rest of communication services, including the work of radio amateurs, with great experience in this activity, computing, carrier pigeons, and other alternative means were available without any problem, as well as transportation (*ACN*, 19/4/10).

**April 19:** Participants in the Eleventh International Conference on Information (INFO), which began in Havana, are analyzing Cuba’s experiences on Internet access. The meeting is taking place at Havana’s Convention Centre through April 23 with the presence of over 500 professionals from 20 countries, the largest participation since the first event of this kind was held in 1988, said the president of the organizing committee Carmen Sanchez Rojas. Topics being discussed include information services, international literacy campaigns, information policies and technologies, and quality and assessment of information sources, among others. The program also includes an International Workshop on Business Intelligence and Knowledge Management that was first held in Havana in 2000 and later in Brazil (2004) and Venezuela (2006). The event opened with the lecture “The Role of Technology on the Society of Knowledge” by Cuban Deputy Minister of Informatics and Communication Boris Moreno Cordoves, followed by “The Society of Knowledge and Its Challenges”, by the director of postgraduate education at the University of Havana, Jorge Nuñez Jover (*ACN*, 19/4/10).

**April 19:** The leader of Cuba’s Catholic Church said Cubans were impatient for change to get the country out of what he called a “very difficult situation” in an unusually blunt interview. Cardinal Jaime Ortega told church publication *Palabra Nueva* (New Word) there was a national

consensus that the government should “make the necessary changes quickly” to end “economic and social difficulties” on the communist-led island. “Its delay produces impatience and unease in the people,” he said. “Our country is in a very difficult situation, certainly the most difficult we have lived in this 21st century,” said Ortega, whose public statements are generally cautious. Ortega, 73, said the longstanding US trade embargo against Cuba also affects the island, as do “the limitations of the type of socialism practiced here.” Ortega said the church believes Cuba should release its estimated 200 political prisoners and called for the United States and Cuba to do more to improve relations. The cardinal lamented the February death of jailed dissident hunger striker Orlando Zapata Tamayo, as well as the harassment of the dissident group “Ladies in White” by government supporters in recent public protests ([Nuestra voz es un llamado al diálogo](#); *Reuters*, 19/4/10).

**Abril 19:** El disidente Guillermo Fariñas agradeció al cardenal Jaime Ortega su interés por la huelga de hambre que realiza desde hace 55 días, pero le reprochó que la Iglesia Católica ofreciera una misa cuando enfermó Fidel Castro y no por la muerte del preso político Orlando Zapata Tamayo. “Le damos las gracias por manifestarse de manera pública sobre este conflicto”, dijo Fariñas. “Nos resultó chocante que él (Ortega) hiciera una misa cuando Fidel Castro se enfermó y no fuera capaz de hacer una misa póstuma cuando murió nuestro hermano Orlando Zapata Tamayo”, señaló. En opinión de Fariñas, éste es un momento “no de conciliar sino de ponerse de parte de las víctimas o los victimarios. Los victimarios son los que tienen el poder y las víctimas son los que no lo tienen”, dijo telefónicamente desde el hospital de Santa Clara donde está ingresado hace más de un mes. “Con todo el respeto, nos subordinamos fundamentalmente a la Santa Biblia y a Jesucristo, quien dijo que el mayor placer es dar la vida por sus amigos”, agregó. Según explicó la madre del disidente, Alicia Hernández, el estado de salud de Fariñas es grave y deteriorado, aunque está mejor de ánimo, no ha registrado fiebre y le siguen administrando sueros a través de un catéter (*Diario de Cuba*, 20/4/10).

**April 20:** Cuban Deputy Minister of Informatics and Communications Boris Moreno said that Cuba is moving towards open source platforms to counteract Washington’s economic blockade. During the inauguration of the Eleventh International Conference on Information (INFO 2010), Moreno pointed out that the country’s progressive migration to this kind of software aims at guaranteeing national security and technological independence. He added that Cuba only has satellite internet access because the US blockade prevents it from having access to the numerous optic fiber cables surrounding the island, which would lower costs significantly. Moreno referred to the creation of Nova, a version of Linux, developed by Havana’s University of Informatics Sciences (UCI), which has already been successfully tested. INFO 2010 runs through April 23, at Havana’s Convention Centre, with the participation of over 500 delegates from 20 countries (*ACN*, 20/4/10).

**Abril 21:** Cuba reportó un incremento sostenido de las enfermedades respiratorias vinculadas con el virus A H1N1 de la influenza en las últimas cuatro semanas, informó el Laboratorio Nacional de Virus de Influenza del Instituto de Medicina Tropical Pedro Kourí, con sede en la capital de la isla. Las autoridades sanitarias del país caribeño realizan una campaña de vacunación que inmunizará a 1,124,000 personas de los grupos de riesgo (*IPS*, 21/4/10).

**April 21:** Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, First Vice-president of the councils of State and Ministers, called on the members of every unit of the National Lawyer's Offices (ONBC) to improve their services. While addressing participants in this capital in the constituent session of the General Assembly of that institution, the Cuban leader affirmed that lawyers shouldn't feel pleased with their work as long as there's a client dissatisfied with their services or he hasn't received the prompt and quality service he deserves. Machado Ventura, who is also a Politburo member of the Cuban Communist Party, underlined the importance of making a good selection of leaders, to choose men and women who're committed to their work, with the necessary requirements to be demanding professionals and also examples to others. We need well trained and motivated leaders and we should work in this regard accordingly, he added. The constituent session of the General Assembly of the National Lawyer's Offices was also presided over by Maria Esther Reus, Minister of Justice, and Ariel Mantecon, president of that institution (ACN, 21/4/10).

**Abril 21:** Raúl Luís Risco Pérez, miembro de la Alianza Democrática de Pinar del Río, informó que el gobierno está entrenando personas, para combatir la disidencia en esa provincia. Según Risco Pérez, el día 8 de abril, las autoridades movilizaron a 200 jóvenes a quienes les orientaron en el Ministerio del Interior enfrentar por la fuerza a la oposición pacífica. Al día siguiente, un operativo compuesto por treinta de estos jóvenes adiestrados junto a un grupo de estudiantes y varios carros estatales y de la policía, impidieron que opositores pertenecientes a la Alianza se reunieran. Los miembros de la policía política que participaron del operativo contra los disidentes manifestaron que tenían órdenes del mando superior de no permitir ni una actividad disidente más en la provincia (*Cubonet*, 21/4/10).

**Abril 23:** La bloguera Yoani Sánchez denunció a través de Twitter que el régimen de La Habana practica la "lapidación social", la "difamación" y la "satanización" contra su persona. Sánchez afirmó que el gobierno ha distribuido en las universidades una "biografía novelada" de su vida, que la oficial Federación Estudiantil Universitaria (FEU) está "discutiendo aula por aula". En declaraciones a *Diario de Cuba*, la autora de *Generación Y* cuestionó el "tono solariego" del documento gubernamental, que aborda asuntos de su "vida íntima", como la atención a su hijo y la relación con su esposo, el periodista Reinaldo Escobar. "Utilizando las estructuras institucionales se dedican a difamar de los inconformes, sin darles a estos derecho a réplica. Que bajeza!", señaló la bloguera. Según dijo, a los estudiantes les "advierten" en los encuentros que ella da "una imagen maternal por tener un hijo, pero que es una mascarada para ganar simpatías". "Hoy estoy pesimista, no hay forma de que un individuo pueda sobrevivir a una maquinaria así de difamación desde el propio Estado (...) Tengo dudas de si podré sobrevivir a todo esto", advirtió (*Diario de Cuba*, 23/4/10).

**April 22:** A website about elections in Cuba is available online at <http://www.eleccionesencuba.cu> The website will provide up to the minute information about the two election rounds in Cuba scheduled for April 25 and May 2. It contains a selection of interesting documents such as the Cuban Constitution, the structure of national and provincial electoral commissions and photos taken during the electoral process that can be downloaded. The website will also feature articles related to the history of election processes in Cuba before and after the triumph of the Revolution in 1959. A selection of articles published by the local media during the election process will be posted on the site (ACN, 23/4/10).

**April 23:** The Book Festival underway in mountainous communities of the eastern province of Santiago de Cuba has been well-received by locals. With the purpose of promoting reading habits in the remotest sites of the region, the one-day event has been held so far in seven of nine municipalities of the province. Director of the Provincial Book Centre, writer Teresa Melo, said the event is a way to contribute to promote human values through reading, in addition to increase the educational level of the people in those communities. Melo noted that the festival has had a positive impact on the mountain people who have made the most of the event, particularly children. The festivals have featured book presentations by local writers who at the same time marked the 10th anniversary of the creation of regional publishing houses (*ACN*, 23/4/10).

**April 24:** For the fifth week in a row, the number of H1N1 cases continues to grow throughout the country, said Dr. Otto Pelaez Sanchez, head of the Transmissible Diseases Department of the Cuban Public Health ministry. During this week, 93 new cases of Influenza A (H1N1) virus were confirmed by the National Influenza Virus Labs of the Tropical Medicine Institute Pedro Kouri, *Granma* newspaper reported. In reference to the national vaccination campaign against the H1N1 virus to conclude on Tuesday, April 2, Dr. Pelaez Sanchez said 981,130 people (87.4 percent), selected based on risk factors, have received the shot. Of them 78,915 are either pregnant women or have given birth recently, representing 99.7 percent of the total. Dr. Pelaez Sanchez said the people who have been vaccinated remain under strict watch so that they can receive immediate medical care in case of severe reactions, although no serious side-effects of the vaccine have been reported so far (*ACN*, 24/4/10).

**April 24:** Health authorities in the central province of Ciego de Avila strengthened the sanitary watch to prevent the transmission of the (H1N1) A virus due to an increase of acute breathing infections. The vice director of the Provincial Epidemiology Centre Jose Carlos Nodarse said there has been a significant increase of cases of respiratory conditions, which even surpassed forecasted numbers for the winter season. Nodarse said tests have been done on all patients with any flu symptoms to rule out H1N1 because this is one of the most dangerous viruses of all currently affecting the people. Likewise, doctors are visiting all kindergartens (children under 6 years of age) and primary schools (children from 6 to 11-12 years) to check if there are children suffering any type of respiratory conditions and prevent the spreading of the disease (*ACN*, 24/4/10).

**April 24:** Cuban dissident Guillermo Fariñas, who completed 60 days of his hunger strike, called the local elections to be held on April 25 on the island “a big farce,” and said that he will vote against “the Castro dynasty” if he is sent a ballot. “There’s no such thing as a free nomination. It has to be in your neighborhood with a show of hands (an allusion to the way candidates are designated), and nobody wants to be identified to this regime of terror,” said Fariñas in a telephone conversation from the intensive care unit where he is hospitalized in the central city of Santa Clara. The dissident recalled that Cuban electoral regulations state that ballots must be sent to sick people who are lucid, and said he was waiting to see what decision state security will take in his case. “If they bring me a ballot, what I’ll do is put: Down with the dynasty of the Castro brothers (Fidel and Raul), my signature and my ID number,” said Fariñas, who was admitted to hospital in mid-March after twice collapsing from hunger. “If they don’t dare bring it to me, I’ll just be one more of those who didn’t go to vote,” he said (*LAHT*, 24/4/10).

**April 24:** Municipal elections that the Cuban government trumpets as the most democratic in the world will be held as usual with a massive turnout guaranteed but no campaigning or opposition candidates. The numbers for the local elections, held every 2 ½ years, are certainly impressive. More than 8.4 million Cubans aged 16 or older will be able to vote in 29,856 polling places for more than 15,000 candidates for seats on the island's 169 municipal councils. More than 200,000 men and women will run the voting, and results will be sent to the National Electoral Commission by telephone or, in remote locations, ham radio, horseback, bicycle and even carrier pigeons. But no dissidents are among the candidates – selected by neighbors in Town Hall-styled meetings – although 27 put their names forward around the island, said Silvio Benitez, president of the Liberal Party, which is not recognized by the government. Most received only one or two votes, he said, but his bid in District 47 of the town of Punta Brava near Havana did surprisingly well: 14 for Benitez, 50 for the official candidate and 50 abstentions. Sunday's elections are officially nonpartisan and anyone can be nominated, though the vast majority of the candidates selected are members of the Communist Party, enshrined in the constitution as the country's ruling party. National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcón nevertheless said earlier this year that "millions of people around the world would want to have votes as free and democratic as Cuba's." Although voting is not legally mandatory, government supporters go around neighborhoods every election day strongly urging everyone to cast their ballots, and keeping track of those who don't. "Not voting can have negative consequences in social and labor circles," wrote Cuban blogger Laritza Diversent. Voting, she added, is therefore little more than "a mandatory electoral service that citizens provide to guarantee the continuity of communist power" (*The Miami Herald*, 24/4/10).

**Abril 25:** El gobierno cubano hizo un llamado a participar masivamente en los comicios parciales de este domingo como "mensaje inequívoco de la confianza de la inmensa mayoría de nuestro pueblo en su sistema político". Según un comunicado leído al amanecer en la prensa estatal, las elecciones serán una respuesta a la "cínica y difamatoria campaña mediática, auspiciada desde los centros de poder de los Estados Unidos y Europa y con el concurso mercenario de grupúsculos contrarrevolucionarios." En las urnas serán elegidos los representantes locales a las Asambleas Municipales del Poder Popular, el escalón básico del sistema político de la isla (*IPS*, 25/4/10).

**April 25:** Cubans hit the polls across the country, voting in municipal assembly elections that the government hopes will soften criticism about democracy – or lack thereof – in the communist nation. The nationwide vote will fill 169 assembly seats and is expected to draw millions to the polls. The vote will determine municipal representation on such local issues as waste removal and electricity, as opposed to the larger political questions facing Cuba. Candidates in municipalities across the country are selected by a show of hands by local monitoring groups called Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, who are also responsible for reporting suspicious neighbourhood activity. Electoral campaigning is strictly prohibited; an aspect that Cuba touts as at least one reason it considers its elections to be more democratic than in neighbouring countries. There were no reports of disruptions at polling stations by midday. At one election site in Havana's Vedado district, polling official Jose Caesar Munez said 211 voters had shown up to cast their ballots, many arriving early to beat the sweltering Caribbean heat. "There is no political party difference between these two (local) candidates," Munez said,

hunched over a paper tally sheet used to process voters. “But there is an opportunity to change (unpopular local representatives) ... That’s democracy,” he said. Others aren’t so sure. “We have these kinds of elections every two years but nothing ever changes,” said Eduardo, an engineer who lives in central Havana who asked not to be fully identified. “All you have to do is walk these streets and listen to people to hear what they’re saying” (*CNN*, 26/4/10).

**Abril 25:** El disidente cubano Guillermo Fariñas, quien lleva dos meses en huelga de hambre, usó su papeleta electoral para anotar frases en favor de la libertad de los presos políticos y en contra de Fidel y Raúl Castro, con lo que anuló su sufragio. “Anulé la boleta porque yo había hecho un llamamiento a los ciudadanos para que asistieran (a la votación), pero anularan sus boletas”, dijo Fariñas por teléfono desde el hospital donde está hospitalizado hace más de un mes en Santa Clara. Según explicó el psicólogo disidente, una integrante de la Comisión Electoral le llevó hasta su cama en la sala de cuidados intensivos la papeleta, en la que también escribió “Abajo la dinastía de los Castro” y “Zapata vive después de muerto”, la firmó y luego leyó las frases en voz alta. “Creo que las elecciones en Cuba son pseudo-elecciones y una farsa”, reiteró Fariñas. El “primer gran defecto” del proceso que “no hay una libre postulación” de los candidatos pues un aspirante “tiene que pasar por un proceso abierto en el vecindario a mano alzada”, explicó. Asimismo, criticó que la Comisión Electoral tenga “potestad de decir quién tiene las condiciones como candidato”, que las elecciones “no tienen supervisión internacional” y denunció “la presión social por parte del Estado sobre las personas para que acudan a votar” (*Diario de Cuba*, 25/4/10).

**April 25:** A small group of carefully choreographed government supporters shouted down an even smaller contingent of wives and mothers of jailed opposition activists, preventing their traditional march for the third straight week in another ugly confrontation that may be becoming a Cuban weekend tradition. The face-off didn’t end for seven hours, when the women finally boarded a city bus to be driven home following being surrounded by jeering counter-demonstrators in a park. After seven years of peaceful protests following Mass in Havana’s upscale Miramar neighbourhood, Cuba has begun blocking the “Ladies in White” from marching since the group never obtained written permission to do so. This time, six members – down from nine last week – left the Santa Rita de Casia Church and crossed swank Fifth Avenue to hold their demonstration on a sidewalk that runs down the middle of the boulevard. A state agent in a Che Guevara T-shirt said they couldn’t march and Laura Pollan, one of the group’s founders, tried to respond. But the agent turned and walked away and that cued two waiting groups of about 50 counter-protesters each who came up the sidewalk from both directions hoisting large Cuban flags. The women marched until they ran into one group, then retraced their steps until meeting the other. The women shouted “Freedom!” and held skyward the pink gladiolas they always carry. The counter-protesters surrounded them and shouted “Fidel! Fidel!” Muscular state security agents with earpieces wedged themselves in between the dueling protests to prevent violence. Organizers in plainclothes moved through the counter-demonstrators suggesting chants. When they called for a song with a refrain “How Lovely is Cuba,” the counter-demonstrators sang it repeatedly, jumping up and down. The “Ladies in White” were jostled off the sidewalk and pinned near the entrance to the church’s front yard. Shoving ensued and pro-government demonstrators grabbed their gladiolas and tore them up. The women then moved to a nearby park, under trees that provided shade from the boiling sun. They remained there for seven hours, some still holding only the green stubs of their flowers. It was a surprising show of

stamina and meant ignoring shouts and enduring suffocating humidity and temperatures in the high 80s, with nothing to eat and no bathroom breaks – though the women did have a bag containing bottled water. Trying to get them to leave sooner, the pro-government crowd parted and offered to let the women go one by one, then in groups of two, but never all together. The women declined. Every few hours, new groups of government supporters relieved the counter-demonstrators who were losing their voices from shouting, and each new group was given water to ensure they had more energy than the “Ladies in White.” Whenever any of the women tried to make a cell phone call, the crowd’s hoots got especially loud to make it hard to hear. As dusk began to fall, the women were allowed to board a bus and were driven home. Pollan held up her fingers in an “L,” meaning “Libertad” or “Freedom,” as protesters threw trash and empty water bottles in the open window of the departing bus (AP, 25/4/10).

**Abril 25:** Tres Damas de Apoyo se declararon en huelga de hambre en protesta por la violación de su libertad religiosa, de movimiento y de reunión. Maritza Castro Martínez, Ivonne Mayeza Galano y Blanca Rosa Hernández, esta última de 72 años de edad, decidieron comenzar el ayuno para exigir el derecho a asistir a la iglesia, moverse libremente por las calles y defender a los presos políticos. Castro Martínez señaló que la Dama de Apoyo de 72 años ya sufre desvanecimientos y abandonará la protesta en unos pocos días. Pidió además la intervención del papa Benedicto XVI para ver satisfechas sus demandas (*Diario de Cuba*, 25/4/10).

**Abril 25:** “Los Aldeanos”, principales exponentes del hip-hop *underground* de Cuba, hicieron vibrar a más de 2,000 jóvenes en La Habana, en el primer concierto exclusivo y públicamente masivo del dúo rapero abiertamente crítico del gobierno y la realidad del país. Aunque sin promoción en los medios cubanos – bajo control estatal–, la presentación rebasó la capacidad del antiguo y céntrico cine-teatro Acapulco, que no obstante anunciaba en luminosa cartelera: “Hoy, Sherlock Holmes”. “Expresan la verdad, lo que uno siente, lo que muchos cubanos no pueden decir. La libertad que no tenemos”, dijo Yoelvis Fonseca, constructor de 27 años, moviéndose con gran dominio del *flow*. Creado en el 2003, el tatuado dúo de amigos Brian Rodríguez (El B) y Aldo Rodríguez (El Aldeano), que se había presentado a menor escala, dio su concierto “Siete años con la aldea” con un repertorio que, aunque mordaz, no incluyó lo más polémico. En un país con la información controlada, afirman, la acogida en un sector de la juventud y en otros países les viene de la osadía de sus canciones, que abordan la corrupción, la burocracia, la vida diaria, la emigración o las restricciones para viajar (*Cubaencuentro*, 27/4/10).

**April 26:** A total of 8 million 205,994 Cubans, 94.69 of the voters, went to the polls on April 25, according to the official report given by the president of the National Electoral Commission (CEN), Ana Maria Mari. During a press conference in Havana, she described as victorious the first round of the electoral process held the previous day, in which the people elected 12,986 delegates. All of the island’s provinces and the Isle of Youth special municipality registered over 92 percent attendance at electoral colleges, and in this first round of the elections there were 29,000 voters more than in 2007, highlighted Mari. She pointed out that the second round will take place on May 2 in 2,106 constituencies, where none of the candidates obtained over 50 percent of the votes required. Over 91 percent of the ballot papers were valid, which is a very high percentage as compared to elections in many other countries of the world, commented Mari (ACN, 26/4/10).

**April 26:** Cuban film director Pavel Giroud won the 7<sup>th</sup> Julio Alejandro Script SGAE Award for his long-feature film *El acompañante*, with which will receive the funds to produce the movie. The prize was granted during the Malaga Film Festival, Spain, by a jury chaired by president of the General Society of Authors and Editors (SGAE, Spanish acronym) Jose Luis Borau. Giroud's was one of the five finalist scripts selected out of 363 submitted to the contest, according to the Cuban Institute of Art and Film Industry (ACN, 26/4/10).

**April 27:** The Cuban government began granting licenses to people to build homes "with their own effort" on the island, an initiative approved last year by President Raul Castro. The granting of the permits was recently approved by the National Housing Institute for people who are the owners of land, homes or other areas included in the new resolution, state-run *Radio Rebelde* reported. Before the new regulation, building permits had been awarded only in "selected" cases by the relevant local authorities, while now all interested parties that assemble the legal prerequisites may request a construction license. The permit includes the case of houses in bad condition and the possibility of adding to existing homes, while the government will institute mechanisms for the sale of construction materials. "A level in square meters corresponding to the nuclear family" will be designated during the application process and, after obtaining the permit, people may begin work, a source with the Housing Institute said (*Diario de Cuba*, 27/4/10; *LAHT*, 28/4/10).

**Abril 27:** El por ciento de boletas en blanco y anuladas aumentó de 7,01 por ciento en los comicios parciales de 2007 a 8,91 por ciento en las elecciones del pasado 25 de abril, lo que representa más de 731,000 personas, según los datos de Comisión Electoral Nacional (CEN). La instancia oficial informó que la asistencia a las urnas fue de 94,69 por ciento de las personas inscritas para votar (*IPS*, 27/4/10).

**Abril 27:** El 22 de abril la policía política detuvo a la periodista Dania Virgen García y la condenó al día siguiente a un año y ocho meses de prisión. No se explicaron las causas de su detención o condena. La periodista y también bloguera es además activista de derechos humanos y apoyaba abiertamente al movimiento de las Damas de Blanco. La Sociedad Interamericana de Prensa (SIP) condenó la detención y juicio inmediato contra la periodista independiente. La SIP exigió la liberación inmediata de los comunicadores encarcelados y el cese de la represión en la isla. El presidente del organismo regional, Alejandro Aguirre, dijo que la entidad sigue de cerca el hecho. Según la *Voz de las Américas*, Dania Virgen García se convierte así en la única mujer periodista encarcelada en la Isla, cuya cifra general alcanza los 26 los informadores presos (*Diario de Cuba*, 27/4/10).

**April 28:** Dissident Cuban journalist Dania Virgen García apparently struck her 23-year old daughter during a fight. In less than 48 hours, she was arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to 20 months in prison. Havana human rights activist Elizardo Sánchez said he'll need a week or two to thoroughly investigate the arrest of García, 41, who also marched often in support of the Ladies in White. But Sánchez said he has a strong hunch: "It could well be a case of political repression, taking advantage of a family situation." That's not uncommon, he added, in a country where the government can easily drum up an array of criminal charges against opponents of the communist system. Sánchez said he obtained preliminary information on the case after his Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation sent an investigator to the Havana

home García shared with her daughter, Suzy, and 2-year-old nephew. “The daughter was reticent to speak, but the family seemed to be hostile to [García’s] dissident activities,” he said. “She said her mother was properly sent to jail because of abuses (...) She also said maybe there [in prison] she would change her dissident activities.” The daughter also told the investigators that she “argued a lot” with her mother, and indicated that at some point the mother struck her, Sánchez said. García was arrested April 22, apparently on charges of “abuse of maternal authority” and the next day was tried, convicted and sentenced to 20 months in prison. Sánchez said. She was sent to the country’s largest prison for women, Manto Negro (*The Miami Herald*, 29/4/10).

**Abril 28:** Un grupo de 88 opositores cubanos pidieron al periodista Guillermo Fariñas que levante la huelga de hambre que mantiene desde hace 64 días, pero el disidente rechazó la solicitud porque dice que debe sostener “la presión sobre el gobierno”. “Asumimos la responsabilidad de acercarnos a ti una vez más con el propósito de que depongas tu huelga de hambre”, dicen a Fariñas 88 disidentes que firmaron el texto “Llamado de la Patria”, entregado al huelguista de hambre en el hospital de Santa Clara (centro), donde es atendido desde el 11 de marzo, y a la prensa internacional en La Habana. Los firmantes señalaron que el gobierno reacciona con “impiedad” ante la protesta que inició Fariñas el 24 de febrero, un día después de que murió el opositor Orlando Zapata luego de mantener por casi tres meses otra huelga de hambre en reclamo de mejoras carcelarias. Los firmantes sugieren a Fariñas liderar la campaña “Yo acuso” por la libertad de los presos políticos cubanos, unos 200 según la oposición. “Ellos me piden que me ponga al frente de un proyecto para pedir la amnistía de los presos políticos, pero me negué a aceptar esa petición, porque es un proyecto inviable”, declaró Fariñas desde el hospital (*El Nuevo Herald*, 29/4/10).

**April 29:** A paraplegic political prisoner is suffering a serious health crisis, the unofficial Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation, or CCDHRN, said. Ariel Sigler Amaya, 47, is being treated at a hospital in Havana, CCDHRN chairman Elizardo Sanchez told *Efe*. “The government is aware that he is very ill and they don’t release him for political reasons,” Sanchez said of Sigler, designated by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience. Brothers Ariel and Guido Sigler were among the 75 dissidents arrested in the “Black Spring” crackdown of 2003. The Siglers, who belonged to the Alternative Option movement, were sentenced to long prison terms on charges of undermining Cuban independence. Ariel Sigler became sick behind bars and ended up in a wheelchair due to a neurological problem linked to inadequate nutrition, according to the CCDHRN. Sanchez said Sigler’s is not the only case of political prisoners falling ill because of insufficient or substandard food. The CCDHRN in March issued a list of 25 severely ill prisoners to refute claims by the communist government that Cuban prisons did not hold any inmates with serious health problems (*EFE*, 29/4/10).

**Abril 29:** Cuba, donde la compra de autos y piezas está restringida, puso fin a una resolución que permitía desde hace dos años a los cubanos la importación de motores y carrocerías de automóviles y motocicletas. La resolución, publicada por la *Gaceta Oficial*, fue derogada casi dos meses después de que el gobierno comunista de la isla suspendiera otra reglamentación que permitió fugazmente a los cubanos importar autos para reemplazar sus vehículos antiguos. Las autoridades decidieron “derogar la Resolución No. 5 de 30 abril de 2007, del Jefe de la Aduana General de la República (...) (donde) se autorizó la importación de carrocerías completas y motores completos de vehículos automotores, por personas naturales”, dijo la *Gaceta* en su sitio

de internet. El texto oficial agregó que la derogación de la norma se debió a que “han variado las causas que dieron lugar a su aplicación”, pero no ofreció otros detalles. Hasta ahora las piezas de autos y motocicletas podían ser importadas sólo por cubanos que viajaban al exterior en misión oficial, quienes debían obtener previamente la autorización del jefe de la Aduana General. La medida favorecía a varias decenas de miles de médicos, maestros y otros profesionales cubanos que trabajan en programas sociales impulsados por el Gobierno en el extranjero (*Reuters*, 29/4/10).

**Abril 29:** Cuba convocó a una movilización por el 1 de mayo, en una respuesta a lo que las autoridades consideran una campaña internacional de difamación contra la Revolución. “El 1ro de mayo inundaremos las calles y las plazas públicas (...) reafirmando nuestro categórico respaldo a la revolución, al Partido (Comunista de Cuba), a Fidel y a Raúl”, afirmó la Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC) en una nota divulgada por la prensa local. “Será la respuesta contundente que de todos demanda hoy la patria”, señaló. La CTC también rechazó en el comunicado “una hipócrita campaña de difamación” orquestada por Estados Unidos, “sus socios” de la Unión Europea y “agentes internos pagados con fondos del gobierno estadounidense”. La central se refirió así a la difusión a nivel internacional de la muerte del disidente preso Orlando Zapata tras una huelga de hambre y el ayuno que sigue desde hace dos meses el también disidente Guillermo Fariñas (*AP*, 29/4/10).

## Economy

**April 1:** The Commercial Siboney exporting company, from the Cuban Ministry of Construction, is participating at the Construction International Fair FECONS 2010, underway in Havana, showing increased sale reports and offers. Orestes Rodriguez, director of exports from the institution, told *ACN* news agency that the company sales have had back-to-back 15 percent growth years while introducing 12 new exportable products. He said doing business with Uruguay, Panama, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Mexico, Ecuador, Spain and Italy as well as with China (*ACN*, 1/4/10).

**Abril 1:** El gobierno de Raúl Castro comenzó a aplicar un decreto que rebaja subsidios al Campismo Popular, prácticamente la única opción vacacional asequible para la mayoría de jóvenes y familias cubanas. Es la más reciente de las medidas para disminuir gastos que el régimen considera insostenibles, informó *ANSA*. El nuevo decreto establece nuevos precios. “El Ministerio del Turismo ha elaborado una estrategia de desarrollo del Campismo, encaminada a elevar su estándar y confort, e ir a una eliminación progresiva del subsidio”, dice la resolución. Por el campismo, la opción vacacional más barata, optan cada año más de un millón de cubanos. De acuerdo con la *AFP*, las nuevas tarifas, que se diferenciarán según la temporada y la categoría de la instalación, también afectarán la transportación y se fijarán según el tipo de ómnibus y la distancia a recorrer. Otra resolución del Ministerio de Turismo dispuso la elevación y unificación de precios de los alimentos que se ofertan en las 84 bases de campismo del país, “no pudiendo generar dichos precios pérdidas”, según dice. El campismo, que surgió en Cuba hace 29 años, fue prácticamente la única opción turística para los cubanos en la década de los noventa y los primeros años de este siglo, cuando el gobierno cerró los hoteles a los nacionales para dedicarlos al turismo extranjero y captar divisas (*Diario de Cuba*, 2/4/10).

**April 3:** The number of tourists coming to Cuba during the first two months of 2010 fell 3.4 per cent from last year due to a decline in visitors from Canada, Cuba's top tourist provider, says a Cuban government website. But a jump in arrivals by Cuban-Americans after the Obama administration lifted restrictions on their visits home likely helped offset the drop in Canadians. A slump in tourism is bad news for President Raul Castro, who replaced his ailing brother Fidel Castro two years ago and is grappling with a growing economic crisis. Tourism and related businesses brought more than \$2 billion to the communist-run Caribbean nation in 2009, or about 20 per cent of its foreign exchange income. The National Statistics office reported on its website that 513,000 tourists arrived in January and February. That was down from 531,000 during the same period in 2009. Canadian arrivals dropped to 243,800, from 270,400 in 2009. Tourism industry experts outside Cuba said a pricing spat with a major Canadian tour operator contributed to the decline (*Reuters*, 3/4/10).

**Abril 3:** Un escándalo de corrupción del que se hablaba desde hace tiempo en La Habana involucra el empleo extraoficial de aviones del gobierno para trabajos en el extranjero, y sus beneficios iban a parar a funcionarios cubanos, según el blog del reportero de la *British Broadcasting Corp. (BBC)* en La Habana, Fernando Ravensberg. "Dicen en Cuba que en el socialismo todos son dueños de los medios de producción, un principio que al parecer se tomaron al pie de la letra varios importantes directivos," escribió Ravensberg. Las noticias del escándalo han estado circulando por La Habana y en la blogósfera desde la destitución del presidente del Instituto de Aeronáutica Civil de Cuba, general Rogelio Acevedo, un viejo revolucionario, aunque los medios oficiales no han informado nada sobre el caso. Ravensberg fue el primer periodista profesional en Cuba en escribir sobre el escándalo, al citar "personas del aeropuerto, de aduanas, de transporte y de agencias de viajes" como sus fuentes no identificadas, en su página online en la *BBC*, "Cartas desde Cuba". Ravensberg, quien ha sido por varios años el hombre de la *BBC* en La Habana, escribió que cada nuevo detalle que conoció sobre el escándalo era "más alucinante que el anterior". Aviones propiedad de la aerolínea gubernamental Cubana de Aviación "vendieron clandestinamente espacio a compañías latinoamericanas para transportar sus mercancías de un país a otro, y los directores se embolsaron todo el dinero", reportó Ravensberg. Incluso enviaron aviones en viajes no programados para transportar sus artículos. Cuando querían más dinero, agregó, "comenzaron entonces a informar que una u otra nave se encontraba reparándose en Canadá, cuando en realidad las tenían transportando pasajeros en otros destinos" ([Pescadores de río revuelto](#); *El Nuevo Herald*, 3/4/10).

**April 4:** Cuba's economy was foremost in Raúl Castro's closing speech at the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Young Communist League. Its management could make or break socialism, he suggested. "The economic battle today constitutes, more than ever, the principal task and the centre of the cadres' ideological work," he said, "because on it depends the sustainability and preservation of our social system. [...]" "Without a solid and dynamic economy, without eliminating superfluous expenditures and waste, we won't be able to continue raising the standard of living of the population or be able to maintain and improve the high levels reached in education and health that are guaranteed free of charge to all citizens." Agriculture has a pivotal role in economic sustainability, Castro said. "Without a strong and efficient agriculture that we can develop with the resources available to us [...] we cannot aspire to sustain and elevate the feeding of the population, which still depends so much on importing products that can be cultivated in Cuba. "If someday the Minister of the Economy himself told us how much we've spent importing

beans of all kinds, which can be produced in this country, the millions and millions of dollars we've spent, we'd fall flat on our backs," Castro said, in a departure from the prepared speech. Castro referred again to the shortage of personnel in some strategic jobs, a flaw he has mentioned in previous speeches. "If people do not feel the necessity to work for a living, sheltered as they are in state regulations that are excessively paternalistic and irrational, we shall never stimulate their love for work, nor shall we solve the chronic shortage of builders, farm and industrial workers, teachers, policemen and other indispensable trades that are disappearing little by little." Then, a shot at corruption. "Without making a firm and systematic social rejection of illegalities and diverse manifestations of corruption, many people who have enriched themselves with the labor of the majority will continue to disseminate attitudes that directly attack the essence of socialism," he said. "The Revolution [...] will struggle to create the conditions so that all Cubans may have dignified jobs, but it is not the State's task to place everyone after [making] several job offers – all of them rejected consecutively. The first people interested in finding a socially useful job should be the citizens themselves – but if they're not pressured to work, this endeavor will be difficult. "In sum, to continue to spend over and above our revenues is simply the equivalent of eating our own future – your future and that of your children – and endangering the very survival of the Revolution" ([Speech by Raul Castro](#); *El País*, 5/4/10; *The Miami Herald*, 6/4/10).

**April 5:** Biocon, India's top listed biotechnology firm, said it had entered into an agreement to buy the remaining 49 percent stake in its biopharmaceuticals unit from joint venture partner, Cuban firm CIMAB. Biocon, based in the southern Indian city of Bangalore, holds a 51 percent stake in Biocon Biopharmaceuticals, as per the joint venture agreement with CIMAB in 2002. Biocon did not provide any financial details of the stake buy that will make the unit its wholly owned subsidiary. The company said it would continue its partnership with CIMAB for research, development and commercialisation of a range of biopharmaceutical products. Shares in Biocon, which makes insulin, cholesterol-lowering statins and other branded drugs, ended 2.7 percent higher at 303.85 rupees in the main Mumbai market (*Reuters*, 5/4/10).

**Abril 5:** La aguda sequía meteorológica que sufre la oriental provincia de Guantánamo podría poner en peligro la agricultura de esa región, la más distante de la capital de Cuba, reportó la prensa local. En lo que va de año sólo ha caído el 40 por ciento del promedio histórico de precipitaciones para ese período (*IPS*, 5/4/10).

**April 5:** Mixed farming and production-based payment have tripled food production, Lazaro Hernandez, president of the Antonio Maceo cooperative unit in Havana's municipality of Bejucal told *ACN*. The two strategies started to be recently implemented in Cuba in a nationwide effort to boost food production. Hernandez said in the case of his cooperative, they are growing different crops in the in fruit plantations. This allows recovering investments more rapidly, he said. The cooperative produces as well worm humus used as fertilizer, thus reducing the import of similar products and guaranteeing higher yield of the environmentally-friendly product. More than 40 species of fruit and about a hundred varieties are cultivated in the cooperative. Among those with the highest demand in the domestic market are avocado, mango, guava and papaya (*ACN*, 5/4/10).

**April 5:** Cuban ranchers look for alternatives to the traditional cattle feeding, unavailable due to the climate change among other reasons, by cropping pasture and using concentrated diet

supplements. These methods aim at hastening the cattle heads reaching the 420 kilogram weight the commercializing enterprises require from ranchers. In order to achieve good results, it is necessary to work on advance during the drought season, highlighted Orlando Fariñas, owner of the La Inecita Ranch, in the Havana province municipality of San Jose de la Lajas. We are making some food from yucca and sweet potato, mixed with some yogurt for several days which acquire a tasty flavor thus becoming a nutritive and desired food for the animals, he said. Fariñas noted the use of sugar cane and king grass, which is harvested in the surrounding areas to the farm, to fatten bulls faster. The Ministry of Agriculture took on boosting production by raising the purchasing prices from private farmers, as part of its working agreements with them (ACN, 5/4/10).

**April 6:** Cuba and Iran examined the development of bilateral commercial and economic relations during a meeting in Havana. The talks were headed by the vice president of the Cuban Council of Ministers and co-chairman of the Cuba-Iran Intergovernmental Commission, Jorge Luis Sierra Cruz, and by Seyed Amir Mansoor Berghei, Iran's First Deputy Foreign Minister. Sierra Cruz, who is also the Cuban minister of Transportation, said both countries are moving toward an improvement of bilateral economic collaboration, both in quantity and in quality. In this regard, he announced that projects favor the purchase of supplies for priority sectors in Cuba such as railroad transportation, water resources, electricity, the iron and steel industry, and the sugar and agricultural industry. Other mutually beneficial co-operation actions are being planned in the area of biotechnology. Another topic analyzed was the prospects to increase the presence of Iranian products in Cuba. They also expressed their interest in favoring projects for Caribbean integration, mainly those involving countries of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of the Americas (ALBA) regional bloc. Berghei also held working meetings with Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla and with the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade and Investment, Orlando Hernandez Guillen (*Prensa Latina*, 5/4/10; ACN, 6/4/10).

**Abril 6:** El congelamiento de las cuentas de empresas extranjeras que operan en Cuba, incluyendo las del empresario chileno Max Marambio, generó un gran revuelo entre la disidencia, la que advierte que ya ha comenzado a desaparecer la leche del mercado local, informó el diario *La Segunda*. “La leche ha desaparecido de las tiendas en precios convertibles y de los mercados negros de productos lácteos, que han colapsado porque se nutrían de esa compañía”, denunció la bloguera Yoani Sánchez. Los negocios con capital extranjero cayeron en 2009 un 18 por ciento y, en total, 56 compañías abandonaron el país —de 314 pasaron a 258—, debido a los efectos de la crisis financiera internacional, las dificultades internas de la economía y el embargo estadounidense, según el diario oficial *Granma*. El “corralito” que desde 2009 se comenzó a notar, se ha sentido fuerte al interior de la Isla, según precisó Yoani Sánchez: “Muchos inversionistas extranjeros se han ido ante los sucesivos impagos y eso se nota en el desabastecimiento de las tiendas y el deterioro de los servicios”. Según explicó, “en una nación que importa más del 70 por ciento de lo que consume”, las restricciones económicas, sumadas a los problemas que actualmente enfrentan las empresas extranjeras, “dan un cuadro bastante gris económicamente”. Un ejemplo es la empresa Río Zaza, operada por Max Marambio en sociedad con el gobierno cubano, la que tras su paralización ha tenido efectos directos en la vida de los habitantes de La Habana. “Con el quiebre de esta fábrica, que al parecer esconde también un escándalo de corrupción por la parte cubana, la leche ha desaparecido de las tiendas. Su precio se disparó por encima del doble, y escasea”, dijo (*Diario de Cuba*, 7/4/10).

**April 7:** Havana has detained two Cuban functionaries working for companies linked to a Chilean millionaire, the Chilean newspaper *La Tercera* reported. One is an accountant for the ING holding company, which handles the business in Havana of businessman Max Marambio. The other is a manager for Rio Zaza, a food importing company jointly owned by Marambio and the Cuban government. No charges have been pressed but the detainees' whereabouts are unknown, the paper said. This is how *La Tercera* reported the situation. Raúl Castro ordered an investigation of Marambio's holdings in mid-December 2009 after the businessman complained about being denied access to his Rio Zaza funds. The government had frozen those funds – about \$23 million, according to a Marambio associate, about \$30 million, according to *Radio Bío-Bío* – adducing widespread liquidity problems. The investigation also spread to the Cuban tourist agency Sol y Son, partly owned by Marambio's brother, Marcel. Marambio's inability to access his Rio Zaza funds forced him in February to shut down two of its plants, leaving 500 workers jobless. The company reportedly did about \$100 million in business per year. Chilean Foreign Minister Alfredo Moreno told the daily *La Nación* that his government is "following the situation closely" and will support any claims by Chilean entrepreneurs in Cuba. "We shall be ready to cooperate in whatever we can," he said, but he ruled out any immediate disruption in diplomatic relations with Cuba (*The Miami Herald*, 7/4/10).

**April 7:** Cuba's sugar ministry will close in the coming months and be replaced by a state-run corporation, business sources said, in the most important reorganisation of the once-thriving industry since it was drastically downsized in 2002. Plans to create the new sugar corporation and revitalise the industry by, among other things, allowing foreign investment and closing inefficient sugar mills are nearing final approval by President Raul Castro, said the sources, who know the industry well and asked not to be identified. The ministry's upcoming demise appears to be the last chapter in the dramatic decline of the sugar industry in a Caribbean island country where sugar was once king but now accounts for less than 5 per cent of foreign exchange earnings. This latest move is similar to other agricultural reforms under Castro, who replaced older brother Fidel Castro in 2008 and is trying to increase food output by loosening the communist-led government's control over farming. Cuba's fall from once being the world's biggest sugar exporter, producing 8 million tonnes of raw sugar annually, began with the collapse of former benefactor the Soviet Union in 1991. Since then, the sector has declined relentlessly and output is expected to be only 1.2 million tonnes this harvest. But with the upcoming reorganisation, "in the medium-term they hope to increase production to 2.8 million tonnes using fewer mills," a Cuban source with intimate knowledge of the sugar industry said. "Yields per hectare are currently around 3 tonnes per hectare and the goal is to bring them up to at least 6 tonnes," he added. The international standard is 8 tonnes per hectare. Cuba itself consumes a minimum 700,000 tonnes of sugar annually. "The new structure will give decision makers in the industry more autonomy and allow them to keep a percentage of revenues for re-investment," a Cuban economist said, asking like the others that his name not be used (*Reuters*, 7/4/10).

**April 7:** Communist Cuba unveiled an online store with a cultural twist offering everything from books by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara T-shirts to designer shower curtains and music downloads. "It is really the biggest online selection of (Cuban) culture, and all the areas of the arts are represented," manager Teresita Espino was quoted as saying in *Juventud Rebelde*

newspaper. The new site, [www.mallcubano.com](http://www.mallcubano.com), even features a clothing line from the Compay Segundo brand, named after the late star of the Buena Vista Social Club who died in 2003. The government clearly has targeted the massive expat Cuban community – more than 1.25 million people of Cuban origin and descent live in the United States alone – offering specials for Mother’s Day and delivery in Cuba. The prices – 32 US dollars for a pair of men’s jeans or 41 US dollars for a linen guayabera shirt – are not terribly inexpensive but still out of the reach of the vast majority of Cuba’s 11 million people. Items can be bought in euros and US dollars, but not in Cuban pesos. Cubans make an average of less than 20 US dollars a month (*AFP*, 8/4/10).

**April 7:** Over 20 enterprises from western Matanzas province exhibit their products in the Plaza America Convention Centre, located in this tourist resort, some 80 miles east of Havana city. This exhibition, Expo Matanzas 2010, represents an opportunity for starting negotiations among the domestic companies, as well as with other national and international entities, said Judith Salcedo, head of the Managerial Improvement System in this province. Among the exhibitors are the Cuban Light Industry and the Spanish company Resigun, which specializes in paints, and water-proof and antirust products (*ACN*, 7/4/10).

**April 7:** Cuba is no longer holding on to foreign companies’ funds to stanch a drain of cash, six Chilean executives doing business in Cuba told Chilean Foreign Minister Alfredo Moreno Charme in a letter, according to the *Terra* news service. The businessmen told Moreno that the problem affecting their compatriot Max Marambio is unique to Marambio and doesn’t affect them. “The case of the companies owned by Chilean entrepreneur Max Marambio is a one-of-a-kind situation that is being investigated by the Courts of Justice in Cuba,” the letter said. “It will be up to them to deal with the violations of the existing regulations that [Marambio’s companies] may have committed, problems that none of the other Chilean companies in Cuba has.” The financial squeeze afflicting Cuba “was provoked by the greater expenses and investments made following the devastating damage caused by the hurricanes in 2008 [...] the worldwide financial crisis, the criminal blockade imposed by the United States of America for almost 50 years, and the commitments assumed by [Cuba] in substantially improving the quality of life of its citizens,” the letter said. A copy of the letter was sent to the Cuban Chamber of Commerce. One of the executives, Angel Domper of TJP Internacional, told *Terra* that “in 2009, yes, there was a problem extracting hard currency that affected all the foreign companies established in [Cuba]. However, beginning in October 2009, new commercial ventures have had no problem paying, collecting or sending money overseas.” Guillermo Jorquera of Merinter Ltda. said the freeze in funds “was no small problem, true, but today it has virtually been solved” (*The Miami Herald*, 9/4/10).

**Abril 8:** La presidenta de la Junta General del Principado de Asturias, la socialista María Jesús Álvarez González, inicia el 9 de abril una visita institucional de diez días a la República Dominicana, Panamá, México y Cuba encabezando una delegación del Parlamento asturiano integrada por la Vicepresidenta Primera de la Mesa de la Junta, Diana Camafeita (IU-BA-Verdes), la Secretaria Primera, Servanda García (PSOE), el portavoz del Grupo Parlamentario Socialista, Fernando Lastra y la portavoz suplente del Grupo Parlamentario de IU-BA-Verdes, Emilia Vázquez. La delegación de la Junta realiza este viaje formando parte de la delegación oficial del Principado de Asturias que encabeza Vicente Álvarez Areces, según informó el Parlamento asturiano a través de una nota de prensa (*Europa Press*, 8/4/10).

**Abril 9:** El gobierno de Hugo Chávez autorizó a una empresa mixta conformada entre las estatales Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) y Cubana de Petróleos (CUPET) a explorar y producir crudo en cuatro campos maduros en el país sudamericano. El acuerdo, que da luz verde a Cuba para extraer petróleo del suelo venezolano tras años de cooperación, que han involucrado desde el suministro de crudo a la isla hasta el envío de médicos a trabajar en Venezuela, fue autorizado por la Asamblea Nacional según un acuerdo publicado en la *Gaceta Oficial*. “La Asamblea Nacional (...) acuerda aprobar la constitución de una empresa mixta entre la Corporación Venezolana de Petróleo (filial de PDVSA) y Comercial CUPET, con una participación accionaria inicial de 60 por ciento y 40 por ciento, respectivamente”, dice el documento. Los campos Adas, Lido, Limón y Oficina Central corresponden a áreas tradicionales que, aun cuando no tienen un volumen de producción significativo, han sido solicitados durante años por algunas de las petroleras privadas que operan en Venezuela. Todos forman parte del grupo de campos de Oficina, ubicados en los orientales estados Anzoátegui y Monagas y que se extienden por más de 170 kilómetros (*Reuters, Diario de Cuba, 10/4/10*).

**April 9:** The General Staff of the Cuban National Defense Council issued a statement calling for a more efficient use of water resources to face an ongoing drought hitting the country. The note states that this prolonged period of low rainfall began in November 2008 and that it became even worse in 2009, which was regarded as the fourth driest year in over a century. The statement adds that the situation has continued in the first quarter of 2010 leading to a significant reduction in water volume of reservoirs and damaging the availability of underground water, which has hindered its supply to over 500,000 people. “This situation demands that the population and economic entities make a more efficient use of water and implement local solutions to mitigate the effects of the drought,” the text points out (*ACN, 13/4/10*).

**April 10:** José Ramón Machado Ventura, First Vice President of the Councils of State and Ministers of Cuba, urged in Ciego de Avila province to achieve greater effectiveness in agricultural contracting. Machado Ventura also chaired the plenary of the Provincial Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), prior to its 10th Congress which will run from May 14 through May 17 in Havana. The leader stated that the contracts between producers and the enterprises should be conducted with objectivity and realism, to increase the levels of food availability and to prevent farmers from losing in the process. Machado further stressed that the country needs a sustainable agriculture to provide people with the products they require (*ACN, 10/4/10*).

**April 12:** The office of the Comptroller General of the Republic (CGR) will carry out at least 750 surprise audits of unnamed companies nationwide “to halt labor indiscipline, crimes and corruption,” the official newspaper *Trabajadores* revealed. Comptroller General Gladys Bejerano Portela, who was appointed to her post in August 2009, said that CGR inspectors will also look for proof of poor management and unproductive labor. The audits will be conducted at random, from April 19 to at least May 22, Bejerano said. Their objective is “to contribute to labor discipline, ensure the optimum use of resources, detect pilferage and other crimes, analyze the cause [of workplace crimes] and adopt measures to solve them” (*AFP, 12/4/10; The Miami Herald, 13/4/10*).

**April 12:** Cuba continues to spend more than \$1.5 billion a year on food imports, Vice President Jose Ramon Machado said while urging farmers to boost production, Communist Party daily *Granma* reported. Machado told gatherings of farmers that if Cuba does not achieve “strong, efficient agriculture, it will be unable to increase production to the amount people need,” the paper said. At the same time, he acknowledged “obstacles and bureaucratic decisions that bog down the distribution and sale of meat, fish, grains and garden produce.” In several provincial assemblies of the state-run National Association of Small Farmers, or ANAP, Machado has said that the goal of agricultural policy should be ensuring an adequate supply of food in each population centre without excessive transportation costs (*EFE*, 12/4/10).

**April 12:** Canadians bound for Cuba will soon have a choice for travel health insurance. They may buy an openly capitalist policy in their country, or face having to buy a sneaky communist policy in Cuba. Proof of medical coverage will become mandatory for all visitors to Cuba starting May 1. The Cuba Tourist Bureau in Canada notified tour operators recently, and promises a general announcement with more details shortly. About 914,000 Canadians visited the land of Fidel Castro last year, according to the bureau. In future, if Canadians arrive without coverage, a Cuban company will sell them medical coverage at an airport, port or marina. A government announcement said about 20 per cent of visitors now arrive without coverage. Tourist Bureau employees assure callers that Cuba will not force its insurance policies on anyone with individual or group travel health insurance coverage from Canada. Tourism is a major source of Cuba’s foreign exchange earnings (*Toronto Star*, 12/4/10).

**Abril 12:** La producción de tomate en Cuba caerá hasta las 104,000 toneladas este año, luego de haber alcanzado un récord de más de 112,000 toneladas en 2009, lo cual desbordó las capacidades de la industria procesadora y provocó significativas pérdidas, reportó la prensa local (*IPS*, 12/4/10).

**April 13:** Cuba is turning over hundreds of state-run barber shops and beauty salons to employees in what appears to be the start of an overhaul of state retail services by Raul Castro, the Cuban president. Barbers and hairdressers across the country said they would be able to rent the space where they work and pay taxes instead of receiving a monthly wage, it was reported. The measure sets a monthly fee for each person based on 15 per cent of the average revenue generated by haircutting and styling in each area. They will be able to charge whatever the market will bear and expect to make good money for Cuba, where the average monthly wage is 420 pesos, or the equivalent of about \$20. Daisy, a hairdresser in an eastern Guantanamo province, told the Reuters news agency that under Barbers and manicurists will pay less per month. For example, in Guantanamo barbers will give the government 604 pesos and manicurists will pay 280 pesos. Those employees who do not wish to rent are being offered other jobs or retirement. The measure marks the first time state-run, retail-level establishments have been handed over to employees since they were nationalised in 1968, however the government has not announced the new policy, nor has the state-run media reported it (*Aljazeera*, 13/4/10).

**Abril 13:** Fuentes oficiales dieron a conocer que la provincia Granma incumplió la meta de producción de azúcar en esta zafra. Hay 2 centrales parados por problemas técnicos y falta de rendimiento, debido sobre todo a la baja en la cantidad de caña de azúcar para moler. Argumentan las fuentes que también la sequía en la zona ha causado un gran perjuicio, pero

agregan que a esto se unen, lo que denominan “problemas subjetivos”, que en definitiva significa mala organización del trabajo, errores en las decisiones administrativas, falta de atención a los obreros, etc. En la provincia Granma, de 5 centrales azucareros quedan sólo 3 en funcionamiento (*Cubamet*, 13/4/10).

**April 13:** A Chilean executive questioned by Cuban prosecutors in a corruption case has been found dead in Havana, the latest twist in a burgeoning scandal that has snared two Fidel Castro protégés and several other Cubans. Chilean Foreign Minister Alfredo Moreno said he has asked Havana for an “exhaustive investigation” into the death of Roberto Baudrand, 59, general manager of the Cuba-based Rio Zaza Foods. News media in Chile reported that Baudrand, who was found dead in his Havana apartment, appeared “tense” in recent days and speculated he may have committed suicide. Cuban prosecutors had interrogated Baudrand at least twice in March for up to seven hours each session and banned him from leaving the island as part of an investigation of several companies in Cuba owned by Max Marambio, a wealthy Chilean leftist. Marambio issued a statement expressing his condolences, but said nothing more. The Cuban media has yet to report on the death or the corruption case, though word of the scandal has been making the rounds since the March 8 dismissal of Civil Aviation Minister Rogelio Acevedo. Acevedo’s wife, two administrators of the government-run Cubana de Aviacion airline in Spain and Canada and one administrator of a chain of government currency exchange house are said to have been detained for questioning. Also detained is Lucy Leal, an executive of the Marambio-owned Sol y Son travel wholesaler. The scandal has shaken Cubans because of the apparent involvement of Marambio and Acevedo, both longtime favorites of Fidel Castro and influential players in Cuba’s profitable tourism industry ([Comunicado del Gobierno de Chile](#); *La Tercera*, 14/4/10; *The Miami Herald*, 15/4/10).

**Abril 14:** El canciller Alfredo Moreno confirmó que Chile envió una nota diplomática a Cuba pidiendo investigación por la muerte de Roberto Baudrand. “El gobierno chileno seguirá atentamente el desarrollo de este caso hasta el esclarecimiento total de los hechos”, dijo. El ministro de Relaciones Exteriores expresó además las condolencias a la familia de Baudrand y señaló que no habían antecedentes acerca de los cargos por los que era investigado el empresario por el gobierno de la isla (*La Tercera*, 14/4/10).

**Abril 14:** Ramiro del Río, directivo de una de las empresas del chileno Max Marambio en la isla, habría muerto este mes en la cárcel, según informó el programa *A mano limpia*, del canal miamense AméricaTeve. En el espacio, el periodista Wilfredo Cancio aseguró que la información procede de “varias fuentes confiables”. “Son aun inciertas las circunstancias de la muerte de Del Río, quien había sido detenido como parte de la investigación que siguen las autoridades cubanas en torno al caso”, añadió Cancio. Según las informaciones del programa, “al parecer hay más de dos empleados cubanos detenidos en el proceso”, y varios chilenos cercanos a Marambio están bajo la lupa y el interrogatorio de la Fiscalía General. Cancio dijo que Ramiro del Río era hijo de un ex alto funcionario del mismo nombre, que tuvo cargos partidistas en Pinar del Río y fue secretario de la Asamblea Nacional y embajador en la extinta RDA. La operación anticorrupción también afecta a otros funcionarios destituidos, como el ex ministro de la Industria Alimenticia, Alejandro Roca Iglesias, aseguraron a *Diario de Cuba* fuentes de la disidencia interna. En *A mano limpia* también se habló sobre el tema. El gobierno todavía no ha informado sobre ninguno de los procesos legales en marcha (*Diario de Cuba*, 15/4/10).

**April 14:** Cuban Vice-President Ramiro Valdés checked on the developments of the works to extend the oil refinery and Petrochemical Pole in central Cuba. Valdés toured the site and talked to the workers and officials to determine the work's progress. The opening of a dining facility for 4,000 people will help improve the working conditions at the refinery. The project includes the building of four oil storage tanks, and the officials reported to Valdés that already 90 percent of the works is done. Three of these tanks will store diesel and one turbo diesel which will increase the refinery capacity in 80 000 cubic meters. The Camilo Cienfuegos refinery processes 65 000 barrels a day, and once the new tanks are operational, it will increase its capacity 125 percent. Valdés checked as well on the progress of prioritized programs such energy savings and housing in the four central Cuban provinces (*ACN*, 14/4/10).

**April 14:** The 30th international tourism fair that will be held in Cuba on May 3 to 8 will be devoted to Russia, *EFE* news agency quoted its organizers as saying. In January-February 2010 about 8,700 tourists from Russia visited Cuba, which is 12 percent more than during the same period last year. Tourism is one of the main sources of Cuba's foreign exchange earnings. Canada is top on the list as to the number of tourists visiting Cuba. Following it are Great Britain, Italy, Spain, Germany and France. Last year 2.43 million people visited Cuba, which is 3.5 percent more than in 2008, but receipts from that economic sector declined 11 percent. According to the Cuban National Statistics Office, the total amount of foreign visitors declined 3.4 percent in January-February despite the growing number of Russian tourists (*Itar-Tass*, 15/4/10).

**April 15:** Cuba's tourist image in Belarus is enjoying great interest and love among citizens of that European nation, said in Minsk Cuban ambassador Alfredo Nieves. In a meeting at the embassy with tour operators represented at the 13th International Tourism Fair of Belarus -Rest 2010-, Nieves thanked dozens of travel agents commercializing Cuban tourism products on the Byelorussian market for their presence in the event. During the Fair, Estefania Escobar, an official from the island's Tourism Ministry presented the multimedia Cuba as Tourist Destination, the *Prensa Latina* news agency reported. For her part, Sandra Tarafa, representative of Cuba's Havanatur tour operator in Moscow, promoted the characteristics and services of that enterprise (*ACN*, 15/4/10).

**April 15:** Cuba presented in El Salvador a group of tourist offers for local travellers, as part of a strategy that seeks to attract Central American visitors to the island. Eduardo Acosta, director of the tourist office based in Venezuela, said in this regard that ways for Cuban tourism are being opened, supported by the recently opened embassy in San Salvador. He said that the Cuban official mission will favor work relations with travel agencies and airlines, with the purpose of finding better ways for Salvadorans to visit Cuba. According to the Spanish news agency *EFE*, the Cuban Tourism Ministry has decided to organize a promotional caravan throughout Central America, which he considers a very promising region for tourism. In March, El Salvador inaugurated its legation in Havana, which in turn inaugurated in January its embassy in San Salvador, as part of the process of the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, following a decision by Salvadoran President Mauricio Funes in June, 2009 (*ACN*, 16/4/10).

**Abril 15:** El gobierno de Chile manifestó su desacuerdo con la tesis de que el ingeniero chileno Roberto Baudrand, quien dirigía una empresa que es investigada por las autoridades cubanas, muriera a causa de un infarto. El ministro chileno de Relaciones Exteriores, Alfredo Moreno señaló a los periodistas que aún no se ha completado la autopsia (en Cuba), pero que sí recibió información preliminar que no va en la línea de lo que se publicó en algunos medios. “Tenemos información verbal de las causas que no coincide con eso (las publicaciones), pero no es definitiva y no es formal tampoco y, por lo tanto, no vamos a dar ninguna información sobre eso hasta que no se haya completado la autopsia y no tengamos un respuesta formal de las autoridades cubanas”, explicó Moreno. La muerte del empresario se generó en medio de una investigación a las empresas mixtas, con capitales privados y estatales, en donde las autoridades cubanas sospechan de dineros mal habidos. Por dicha situación, Baudrand había sido interrogado en tres ocasiones por la Fiscalía Nacional de Cuba y no podía salir de la isla. El canciller aseguró que el gobierno chileno ha concentrado sus esfuerzos en respaldar a la familia del gerente general de Río Zaza y en lograr que se esclarezcan las causas de su deceso (*EFE*, 15/4/10).

**April 16:** A Chilean businessman found dead in Cuba following questioning in a corruption investigation died of “acute respiratory insufficiency” caused by a mixture of drugs and alcohol, the Cuban government said in a statement. The death of Roberto Baudrand, 59, whose body was found in his Havana apartment on April 13, prompted speculation he may have killed himself over a Cuban probe involving government agencies and companies, including a joint venture he managed, but the statement did not say whether he died by suicide or other means. It did not say how much alcohol Baudrand had consumed nor which drugs were in his system, in findings said to be based on a preliminary investigation and autopsy by Cuba’s Institute of Legal Medicine. Sources close to the case and Baudrand’s family said they had been told preliminary autopsy results found he had died of a heart attack. The Chilean government has asked for a full investigation by Cuban authorities. Baudrand was manager of food firm Rio Zaza, a joint venture between the Cuban government and Chilean businessman Max Marambio, a former bodyguard for the late Chilean President Salvador Allende who became a close ally of former Cuban leader Fidel Castro. In its statement, the government confirmed for the first time that Rio Zaza was under investigation for “the presumed commission of irregularities and violations of laws.” It said a group of Chilean executives have been implicated, but with the exception of Baudrand they had “abandoned the country” or not shown up for questioning. Baudrand had been requested to stay in Cuba until the investigation was finished, the statement said. Foreign media and dissident blogs have reported the probe was linked to the recent dismissal of longtime Cuban Civil Aviation Minister Rogelio Acevedo, but the government made no mention of him ([Nota oficial](#); *Reuters*, 16/4/10).

**Abril 16:** Dirigentes del Poder Popular y el Partido Comunista de Cuba del municipio San Antonio de los Baños, provincia Habana, se reunieron con los trabajadores sociales de esta localidad, para ofrecerles nuevos puestos de trabajo. A los encuentros asistieron alrededor de 150 jóvenes que aún permanecen en sus puestos. Los representantes del gobierno les propusieron ocupar plazas en la Policía Nacional Revolucionaria, pero sólo dos aceptaron. Las brigadas de trabajadores sociales fueron creadas por iniciativa de Fidel Castro en noviembre de 2005. Su labor se concentró en el control de los jóvenes desvinculados del estudio y el trabajo, para reinsertarlos en la sociedad, pero entre sus primeras tareas estuvo la venta de efectos eléctricos y ollas a la población. Los trabajadores sociales se convirtieron en un contingente de choque que

realizaba trabajos de inspección en sectores laborales y despachaba combustible en las gasolineras debido a la gran corrupción en ese sector. Raúl Castro declaró en el IX Congreso de la Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas, que existen más de un millón de plazas que serán eliminadas, y entre ellas las de muchos trabajadores sociales (*Cubanet*, 16/4/10).

**April 19:** Humberto Rios Labrada's campaign to let Cuban farmers choose the crops and seed varieties best for their lands helped him win one of the 2010 Goldman Environmental Prizes — known as the “green Nobels.” “I want the seed to adapt to the people, not the people to adapt to the seed,” the 47-year-old, self-described hippy told *The Associated Press* during a recent visit to this farming town 20 miles east of Havana. Rios' wants to make Cuban farms more sustainable by giving farmers more autonomy — a radical notion in what has long been a strictly top-down planned economy where officials tell producers just what to grow, even if it isn't quite right for the soil. Government officials at first bristled at his ideas, but his success, along with greater government openness to local autonomy, has led them to grant him unusual and growing leeway in working with 50,000 farmers and counting. Goldman recipients are chosen annually from six regions worldwide. Winners receive \$150,000 at a ceremony in San Francisco, and Rios obtained sometimes tough-to-come-by permission to attend the event from both the Cuban and US governments (*AP*, 19/4/10).

**April 19:** The President of Cuba's Chamber of Commerce, Pedro Álvarez Borrego, spoke out in favor of boosting trade with Asturias, Spain. In a business meeting between businesspeople from Cuba and this Spanish autonomous region, Alvarez Borrego encouraged participants to identify and promote potential areas to develop exchange between the two nations. He added that Cuba and Asturias already have projects to help the island replace certain imports with domestic productions and to increase exports particularly in the tourism industry and other sectors like renewable energy, food production and agriculture. The President of Asturias attending the meeting, Vicente Alvarez Areces, agreed on the need to look for new business opportunities. In the meeting, held at the National Hotel in Havana, local experts presented investment projects and an array of Cuban exportable products to the Asturias' businesspeople (*ACN*, 19/4/10).

**Abril 19:** El gobierno cubano dijo al presidente de la región española de Asturias, Vicente Álvarez Areces, que saldará “con flexibilidad” y en un periodo “no muy dilatado” la deuda de 23 millones de euros que mantiene con diez de las 38 empresas asturianas que operan en la isla. Álvarez Areces se reunió con el viceministro primero de Comercio e Inversión Extranjera, Antonio Carricarti. Al encuentro asistió también el empresario Antonio Sabino, uno de los diez inversores asturianos que acompañaron al funcionario español en una visita institucional a Cuba. Según el presidente de la región de Asturias, la cita resultó “muy útil” para la defensa de los intereses de estas compañías, con las cuales La Habana acumula una deuda que en algún caso alcanza los 10 millones de euros (*EFE*, 19/4/10).

**April 19:** Cuban General Comptroller Gladys Bejerano announced in a press conference the launching of the Fifth National Checking to Internal Control throughout Cuba. Bejerano said 3,800 professional, most of them auditors, will make 742 audits by surprise to different enterprises. The process has been done in previous years, but this time we are better prepared to face this challenge, she added. She said this checking is not a campaign since control is an everyday task for the organization she heads, and its goal is to assess it at random in every Cuban

working sphere. The activity will focus mainly in those companies with presence all over Cuba, since the local ones have gone through this process on regular basis in the last six months. The audits to enterprises will account for 64 of the total, and the rest will be performed to entities directly subsidized by the government (ACN, 19/4/10).

**April 19:** Coffee production has fallen by 90 percent in recent years in Cuba, where the government of General Raul Castro is currently spending some \$50 million to import the bean to meet domestic demand, the government-run weekly *Trabajadores* reported. Cuba once produced 60,000 tons of coffee per year, but “now it scarcely reaches 10 percent of that quantity,” *Trabajadores* said, citing figures compiled by the Agriculture Ministry. “Today, the country needs to import 19,000 tons of coffee valued at approximately \$50 million to ensure the consumption of this product, which traditionally constituted an important source of foreign currency income,” the weekly said. Experts cited in the article said that the main causes of the drop in coffee production include prolonged droughts, the hurricanes that have slammed Cuba in recent years and the government’s failure to provide growers with enough fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides and tools. They also mentioned the introduction of plagues “by enemy hands” and the exodus of producers to other crops “seeking greater income.” The weekly emphasized that the harvest of the bean “touched bottom” in 2005, when coffee growers became the worst-paid peasant farmers within the island’s agricultural system. “It cannot be a more bitter pill for the Cuban economy,” *Trabajadores* said, adding – however – that “far from renouncing this crop, present on the island for more than 250 years, the nation has established a development program, which between 2009 and 2015 intends to reverse the deficit” (EFE, 19/4/10).

**April 19:** Heavy rains that lasted some 20 hours caused rivers to burst their banks and cut road communications among the towns scattered throughout the coast in Eastern Cuba, an unprecedented event according to locals. The head of the Risk Reducing Management Centre, Julio Hopkins, told ACN news agency that the water accumulated in the nearby Sierra Maestra mountain range descended with such force that knocked down the El Peladero bridge, when two of the centre collapsed. Road traffic was stopped in this area, and until the waters recede they will not be able to assess the damages, said Hopkins. This situation prevents the inhabitants of towns such as Limoncito, La Mula, La Plata, La Magdalena and El Macho from reaching the municipal main locality. Reports from damages in the Uvero town were issued by the Civil Defense, along the evacuation of 82 people. A similar event took place in the municipal main town, where the Guama river flooded the milk processing factory, and ice making facility, as well as housing facilities causing over a hundred people to evacuate to safer areas. The Civil Defense reports no human losses (ACN, 19/4/10).

**April 20:** As a result of the prolonged drought in eastern Cuba, the water for more than 100,000 people in 280 communities of the province of Las Tunas is being distributed in water trucks. Due to the absence of rain and the steady decrease in the level of water reservoirs, the water service through the water supply system is limited. Las Tunas, located over 428 miles to the east of Havana, has the lowest rainfall historical average of the country, with barely 1,038 cubic millimetres a year. Norberto Marey, local representative of the National Institute of Water Resources (INRH) told ACN that the reservoirs are at 51 percent of its total capacity although the largest of them still contains 62 percent. Marvey said as part of actions to make better use of the

stored water, INRH is leading a program to eliminate leakages in aqueducts and installing water meters in high-consuming centres (ACN, 21/4/10).

**Abril 20:** Una plan bilateral de complementación económica y desarrollo social, basado en los ideales de Simón Bolívar y José Martí, discutieron los presidentes de Venezuela y Cuba, Hugo Chávez Frías y Raúl Castro, respectivamente, durante una reunión efectuada en el Palacio de Miraflores en Caracas. Así lo expresó el Jefe de Estado venezolano durante un pase televisivo con el programa Dossier, transmitido por Venezolana de Televisión (VTV). “Aquí estamos trabajando en el plan de integración y ahora estamos desarrollando un mapa más detallado de complementación económica, además de todo el desarrollo social. Hay que ver cuánto nuestro pueblo tiene que agradecerle a Cuba Revolucionaria”, dijo Chávez. Indicó que en el encuentro también analizaron el impacto social en la población venezolana de la misión Barrio Adentro, que cuenta con la participación de médicos cubanos. Chávez informó que durante la reunión se acordó realizar con Cuba encuentros trimestrales para evaluar el seguimiento de los proyectos de desarrollo social que impulsan en conjunto ambas naciones. Por su parte, el presidente de Cuba, Raúl Castro, dijo haberse sentido satisfecho por los dos días de trabajo que tuvo con el presidente Chávez y prometió volver lo antes posible al país (ABN, 21/4/10).

**April 21:** The Cuban company Comercial Cupet will pay \$17.35 million to participate in the development of four oil fields in eastern Venezuela over the next 25 years, Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) announced. The two countries have formed a joint venture to be known as Petrolera VenCupet. Through a branch, the Corporación Nacional de Petróleo (CNP), PDVSA will hold a 60-per cent share in the enterprise, Cupet the remaining 40 per cent. The fields in question are in the states of Anzoátegui and Monagas (*The Miami Herald*, 22/4/10).

**April 21:** Ricardo Cabrisas, Vice-president of the Cuban Council of Ministers, met with Wu Aiyang, Minister of Justice from the People’s Republic of China, who is on an official visit to the island. Today, there’s not a single sector of the Cuban economy in which China is not present, affirmed Cabrisas at the office of the Council of Ministers, after receiving the distinguished visitor and her accompanying delegation. He described bilateral co-operation relations as very important and increasingly stronger, and highlighted that Cuba has several joint ventures with the People’s Republic of China, included in the spheres of biotechnology and public health (ACN, 21/4/10).

**April 21:** The Ciego de Avila Citrus Enterprise created a seed bank to boost the growing of strawberries in central Cuba to diversify its production and replace imports. Ministry of Agriculture specialist Amador Perez said they will use 5 hectare for this project, from which they expect to cover the fruit supplies for the tourist poles in its fresh state and also canned. Perez explained that the chosen varieties, such as Misionera and Robuda, adapt well to the Cuban climate, and have a good production yield. Strawberry crops began in Cuba in the 1960s in the region of Banao (central Cuba) and later extended to the Havana provinces (ACN, 21/4/10).

**Abril 21:** La llegada de turistas a Cuba aumentó un 6,4 por ciento en marzo comparado con el mismo mes del 2009, interrumpiendo una caída durante los primeros dos meses de este año, dijo la Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas (ONE). Según la ONE, 296.988 turistas visitaron Cuba el mes pasado, llevando a 810.150 el total de visitantes en el primer trimestre del 2010, apenas 140

menos que en el mismo lapso del año previo. El turismo había caído un 3,4 por ciento en los primeros dos meses del 2010 debido a un retroceso en los visitantes de Canadá, el principal cliente del turismo cubano. La recuperación de marzo fue una buena noticia para Cuba, que atraviesa por una severa crisis de liquidez y que el año pasado obtuvo 2,000 millones de dólares, o un 20 por ciento de sus divisas, del turismo y otros negocios vinculados. El aumento parece obedecer a un incremento en las llegadas de cubano estadounidenses después que el presidente Barack Obama eliminó las restricciones de viajes a la isla (*Reuters*, 21/4/10).

**April 21:** Cuba invested about 150 million dollars for the development of cellular phones since 2003 and plans to exceed the first million lines at the end of this year, official sources reported. The Vicepresident of Mobile Services of the Cuban Telecommunications Enterprise (ETECSA), Maximo Lafuente, affirmed in a press conference that the island carries out an investment process to guarantee the expansion of that network. The will of the organization to gradually reduce the service tariffs will allow the increase in traffic with the same amount of money, 11.88 dollars as monthly average, said the official. This year ETECSA will make the investments necessary to conclude 2010 with one million customers, expressed Lafuente in statements to *Prensa Latina*. Regarding the roaming service, the second source of income in mobile technology, Lafuente said this year should be signed another 30 accords to exceed the over 300 accords currently with operators of 128 countries. He also announced reductions in national and international tariffs, which in this last case implies reductions from 42 to 75 percent (*Prensa Latina*, 22/4/10).

**April 23:** Ghanaian President John Evan Atta Mills sent greetings to Cuban Revolution leader Fidel Castro, who has promoted the island's support for that African state, in the 10 regions of which a medical brigade is working. The head of state received Doctor Jose Antonio Castro, president of Cuba's Labiofam business group, at the Government's Office in Accra, the Foreign Cuban Ministry's Web site reported. During the meeting, Fraga referred to the work of his entity and the successful results obtained in the reduction of malaria in that nation and in other African countries where Cuban technology against that disease is used. He also spoke about the opening of a factory to make a biological product against larvae, with the financing of the fraternal Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which will guarantee the sustainability of the project. Fraga expressed his willingness to continue cooperating with Ghana, in order to make a modest contribution to what Revolution leader Fidel Castro has pointed out: the need to pay the great debt humanity has with Africa (*ACN*, 23/4/10).

**April 24:** Buying medical insurance for a trip to Cuba may not be as costly as it was said earlier, or as complicated as many travelers fear. A Miami expert on charter flights sent the following explanation. Beginning May 1, Havanatur, the Havana-based travel group that deals with US charter companies, will charge a \$46-per-passenger medical insurance premium to every charterer as part of the overall landing fee. The insurance coverage is good for 30 days. When a traveler arrives in Cuba, his airline ticket will be stamped with proof of 30-day protection. The stamped ticket is, in effect, his policy. But will the charterer collect the whole \$46 from the traveler when it issues him his ticket? Not necessarily, the source said. Most likely, the charterer will charge the traveler less and absorb the loss, as an inducement to gain and keep the traveler's business, the source said. It's all a matter of competition, and the charter companies rely on volume sales to stay in business. It would be counterproductive for the charterer to charge the

traveler more than the established \$46. The bottom line is that, while medical insurance is now inescapable, the charterer can help you keep its cost down (*The Miami Herald*, 24/4/10).

**Abril 25:** El gobierno afirmó que continúa la investigación, por presunta corrupción, a la empresa Río Zaza, con capital chileno, y que sólo informará del resultado una vez concluya, al tiempo que dijo esperar mejores relaciones comerciales con la administración de Sebastián Piñera. El presidente de la Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular, Ricardo Alarcón, dijo a la prensa que el caso de Alimentos Río Zaza —propiedad del chileno Max Marambio y el Estado cubano— está en manos de la contralora general, Gladys Bejerano, y “ella no va a decir nada hasta que termine la investigación”. El pasado 16 de abril, al confirmar la muerte en La Habana del gerente de Río Zaza, el chileno Roberto Baudrand, el gobierno cubano dijo que en la investigación “están implicados un grupo de directivos chilenos que abandonaron el país”. Las autoridades cubanas, a las que el gobierno de Piñera pidió una “exhaustiva investigación” de los hechos, dijeron mantener “comunicación y colaboración” con las de Chile. En sus declaraciones tras votar en los comicios municipales, Alarcón dijo también que entre Chile y Cuba “hay bastante intercambio”, pero se debería “esperar que hubiera mucho más”. “Chile es un país con una economía interesante, que ha tenido algunos resultados en el desarrollo de un modelo que no tiene que ver nada con el nuestro, pero que ofrece posibilidades de encontrar áreas de interés común”, añadió (*AFP*, 25/4/10).

**April 26:** Golf could become a new attraction for tourists visiting Cuba each year because of its popularity among affluent sectors and the magnificent climatic conditions all year round. According to Spanish golfer Alvaro Quiros, currently in the 35th place in the world ranking, Cuba could be included among the Caribbean nations with opportunities to organize tournaments for amateurs and professional golfers. Quiroz was among the athletes invited to the Second Montecristi Cup, played in the seaside resort of Varadero with the participation of 72 players from seven nations. He said golf, recently included in the programme of the upcoming 2012 Olympic Games, helps to improve the health of practitioners, encourages personal relationships and caring for the environment (*ACN*, 26/4/10).

**April 26:** Britain’s Esencia Hotels and Resorts CEO Andrew Macdonald had investors looking at a stretch of land in Cuba where he plans to raise \$300 million to build the Carbonera Country Club and a hotel/villa/apartment development. The company was supposed to break ground last year, but is still waiting. Macdonald’s group hopes to bring tourists into a country that once had a dozen courses and hosted an annual professional event in the 1950s (*PGA Tour*, 26/4/10).

**Abril 27:** El gobierno de Venezuela autorizó la constitución de una empresa con el de Cuba, para impulsar la producción de cacao en los países de la Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de América (ALBA). La sociedad, denominada Empresa Mixta Socialista Cacao del ALBA S.A., estará conformada por el Instituto Autónomo Corporación Venezolana Agraria (CVA), con 51 por ciento de las acciones, y la Corporación Alimentaria S.A. (CORALSA) de Cuba, con el 49 por ciento restante, indicó una resolución publicada en la gaceta oficial. La empresa estará ubicada en el estado de Sucre, oriente de Venezuela, y tendrá por objeto el procesamiento del cacao en grano, para la producción, comercialización y distribución de los productos derivados del cacao, según la resolución. También podrá establecer oficinas y filiales dentro y fuera del

país, incluyendo una en Cuba “con el propósito de explotar la Planta Procesadora de Cacao instalada en la provincia de Cienfuegos” (ANSA, 27/4/10).

**April 27:** Sherritt International Corp posted a first-quarter profit, as rising nickel, cobalt and oil prices helped the company overturn a year-earlier loss. The Canadian miner and energy producer, whose main assets are in Cuba and Madagascar, earned C\$59.7 million, or 20 Canadian cents a share, for the quarter ended March 31. That compared with a loss of C\$42.9 million, or 15 Canadian cents a share, for the year-before period, when the results were hit by a loss on oil and gas asset disposals (*Reuters*, 27/4/10).

**April 28:** The Cuban government has begun a process of modernizing the country’s ports and vessels to revitalize internal coastal shipping with the aim of reducing the costs of fuel and other resources, Communist Party daily *Granma* said. The Transport Ministry “is pushing for greater use of railroads and maritime transportation of short-haul cargo,” since there are “more rapid and less costly” ways to replace “so far as is possible” the transport of goods in trucks, the newspaper said. Last year on the island, 79.2 percent of all cargo was transported in trucks, 18.9 percent by rail and just 1.9 percent by water, according to official statistics. *Granma* cited Deputy Transport Minister Lazaro Machado as saying that authorities are repairing 30-year-old cargo vessels and tugboats and are developing a program to modernize Cuba’s main port facilities (*LAHT*, 28/4/10).

**Abril 28:** Cuba recibirá un préstamo del Fondo Saudí para el Desarrollo para rehabilitar y equipar un grupo de hospitales maternos del país. El acuerdo para la financiación del proyecto fue firmado en La Habana por el ministro de Comercio Exterior e Inversión Extranjera de la isla, Rodrigo Malmierca, y el de Finanzas de Arabia Saudí, Ibrahim Abdulaziz Al-Assaf, quien preside la Junta directiva del Fondo, según la agencia estatal *Prensa Latina*. El plazo del préstamo -cuyo monto no fue especificado- es de 25 años, incluidos cinco de gracia, y las obras de rehabilitación en los hospitales incluidos en el proyecto están previstas para un período de tres años. Este es el primer acuerdo de este tipo suscrito por el gobierno de la isla con el Fondo de Arabia Saudí, que se dedica a ayudar a los países del Sur para fortalecer sus economías y proporcionarles los préstamos necesarios para ejecutar sus proyectos y programas de desarrollo. Abdulaziz fue recibido por el vicepresidente Ricardo Cabrisas, el canciller Bruno Rodríguez, y visitó el Centro de Ingeniería Genética y Biotecnología de La Habana (*EFE*, 28/4/10).

**April 28:** Hector Pernia, main executive of the PDVSA-Cuba joint venture said the Cuban oil refining system is designed to process 350,000 barrels a day, a capacity Cuba will reach once the joint investment works are concluded. This will guarantee steady supplies of oil derivatives to every Caribbean island and the PetroCaribe (integration mechanism in the energy field) member countries, said Pernia, according to local *5 de Septiembre* newspaper’s website. The investment program includes the setting up of a new plant to refine 150,000 barrels a day in Matanzas city (in the northern coast, while Cienfuegos is in the south). At the same time, the Cienfuegos refinery will increase its capacity from 65,000 to 150,000, and the one located in Santiago de Cuba (eastern Cuba) will move up from 22 to 50,000. The Cienfuegos refinery has averaged 59,000 barrels a day since the beginning of 2008, said Pernia. This industry, created by the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) is the core of a petrochemical development pole in Cienfuegos (*ACN*, 28/4/10).

**Abril 29:** Más de medio millón de cubanos reciben agua potable mediante camiones cisterna debido a la prolongada sequía que padece la isla, que también afecta a 370 fuentes de suministro hídrico, informaron expertos y autoridades. El director de cuencas hidrográficas del Instituto de Recursos Hidráulicos de Cuba, Jorge Mario García Fernández, explicó en un programa de la televisión estatal que a principios de esta semana se registraban unas 520,000 personas afectadas por la temporada seca y a las que se les está suministrando agua potable. Indicó que de 100 fuentes subterráneas principales de suministro a la población, 67 presentan niveles normales y 33 están en estado desfavorable. El funcionario insistió en recomendar como “una exigencia básica” el ahorro y uso eficiente del agua que se consume. La sequía, que comenzó a finales de 2008, está repercutiendo también en la agricultura de varias zonas de Cuba y en el abastecimiento de agua a las provincias de Guantánamo, Santiago de Cuba y Holguín, Sancti Spíritus y Ciudad de La Habana. Jorge Kalaf, subdelegado de recursos hidráulicos en La Habana, dijo que más de 60,000 personas están recibiendo el agua por camiones cisterna, en varios municipios de La Habana (*EFE*, 29/4/10).

## **Exile Community**

**April 1:** President Barack Obama conveyed his harshest rebuke yet of Havana’s government last week and, hours later, Gloria Estefan protested repression in Havana from the streets of Miami. On April 15 they’ll be together again when the Cuban-born singer and her husband, Emilio, host Obama at their Miami Beach home for a Democratic National Committee fund-raiser. The \$30,400-a-couple cocktail reception is the Estefans’ first fund-raiser, said Democratic consultant Freddy Balsera, who advised Obama’s campaign on Hispanic issues and is close to the couple. The Estefans — who were traveling and not available for comment — orchestrated a massive march through Miami’s Little Havana in support of Cuba’s Ladies in White, peaceful dissidents who were attacked by government security forces in Havana. In September, Obama appointed Emilio to a commission to study the feasibility of a National Museum of the American Latino, and Gloria — along with Marc Anthony, Jose Feliciano and others — performed at the White House in October as it celebrated Hispanic music (*The Miami Herald*, 1/4/10).

**Abril 5:** Miembros y simpatizantes de la plataforma ‘Cuba Democracia ¡Ya!’ comenzaron a recorrer unos 160 kilómetros de la etapa final del Camino de Santiago para condenar la muerte del disidente Orlando Zapata, la represión contra las Damas de Blanco y solidarizarse con el opositor Guillermo Fariñas. El objetivo de esta marcha, que durará hasta el próximo día 9, es aumentar la presión sobre el régimen liderado por Raúl Castro en la isla tras la muerte de Zapata, la agresión a las Damas de Blanco durante la conmemoración del séptimo aniversario de la Primavera Negra y unirse a Fariñas, quien suma más de cinco semanas en huelga de hambre y sed para exigir la liberación de los 26 presos políticos cuyo estado de salud es grave. “La iniciativa busca promover la liberación de los presos políticos cubanos, el fin de la dictadura castrista y sensibilizar a la opinión pública española de la situación crítica que se vive en la Isla y la escalada represiva que se está produciendo”, reza el comunicado facilitado por la organización. El grupo, integrado inicialmente por cinco personas, se dará cita en la localidad de Sárria desde donde se iniciará el peregrinaje que tiene previsto pasar por las localidades de Porto Marín, Palas de Rei, Arzúa, O Pedrouzo y, finalmente, Santiago de Compostela. Durante el trayecto los manifestantes repartirán información en los distintos puntos del camino – albergues,

pueblos, aldeas y puntos de información turística— sobre la campaña internacional “Yo acuso al Gobierno cubano” que lleva recogidas más de 40,000 firmas en todo el mundo (*Europa Press*, 5/4/10).

**April 7:** Graciela Perez Grillo - a famed singer from the Caribbean island of Cuba - has died in New York of natural causes aged 94. The first lady of Latin jazz, as she is often referred to, was born in Havana in 1915 but moved to the Big Apple in 1942 to join an Afro-Cuban orchestra organised by her stepbrother. A successful performer, she received numerous Grammy nominations and was best known for songs such as Intimo y sentimental (Intimate and Sentimental), Esta es Graciela (This is Graciela) and Yo soy asi (That’s the Way I Am). Cuban musician Candido Camero said: “I don’t believe that anyone could take the place of the Queen of Afro-Cuban Jazz” (*El Nuevo Herald*, 8/4/10).

**Abril 8:** El rostro del disidente cubano Orlando Zapata, muerto en marzo de 2010 después de 85 días de huelga de hambre, fue proyectado en la fachada del Consulado de Cuba en Barcelona, donde una veintena de cubanos se ha concentrado para reclamar cambios en el país y apoyar la causa de la libertad. La proyección de la imagen de Zapata, flanqueada por la bandera cubana que ondeaba en el consulado, es una creación del artista cubano residente en Nueva York Geandy Pavón, que la ha bautizado como “Nemesis”. Pavón viajó hasta Barcelona para rendir con esta proyección un “homenaje a una persona que no ha hecho daño a nadie” y “a la disidencia cubana, que está dispuesta a morir y no a matar” por la causa que defiende (*EFE*, 9/4/10).

**Abril 9:** Cinco ciudadanos cubanos llegaron a Compostela (noroeste de España) tras recorrer 170 kilómetros del Camino de Santiago para reivindicar la libertad de los presos políticos cubanos y en apoyo de sus madres, las “Damas de Blanco”. Frank Prieto, Deyanira Pijuán, César Goza, Rubén Fernández y José Antonio Guerrero, “los Peregrinos del Camino por la Libertad de Cuba”, habían salido de Sarria (Lugo, también en esta región noroccidental de Galicia) el 5 de abril y entraron en la Plaza del Obradoiro de Santiago de Compostela portando enseñas cubanas y gritando “libertad y democracia para Cuba”. Durante su recorrido repartieron octavillas en las que se exigía la excarcelación inmediata de todos los presos políticos en las cárceles cubanas y un manifiesto en el que se pedía la dimisión de Raúl Castro y “el fin del acoso sistemático a aquellos que opinan diferente” (*El Nuevo Herald*, 9/4/10).

**Abril 9:** El escritor y periodista cubano exiliado Carlos Alberto Montaner respondió al cantautor Silvio Rodríguez que millones de compatriotas anhelan “una Cuba sin exclusiones”, en la que no se persiga a nadie por expresar sus ideas. En un artículo de opinión enviado a varios medios de comunicación, Montaner respondió así a una carta del cantautor cubano en la que éste acusa al intelectual exiliado de diseñar una “Cuba distorsionada”, al tiempo que reafirma su compromiso con la revolución, frente a sus detractores. Montaner respetó en su escrito el derecho de Rodríguez a cantar la revolución y la dictadura comunista, si ese es su deseo, pero reclamó a continuación ese mismo derecho de expresión para millones de cubanos que aspiran a convivir en una Cuba tolerante. “La Cuba con la que sueñan millones de cubanos deber ser un país en el que tú puedas cantar lo que piensas, pero en el que también quepan Gloria Estefan, Willy Chirino, Paquito D’Rivera y Los Aldeanos. Una cuba sin exclusiones”, manifestó. Le recordó que la generación a la que pertenece su hijo, “Silvito ‘el Libre’”, es también la de los suyos, la de

la bloguera cubana Yoani Sánchez, autora del blog “Generación Y”, y del líder de la banda de punk-rock “Porno para Ricardo”, Gorki Águila, ambos críticos del gobierno. En ese contexto, Montaner le preguntó a Rodríguez si no le parecía criminal que “esos jóvenes estén obligados a suscribir las ideas y prejuicios de unos confundidos octogenarios paralizados por el miedo y el dogmatismo”. A su juicio, resulta “urgente”, además de una obligación moral y social “liberar a las jóvenes generaciones de esa carga nefasta para que sean capaces de construir libremente sus vidas”. El polémico intercambio epistolar de réplicas comenzó el 30 de marzo con un texto de Silvio Rodríguez divulgado en *Rebelión*, una web a favor del castrismo. En ella el cantautor dirigía a Montaner una serie de preguntas. Tras la respuesta de Montaner a continuación en una carta abierta, llegó la réplica del autor de la famosa canción “Unicornio”, en un tono duro y vehemente. En esta segunda respuesta a Silvio Rodríguez, Montaner le explica que su intención no es “hostilizarle”, sino conversar de forma civilizada. Concluye su carta con una llamada, “en un claro de la historia patria”, a la reconciliación entre los cubanos, a “la libertad y el cambio que todos anhelamos” ([Correspondencia íntegra entre Rodríguez y Montaner](#); *EFE*, 9/4/10).

**Abril 13:** El escritor y periodista cubano exiliado Carlos Alberto Montaner propuso al cantautor Silvio Rodríguez la creación de un comité para “luchar contra el embargo” de EEUU a Cuba y a favor de una amnistía a los presos políticos en la isla. En esta carta, la tercera desde que comenzó el intercambio epistolar el 30 de marzo pasado, Montaner expresó al cantautor cubano su disposición a establecer entre los dos un comité para “luchar conjunta y simultáneamente” contra el embargo económico de EEUU a Cuba. El eventual comité abogaría también por el restablecimiento de la libertad de asociación y expresión en la isla caribeña y la libertad de tránsito para que los cubanos puedan entrar y salir libremente. “Lo sensato para terminar con el embargo y para solucionar los problemas del país, es que gobierno (cubano) y oposición se sienten de buena fe a hablar civilizadamente con un temario abierto”, expone Montaner a Rodríguez en la carta que publican varios medios locales. El intelectual cubano se mostró convencido de que una acción de este tipo rendiría sus frutos “en un plazo corto” y pondría en marcha un proceso que, a juicio de Montaner, “muchos reformistas dentro del régimen están deseosos de que comience cuanto antes”. Con esta tercera respuesta, Montaner contesta al texto en el que el cantautor le exhorta a que “cambie su lógica” si anhela una Cuba mejor y luche “contra el bloqueo” estadounidense, una medida que el creador de la popular canción “Unicornio” tachó de “genocida, inmoral, impresentable” ([Tercera respuesta de Montaner a Silvio](#); *Infolatam*, 13/4/10).

**April 15:** Singer Gloria Estefan and husband Emilio brought up the situation of human rights in Cuba to President Barack Obama while hosting a Democratic Party fundraiser at their Miami Beach mansion. The \$30,400-per-couple cocktail reception was the first foray into political fundraising by the Estefans, who are among the most prominent representatives of the Cuban-American community. Gloria said when presenting the president that for people in Cuba, “hope and freedom are a part of their history, not their everyday lives.” “We look around at the difficulties and challenges that our world is experiencing and we wonder (I know I do) if history has taught us anything. We question if there is indeed something still worth fighting and dying for,” the international music star said. She then recalled Orlando Zapata Tamayo, “a Cuban dissident and now martyr who gave his life on a hunger strike for the promise of a free Cuba, and Guillermo Fariñas who is poised to give his life at any moment merely asking that his government free 26 other sick and dying prisoners of conscience.” The Estefans gave Obama a

letter from the mother of political prisoner Zapata, who died in February after an 85-day hunger strike. They also showed him photos of the repression suffered by the Ladies in White, relatives of 75 dissidents who were jailed during the “Black Spring” crackdown of 2003, when they were commemorating the 7th anniversary of that event (*EFE*, 16/4/10).

**Abril 16:** Un grupo de ciudadanos cubanos exiliados y españoles denunció que las delegaciones diplomáticas cubanas en España han realizado lo que califica de actos represivos contra aquellos que protestan pacíficamente ante sus puertas. Las opositoras plataforma “Cuba Democracia Ya” y la campaña virtual “Yo acuso al Gobierno cubano” difundieron un comunicado en el que explican que su queja que ha sido elevada tanto al ministerio de Exteriores como al defensor del pueblo español. “En España, la Embajada de Cuba y los consulados cubanos promueven contramanifestaciones con partidos y asociaciones partidarias del castrismo que insultan, veján y agreden de forma sistemática a aquellas personas que se manifiestan frente a dichas sedes diplomáticas”, dice la nota. El comunicado señala que el último episodio de este acto de represión tuvo lugar en Santiago de Compostela (norte español) el pasado 9 de abril ante la llegada a la ciudad de cuatro cubanos y un español que peregrinaron durante cinco días por el Camino de Santiago en solidaridad con la disidencia interna de Cuba. “No se trata de un hecho aislado, pues desde hace más de un año, las protestas llevadas a cabo en Barcelona y Madrid han acabado con acciones semejantes”, concluye el comunicado (*EFE*, 16/4/10).

**April 16:** Cuban writer and journalist Carlos Franqui, a former ally of Fidel Castro and editor of an underground newspaper who later broke with the revolutionary government, died in Puerto Rico. He was 89. Franqui, who was born in 1921 in central Cuba, was named editor of the *Revolucion* newspaper after the launch of Castro’s guerrilla struggle, although his independent editorial line later cost him his position. The Caribbean author affiliated himself with Castro’s 26th of July movement after Fulgencio Batista came to power in a coup and he was later arrested several times and forced into exile in Mexico. He subsequently joined up with the revolutionary struggle in the 1950s in Cuba’s Sierra Maestra mountains, where he headed *Revolucion*, the guerrillas’ clandestine newspaper, and the *Radio Rebelde* radio station. The Cuban writer had a falling-out years later with Castro’s regime and went to Europe, where he met and associated himself with leading artists and intellectuals. Labeled a traitor by Havana and accused of having ties to the CIA, he wrote several works about the Cuban Revolution, including *El libro de los doce* (The Book of the 12) and *Diario de la revolucion cubana* (Diary of the Cuban Revolution). Franqui’s formal break with the regime in Havana came in 1968, when he signed a letter condemning the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Among his most important initiatives was the organizing of the Salon de Mayo exhibition in Havana in 1967, an event that drew leading artists from all over the world. In 1996, the Cuban intellectual founded in Puerto Rico the quarterly literary magazine *Carta de Cuba*, in which works by Cuban writers and journalists were published. Franqui spent the last years of his life in relative obscurity in Puerto Rico and his death went virtually unnoticed by that Caribbean island’s media (*Diario de Cuba*, 16/4/10; *LAHT*, 17/4/10).

**April 19:** North Jersey’s exile Cuban community is preparing a weekend march calling for democracy in their former homeland. And the founder of a prominent human rights group in Cuba appeared in Union City to urge that kind of international demonstration as a morale builder for dissidents on the island. Dolia Leal, a founder of “Ladies in White,” a group in Cuba made

up of mothers and wives of political prisoners, praised the growing international calls for the release of jailed dissidents on the island. Cuban exiles residing in the counties of Bergen and Hudson counties held the press conference to lay out details of a Sunday march along Bergenline Avenue in Union City to support the Ladies in White in Cuba and draw attention to human rights violations there. “Those who fight for liberty feel vulnerable — and isolated,” said Leal while at the office of an organization for former Cuban political prisoners. “The Cuban regime does not allow opposition to it, and it gets to your neighbors, your friends, and pressures them to stay away from people who criticize it, or risk losing their jobs and being put in jail.” “So when you learn that others support your standing up for human rights, it’s motivating; you know you are not alone.” Leal arrived in the United States from Cuba with her husband, Nelson Aguiar, who was a political prisoner for seven years. He was among 75 people jailed in 2003 after a crackdown by the Cuban government on dissidents. Cuban officials agreed to release Aguiar from prison last fall because of medical reasons, and to allow him and his wife to leave Cuba, after pressure from the government of Spain, Leal said (*North Jersey.Com*, 19/4/10).

**Abril 23:** La médica cubana disidente Hilda Molina se vio impedida de presentar su obra en la Feria del Libro debido a interrupciones e insultos que recibió por parte de manifestantes defensores del régimen de Cuba. Molina iba a presentar su libro *Mi verdad* cuando militantes del Movimiento Argentino de Solidaridad con Cuba y estudiantes universitarios irrumpieron en la sala para increpar e insultar a Molina, según imágenes difundidas por el canal de televisión C5N. “El mismo libreto que el gobierno cubano, sólo faltan los golpes que les dan a las damas de blanco”, respondía Molina mientras los manifestantes coreaban “Cuba, Cuba, Cuba, el pueblo te saluda”. Molina optó por retirarse del lugar, pero antes dijo: “Quiero despedirme de mis amigos”, lo que provocó un fuerte aplauso de sus adherentes antes de irse de la sala (*El Nuevo Herald*, 24/4/10).

**April 24:** Four Cuban American lawyers and a Miami-based television station have launched a campaign to identify and publicly name Cuban state security agents and pro-government militants who attack dissidents on the island. Called “Cuba, Repression ID,” the project solicits public support from the Cuban exile community in the United States and also from people inside Cuba to identify, through photographs and film footage, individuals seen beating or harassing unarmed critics of Cuba’s communist government. In recent weeks, TV footage of Cuban state security agents and mobs of pro-government supporters heckling, harassing and forcibly breaking up dissident rallies and marches has drawn widespread international criticism of Cuba’s rulers and renewed calls for them to free political prisoners on the island. The promoters of the “Repression ID” initiative backed by Spanish-language Channel 41 AmericaTeve say they want to name and shame identified persecutors of Cuban dissidents, both as a historical record, for possible future legal action, and as a way of trying to halt such violence and intimidation. “Here are the images, the faces of repression,” reads the advisory on AmericaTeve’s website [www.americateve.com](http://www.americateve.com), above a gallery of 28 photographs of men and women who were captured on film breaking up peaceful rallies by Cuba’s Ladies in White dissidents. Members of the public are requested to e-mail or call in the identities of those shown. “Who are they? What are their names? Where do they work? Where do they live?” the website asks (*The Washington Post*, 24/4/10).

**Abril 25:** El escritor Carlos Alberto Montaner afirmó que La Habana exigió a Silvio Rodríguez detener el debate epistolar sostenido entre ambos y que el cantautor no previó el alcance del intercambio, según una entrevista publicada en un diario español. “Creo que Silvio no pensaba entrar en un debate al preguntarme públicamente si yo condenaría los atropellos de la CIA contra Cuba. Cuando le respondí que sí, por supuesto, y le pregunté si él haría lo mismo con los crímenes del gobierno cubano contra el pueblo, se desató un intercambio que él no había previsto”, respondió Montaner. Según el presidente de la Unión Liberal Cubana, “a la tercera carta el gobierno le exigió que detuviera el debate”. En una entrevista publicada por *Diario de Avisos* (Islas Canarias, España), Montaner abordó otros aspectos sobre la situación política de la isla y el futuro inmediato. Sobre la participación cada vez mayor de ciudadanos negros en la oposición al régimen, el escritor destacó que “los negros y las mujeres son quienes más sufren bajo el socialismo (...) Son los segmentos más pobres. Los negros, porque ocupan los espacios peor remunerados. Las mujeres, por la ruptura de las familias”. A la pregunta de si el “alarmante proceso de haitianización” que vive la Isla podría ser la última etapa del castrismo, respondió que “probablemente”, pero que el deterioro material de Cuba “sucede de manera ininterrumpida” desde el inicio de la Revolución. “No llegará al nivel de Haití por el tipo de educación que tienen los cubanos, pero estará muy cerca”, señaló Montaner (*Diario de Cuba*, 26/4/10).

## Foreign Affairs

**April 1:** Cuban President Raul Castro met with Leonid Kuchma, former president of Ukraine and special envoy from the current head of state of that nation, Victor Yanukovich, who is in Havana to participate in several activities to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the beginning of a Cuban program to attend to Ukrainian children victims of the 1986 nuclear accident in Chernobyl. According to *Granma* newspaper, during the meeting they analyzed the good state of bilateral relations and current challenges for both countries and for the word and, in particular, the situation in Haiti, the negative effects of climate change and environmental pollution. Kuchma presented Raul with the decorations recently awarded by Ukrainian President Yanukovich to him and to the leader of the Cuban Revolution Fidel Castro for their assistance to the victims of the nuclear accident (*ACN*, 1/4/10).

**April 1:** The Patriarch Kiril received Cuban ambassador to the Russian federation, Juan Valdes Figueroa, and chair of the Scientific Council of the Cuban “Pando Ferrer” Ophthalmology Institute, Frank Eguia Martinez, according to *Prensa Latina* news agency. During the meeting held at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, said that the Orthodox Church sponsors the collaboration between the Cuban institution and the Russian “S.N. Fiodorov” Optical Microsurgery Institute. The Fiodorov institute’s director, Cristos Tachidi, spoke in a friendly and cordial atmosphere with Eguia Martinez, who held contacts with his counterparts in that institution in Russia, attended operations and conducted lectures during his stay in Moscow. Meanwhile, Valdes Figueroa offered the condolences on behalf of the government and people of his country to the Patriarch Kiril, for the dead caused by the tragedies that have took place recently in Russia. The Cuban people heard with pain the information on the attacks in the capital’s subway and Cuban President Raul Castro, sent condolences to his Russian counterpart, Dmitri Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, said Valdes (*ACN*, 2/10).

**April 1:** José Eduardo Dos Santos, President of Angola, paid tribute, in Luanda, to the heroes of his country and Cuba who gave their lives in defense of the African soil. These fighters, whose struggle led to the victory of Cuito Cuanavale 22 years ago, extolled the high values of friendship and solidarity between peoples, highlighted Dos Santos in the act of homage at the Presidential Palace in Luanda. He remarked that the feat is the greatest symbol of resistance against South African regime's apartheid, reported *Prensa Latina* news agency. *Prensa Latina* recalls that that epic battle which took place in the province of Cuando Cubango, 825 miles southeast of Luanda, became on March 23, 1988 an icon for the continent, by transforming the geopolitics of Southern Africa. The Battle of Cuito Cuanavale is a historic event which marked the victory of the Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA), together with the Cuban internationalists and Namibians against the apartheid (ACN, 1/4/10).

**April 2:** A delegation of Cuban parliamentarians travelled to Viet Nam after participating in the 122nd Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) held in Bangkok, the capital of Thailand. Ramon Pez Ferro, president of the Cuban Parliament's Commission for International Relations, is heading the island's delegation, which actively participated in the debates on issues the international community is concerned about. The necessary support of parliaments from around the world to the development of the South-South and triangular co-operation, and also the global struggle against cross-border terrorism and organized crime, with emphasis on the smuggling of human beings, and the trafficking of weapons and drugs, were among the aspects tackled by participants in the meeting (ACN, 2/4/10).

**April 2:** Cuba, the Ukraine and the Chernobyl International Fund signed in Havana a medical co-operation accord, which will give continuity to the medical treatment of children from that nation suffering from health problems as a consequence of the 1986 nuclear accident. The document was signed by Cuban Public Health Minister José Ramon Balaguer; Vasili Lazoryshynets, deputy minister from the Ukraine in this sector; and Alexander Bozhko, president of the aforementioned Fund. Lazoryshynets reiterated the appreciation of Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovic to the Cuban government and people for the free medical treatment given to over 23,000 children throughout the 20 years of existence of this program (ACN, 2/4/10).

**April 2:** A goodwill gesture by the Cuban government offering scholarships to around 1,000 Pakistani medical students has become a nightmare for a few. Despite clarifications of the Higher Education Commission (HEC), the fact remains there that whether Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) will accept Cuban medical degrees. Talking to *Daily Times*, the six students deported from Cuba shortly alleged that the Cuban colleges were ill-equipped and quality of education lower than Pakistan. They said they would not be able to get past the PMDC test if and when they completed their studies and obtained degrees. They claimed that teaching hospitals were not attached with their colleges in Cuba. These six were among the 15 students were arrested for violating laws in Cuba. They and their parents have staged a protest in front of Higher Education Commission (HEC) building in Sector H-9 in favour of their demands. The HEC has issued a press release stating that a comprehensive certificate, addressing all issues, was signed by the Cuban deputy minister for health and endorsed by the PMDC representative, who went to Cuba for resolution of this matter. Tahir Abbas Zaidi, HEC project director, said it was clarified that Pakistani students in Cuba were studying in WHO-recognised institutions and, upon successful completion of their degrees, would be recognised as doctors by Pakistan.

Havana's Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) will issue degrees, not certificates, to these students, which were recognised by the HEC (*Daily Times*, 2/4/10).

**April 2:** With much emphasis placed on improving the healthcare system, 301 Guyanese doctors, trained in Cuba, are expected to return home next year to begin service in their homeland. Minister within the Ministry of Health, Dr Bheri Ramsaran said that this batch of medical practitioners exceeds the total number of doctors currently registered in Guyana. He noted that the returning doctors will be posted to various locations across the country and will greatly improve the quality of service offered to Guyanese (*GINA*, 2/4/10).

**Abril 2:** México repatrió a 226 cubanos interceptados sin sus documentos en regla en territorio mexicano o frente a las costas del país durante el primer año desde la entrada en vigor del memorándum de entendimiento suscrito por las dos naciones en octubre de 2008, informó el Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM). El acuerdo, que entró en vigor el 20 de noviembre de 2008, pretende “garantizar un flujo migratorio legal, ordenado y seguro entre ambos países” y evitar que organizaciones criminales trafiquen con indocumentados. En respuesta a una solicitud de información presentada por *Efe*, el INM, que depende de la Secretaría de Gobernación (Interior), detalló la cifra de 226 cubanos repatriados, lo que equivaldría a la expulsión de 0,61 personas cada día. Hasta la entrada en vigor del acuerdo, Cuba se negaba a admitir a los cubanos que las autoridades mexicanas detenían en territorio o aguas territoriales de México, la mayoría llegados a este país en tránsito para entrar a Estados Unidos (*EFE*, 2/4/10).

**April 3:** Cubans who can prove they are the children or grandchildren of Spaniards will have one more year to apply for Spanish citizenship, says a note in Spain's Official Government Bulletin. The program – launched in 2008 under the so-called Law of Historical Remembrance – was supposed to end on December 26, 2010. It has been extended to December 26, 2011. The reason for the extension was the huge number of applicants who flocked to Spanish consulates in Cuba, Miami and Argentina, overwhelming the capacity of the local consulates to process the applications. Consulates in Miami and Latin America interviewed 258,195 applicants in 2009 and expected to receive 520,000 applications by the end of this year, way more than the 310,000 applications originally envisioned for the two years. Specifically, the consulates in Cuba and Argentina used up their entire two-year quota of interviews in 2009 alone (*The Miami Herald*, 3/4/10).

**Abril 3:** El periodista disidente cubano Guillermo Fariñas, en huelga de hambre y sed desde el pasado 24 de febrero, que inició en protesta por la muerte del también disidente preso Orlando Zapata, ha denunciado formalmente la “violación” de sus derechos fundamentales por parte del régimen de la isla ante la Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos (CIDH), organismo adscrito a la Organización de Estados Americanos (OEA). “Deseo presentar mi acusación formal ante esta comisión contra el ilegítimo régimen de Fidel y Raúl Castro, por la violación legislada, sistemática programada y ejecutada contra mi familia y mi persona y todos nuestros derechos naturales y libertades fundamentales reconocidas universalmente”, señala en una carta con fecha 27 de marzo. La misiva forma parte de una denuncia presentada el 1ro de abril ante la CIDH, acompañada de un dossier de documentos que sustentan su argumentación. La acusación es contra los hermanos Castro “y toda la cadena de comando de personas que han hecho posible que esas órdenes contra Fariñas y contra su familia sean ejecutadas”. Según Fariñas, la violación de

“todos” sus derechos comenzó el pasado 1 de enero de 1959, cuando la revolución encabezada por Fidel Castro triunfó en Cuba instaurando un régimen comunista que sigue en el poder después de 51 años. Con esta acción, Fariñas y otros disidentes esperan que “haya un aluvión de acusaciones de otras personas” ante el organismo interamericano, señala la activista y refugiada cubana Alina Brouwer. El objetivo, aclara, no es que la OEA tome acciones “contra” el régimen castrista, sino que se pronuncie “a favor del activista Fariñas, de que haya un reconocimiento público y oficial, porque no estamos hablando de un asunto político, sino de derechos que son básicos y que están siendo vulnerados” (*EFE*, 3/4/10).

**April 4:** During the last day of sessions of the IX Congress of the Young Communist League, participants issued a final declaration, called Declaration of Cuban Youngsters against Lie and Hatred, which condemns the media campaigns and the anti-Cuban resolution recently approved by the European Parliament ([Declaración](#); *ACN*, 4/4/10).

**Abril 5:** El secretario general de la OEA, el chileno José Miguel Insulza, está dispuesto a contactar con el presidente cubano, el general Raúl Castro, para encontrar una salida a la situación de los disidentes políticos en Cuba, pero cree que para tener éxito es necesaria una “presión mucho más concertada”. “Creo en una presión mucho más concertada (...) que por un lado haga un llamado humanitario y por otro, pueda por su amplitud y su disposición, dar garantías de que esto no es un asunto contra el régimen, sino que simplemente por salvar la vida de 23 personas”, dijo Insulza en una entrevista que publica el diario chileno *La Nación*. El secretario general de la Organización de Estados Americanos (OEA) sostuvo que plantear el tema a Castro “no es fácil” y que ese tipo de gestiones las hace cuando cree que puede tener “alguna posibilidad de éxito”. “Por eso me cuidé y me cuidaré mucho de atacar al régimen por estas cosas, no quiero atacar a nadie ni ganar puntos a costa de nadie”, indicó el ex ministro chileno. Insulza denunció que el clima político en la isla “está complicado”, y se mostró especialmente preocupado por la situación del disidente Guillermo Fariñas, en huelga de hambre desde hace más de un mes para exigir la liberación de los presos políticos. “Me preocupa lo que puede pasar con Guillermo Fariñas, porque si fallecen dos personas en sucesión es muy difícil impedir que ocurra con otros y eso será un desastre desde el punto de vista comunicacional y político para el gobierno cubano”, apuntó. Insulza se refería a la muerte del preso político Orlando Zapata, ocurrida en marzo pasado al cabo de una huelga de hambre de 85 días (*EFE*, 5/4/10).

**Abril 5:** El cantante colombiano Juanes se sumó al apoyo internacional para postular a las Damas de Blanco de Cuba, familiares de 75 presos políticos, al Premio Nobel de la Paz 2011, informó uno de los nueve cubanos que lideran la iniciativa. El artista, que organizó un polémico concierto en La Habana en 2009, respaldó la iniciativa en un mensaje electrónico, dijo Óscar Peña. “Por su pacífica lucha diaria, propongo que el Premio Nobel de la Paz 2011 se les entregue a las Damas de Blanco para que su ejemplo sea admirado y seguido por todos aquellos que sufren injusticias”, expresó el artista en respuesta a un mensaje de Peña que éste divulgó en Miami (EEUU). El intérprete de “A Dios le pido” y “La camisa negra”, resaltó que la paciencia, la perseverancia y valor de las Damas de Blanco en La Habana y “de todas las mujeres solitarias que buscan la libertad de sus hijos o esposos presos políticos, secuestrados, prisioneros de guerra, merecen toda la atención, respeto y apoyo de todos”. Juanes en su mensaje electrónico

recordó que las Damas de Blanco apoyaron el concierto Paz sin Fronteras “en La Habana el pasado mes de septiembre cuando otros sectores se oponían drásticamente” (*EFE*, 5/4/10).

**April 6:** The President of the Vietnamese Parliament, Nguyen Phu Trong, met in Hanoi with a high-level delegation from Cuba’s National Assembly of People’s Power, with which he agreed to consolidate relations. After highlighting the bonds existing between the two legislative bodies, Truong recommended a greater exchange of experiences on law-making and supervision and on mutual support in international forums, *Prensa Latina* news agency reported. Heading the group of parliamentarians is Ramón Pez Ferro, in charge of International Relations at the Assembly, who also met with his Vietnamese counterpart, Nguyen Van Son. The two officials analyzed a plan of actions to mark the 50th anniversary of diplomatic bonds between the two countries, which is also aimed at passing on to the new generations a friendship forged in the difficult years of struggle (*ACN*, 6/4/10).

**April 6:** Cuban and Venezuelan doctors have been honored by the Bolivian government, in recognition of their humanitarian work in the Andean nation. During a ceremony held in La Paz, Sports and Health Minister Sonia Polo presented the brigades of voluntary workers from the two nations as well as Bolivian community social workers with certificates of acknowledgement, *Prensa Latina* news agency reported. Polo expressed that, with their highly valuable example, the foreign specialists contribute to the transformation of her country’s health system. “We consider your attitude as worth highlighting and priceless, because it goes beyond giving Bolivians back their health and creates an example in each of the citizens you treat”, she added. “We only aspire to enjoy the love of Bolivians; that would be the greatest reward doctors could have for their efforts, the reward coming from the hearts of citizens in this country”, Cuban ambassador to Bolivia, Rafael Dausa, expressed (*ACN*, 6/4/10).

**April 5:** The Todos con Voz medical brigade, made up by physicians from Cuba and Nicaragua, began studies on people with disabilities in three municipalities of Leon, a department in Managua. Local authorities from Achuapa, Santa Rosa del Peñon and El Sauce, accompanied the medical teams –located in these municipalities- which set to work immediately, *Prensa Latina* news agency reported. Made up by four specialists each, the groups are distributed as follows: five in Santa Rosa del Peñon, seven in Achuapa, and the same number in El Sauce. Later on, the medical brigade will continue its studies in El Jicaral, La Paz Centro, Nagarote, Larreynaga, Telica and Quezalaguaque, to end in the rural and urban areas of the municipality of Leon, the departmental capital. Likewise, the 10 municipalities of Leon have been included in studies that, according to the working plan, should conclude on May 3. The Todos con Voz brigade is composed of 65 Cuban and 25 Nicaraguan doctors and began its work in Nicaragua in October 2009, being the studies made in the departments of Masaya, Matagalpa, Chinandega and Managua already completed (*ACN*, 6/4/10).

**Abril 6:** El canciller de Brasil, Celso Amorim, defendió en el Senado el acercamiento que el país promueve con Irán, Cuba, Venezuela y otras naciones consideradas “polémicas”, bajo la premisa de que “el aislamiento sería peor” para sus pueblos. Amorim fue convocado por la Comisión de Relaciones Exteriores del Senado para un debate sobre las políticas de su despacho, en el que escuchó duras críticas de la oposición por la relación que el jefe de Estado, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, mantiene con el cubano Raúl Castro, el venezolano Hugo Chávez o el iraní Mahmud

Ahmadinejad. El ministro respondió caso por caso, pero en cada uno de ellos dijo que la intención de Brasil es impedir el “aislamiento” de determinados Gobiernos, a fin de poder ser un interlocutor fiable en momentos de tensiones. En relación a Cuba, opinó a título personal que ese país tiene un gobierno “que ya no responde a todos los intereses del pueblo”, pero reiteró que “eso en gran parte se debe al más largo embargo de la historia”, en alusión a las sanciones impuestas por Estados Unidos hace casi medio siglo. “Si hay una manera de facilitar una evolución política en Cuba es acabar con el embargo”, declaró Amorim, quien afirmó que Brasil “ha ayudado y ayuda” a la isla mediante el fortalecimiento del comercio y las inversiones y la cooperación en infraestructuras. Según el canciller, ese tipo de cooperación “tendrá también una influencia positiva en la política” cubana. Las críticas en el caso cubano, más o menos veladas, partieron hasta de senadores oficialistas, como Eduardo Suplicy, del Partido de los Trabajadores (PT), quien pidió a Amorim que abogue ante Lula para que tramite un permiso que le permita visitar Brasil a la “bloguera” cubana Yoani Sánchez, a quien se le impide salir de Cuba (*EFE*, 6/4/10).

**Abril 7:** El ministro de Relaciones Exteriores de Italia, Franco Frattini, aseguró estar “asombrado” por el silencio que existe en su país en relación con el caso de los 75 opositores cubanos detenidos en 2003. “Cuando se trata de disidentes chinos y birmanos, o en otros países de todo el mundo, hay preguntas, protestas, manifestaciones. En este caso, hay sobre todo silencio”, dijo el canciller en una entrevista con la prensa local. “Hay un hombre que se dejó morir de hambre y sed, otro al que le podría suceder lo mismo”, continuó el ministro, para quien, “si se comienza a desacreditar a la disidencia, nadie sabe dónde puede parar esto”. Según Frattini, “Europa no puede hacer concesiones (...) Hay que ser claro y firme para confirmar que tenemos responsabilidad en la información libre de los cubanos y la salvaguardia de sus derechos fundamentales”. Piero Fassino, responsable de asuntos exteriores del Partido Demócrata (PD) — la principal fuerza de oposición al gobierno italiano— está de acuerdo con el canciller sobre la “necesidad de una movilización más fuerte con respecto a Cuba” en Italia. El político también se refirió a la idea de nominar a las Damas de Blanco para el Premio Nobel de la Paz. “Es una propuesta con un valor moral y político muy fuerte”, dijo Fassino (*Diario de Cuba*, 7/4/10).

**April 7:** Pierre Lavergne, president of the Solidarity-with-Cuba Committee in the city of Trois Rivieres, in the Canadian province of Quebec, condemned the current media campaign carried out by the United States and Europe against Cuba. These statements were made by Lavergne during his conversation with ACN in Bayamo, the capital of the Cuban province of Granma, where he’s participating in a workshop on energy, the environment, and sustainable development.

He said that capitalist powers, by way of their controlled media outlets, try to discredit the Cuban Revolution to prevent the spreading of its example. He said that keeping that campaign of discredit in Canada is no longer easy, since many people travel to the island and get acquainted with its reality. Thousands of people from Quebec visit Cuba every year, where they cultivate bonds of friendship and solidarity, he underlined (*ACN*, 7/4/10).

**April 7:** “How many more deaths will be needed in Cuban prisons?” was the question posed at a news conference held at Reporters Without Borders headquarters in Paris for representatives of the French, Spanish and Latin American media. This question has been more pressing than ever since political prisoner Orlando Zapata Tamayo’s death on 23 February. Some independent

journalists such as Guillermo Fariñas, who is not currently detained, and Darsi Ferrer, who is in prison, have decided to follow Zapata's example by going on an indefinite hunger strike to press for the release of the prisoners of conscience who are in poorest health. The 25 journalists currently in prison in Cuba include Reporters Without Borders correspondent Ricardo González Alfonso, who is serving a 25-year jail sentence which he received during "Black Spring" crackdown of March 2003. His state of health has deteriorated markedly in recent months. After Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Jean-François Julliard opened the news conference, writer and academic Jacobo Machover, criticised the readiness of certain governments - in France, Spain and Latin America - to tolerate the arbitrary actions of a regime that has still not ratified the two UN human rights conventions it signed when Raúl Castro was officially installed as his brother's successor in February 2008. Referring to the letter that Reporters Without Borders wrote to Brazil's President Lula on March 17 and to its contacts with the European Union's Spanish presidency, Julliard concluded: "We are waiting for a response from governments regardless of their tendency. The International community cannot continue to remain silent in the face of the suffering of these dissidents and the lack of freedoms imposed by a regime whose hints of a possible opening stopped short at the threshold of human rights (*RWB Press Release*, 7/4/10).

**Abril 7:** El secretario de Estado español para la UE, Diego López Garrido, afirmó que "nunca ha sido una prioridad" de la presidencia española cambiar la posición común de la UE hacia Cuba, aunque defendió el diálogo con el régimen castrista y el que haya las "mejores relaciones institucionales posibles". López Garrido se refirió al asunto de Cuba en un coloquio organizado por el Real Instituto Elcano en el Círculo de Bellas Artes de Madrid con motivo de los cien primeros días de la presidencia española de turno. Preguntado por la insistencia del ministro de Asuntos Exteriores español, Miguel Ángel Moratinos, en cambiar la política de la UE con Cuba, vigente desde 1996, López Garrido ha dejado claro que "no es una prioridad, ni lo ha sido nunca", para este semestre. Asimismo, recordó que este punto no está incluido en el programa político de la presidencia rotatoria, si bien consideró legítimo que España aspire a que la UE pase de tener una posición común hacia el país caribeño a entablar una "relación bilateral". "Eso es todo", resumió el secretario de Estado (*EFE*, 7/4/10).

**Abril 8:** El Senado mexicano aprobó en comisiones un exhorto para que el gobierno del país pida a Raúl Castro establecer un diálogo con la oposición y liberar a los presos de conciencia, informó el diario *Excelsior*. Según la publicación, Yeidckol Polevnsky, una integrante del Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), tuvo lo que legisladores describieron como "un ataque de histeria", y acusó a los senadores que votaron a favor del exhorto de lastimar al "único gobierno verdaderamente democrático de América Latina". El *Excelsior* dijo que el debate fue duro y se realizó a puertas cerradas, sin presencia de la prensa, a pesar de que las sesiones de comisiones del Senado son públicas. La justificación utilizada fue que se trataba de "una reunión privada". Tras la discusión, las comisiones unidas de Relaciones Exteriores, presidida por Rosario Green, y de Relaciones Exteriores, América Latina y El Caribe, liderada por César Leal, aprobaron por 12 votos en favor y cinco en contra el exhorto (*Diario de Cuba*, 8/4/10).

**April 8:** Cuba criticized the role of transnational disinformation groups for their discrepancies with the reality of the developing world and their promotion of a single unifying thinking. Juan Antonio Fernandez, a delegate from the Caribbean island, spoke in Paris during the 184th

Executive Council of the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO). Fernandez, who is the president of the Cuban National Commission of UNESCO, branded the panorama of the communication and information sector as disappointing. In addition, he condemned the mechanisms that have favored the cult of market, which in their reports talk about rights and pluralism but censures free software, *Prensa Latina* news agency reported (ACN, 8/4/10).

**April 8:** Spain's foreign minister said that only through dialogue with authorities in Havana is it possible to help the Cuban dissident movement and achieve the release of political prisoners on the communist island. Miguel Angel Moratinos once again defended the need to soften the European Union's stance toward Cuba during his appearance before a Spanish Senate committee. Spain's Socialist government has hoped to amend the EU's Common Position, which conditions relations with Cuba on improvements in human rights and moves toward democracy, during Madrid's six-month term in the bloc's rotating presidency, which ends June 30. The foreign minister said it was "essential" for there to be a bilateral relationship establishing a dialogue with President Raul Castro's government and with all sectors of civil society, including the dissidents. In his opinion, the United States and the majority of countries in Latin America were pursuing that line, and thus he said it was necessary for the EU to do the same. He insisted revising the Common Position, which has been in force since 1996, would not mean making concessions or adopting a "complacent" attitude toward the authorities in Havana, since the EU would continue to demand that the Cuban government respect human rights and release all its political prisoners (LAHT, 8/4/10).

**Abril 9:** El buque escuela ruso "Kruzenstern" atracó en el puerto de La Habana como parte de las actividades organizadas para celebrar este año el medio siglo de relaciones diplomáticas con Cuba y el 65 aniversario de la victoria rusa en la Segunda Guerra Mundial. El "Kruzenstern", construido en Alemania en 1926 y considerado el buque más legendario de la flota de veleros escuela de Rusia, podrá ser visitado por los cubanos, que podrán recorrer a bordo una exposición fotográfica sobre las relaciones de los dos países, informaron medios oficiales. La muestra se titula "Reportaje cubano: retratos desde la distancia del tiempo" y permanecerá abierta hasta el 10 de abril, cuando el velero de tres mástiles terminará su visita a la capital cubana (EFE, 9/4/10).

**April 9:** The vice-president of the Cuban councils of State and Ministers, Esteban Lazo Hernandez, met with a delegation from the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) at the headquarters of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party (CCPCC) in Havana. The visiting delegation is headed by Ha Thi Khiet, a member of the Secretariat of the VCP's Central Committee. Machado Ventura and the Vietnamese communist leader spoke of the efforts by both political organizations to strengthen the ideological and political work in Cuba and Viet Nam. Thi Khiet referred to the preparations for the Eleventh Congress of the VCP scheduled for 2011 while Lazo talked about the most recent anti-Cuba media campaign led by the United States and its European allies. Both sides reaffirmed their mutual bonds of solidarity and friendship and sent greetings to the State, Government and Party leaders from both nations. Present in the meeting were the head of the Foreign Relations Department at the CCPCC, Jorge Marti Martinez, and the Vietnamese ambassador to Cuba, Vu Chi Cong, among other officials (ACN, 9/4/10).

**Abril 9:** Los gobiernos de Cuba y Noruega firmaron en La Habana una declaración para reanudar la cooperación bilateral, suspendida desde 2003 a raíz de la decisión de la Unión Europea de condicionar las relaciones con la isla a avances en democracia y derechos humanos. El documento, suscrito por el canciller cubano, Bruno Rodríguez, y el ministro noruego de Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo Internacional, Erik Solheim, señala que el acuerdo es resultado de la voluntad de ambos países de incrementar sus relaciones bilaterales y de cooperación. Solheim es el primer ministro de un país de la UE que visita La Habana en 2009, en momentos en que el gobierno cubano acusa a Estados Unidos, Europa, la disidencia interna y medios de prensa extranjeros de impulsar una “campana mediática” en su contra sobre la vigencia de los derechos humanos. Cuba suspendió la cooperación con la UE en 2003, cuando el bloque adoptó la “posición común” que condiciona las relaciones a mejoras en democracia y derechos humanos en la isla, tras el encarcelamiento de 75 disidentes acusados de ser “mercenarios” pagados por Estados Unidos (*EFE*, 9/4/10).

**Abril 10:** El libro *Cuba Libre*, de la bloguera Yoani Sánchez, fue presentado en Chile en un acto al que asistieron los escritores Jorge Edwards y Rafael Gumucio, y el ministro de Cultura Luciano Cruz-Coke, informó el diario local *La Segunda*. Según el periódico, la librería Qué Leo se llenó para el lanzamiento, evento que fue coronado por una singular manifestación. Edwards terminaba de hablar acerca de *Cuba Libre*, cuando un pequeño grupo de jóvenes se hizo escuchar a gritos: “Hablemos de los constantes problemas y abusos que existen hoy día en Afganistán, Irán, China y nuestro mismo Chile, donde hay más de 100 presos mapuches”, gritó una joven con desesperación. “¡Viva la revolución cubana, mierda!”, añadió su acompañante. Exceptuando el percance, el evento organizado por la editorial Random House Mondadori ofreció interesantes análisis de parte de tres invitados muy distintos entre sí. El que causó gracia fue el escritor y fundador de la revista humorística *The Clinic*, Patricio Fernández, al comparar a Cuba con la serie *La isla de la fantasía*. “Cuando los turistas partían, la Isla volvía a una realidad bastante miserable en la que quedaba este tipo alto de blanco y el enano a su lado, despidiendo a la gente. Ahora está pasando algo bastante trágico: está por morir Ricardo Montalbán y Tatú está solo recibiendo a los visitantes”, dijo, aludiendo a Fidel y Raúl Castro (*Diario de Cuba*, 10/4/10).

**April 10:** Officers and cadets from the Russian sailing ship *Kruzenshtern*, along with midshipmen from the Granma Naval Academy laid floral wreath before the bust of Cuban National Hero José Martí, in Havana’s Central Park. The sailors of the ship of the Eurasian country’s fishing fleet subsequently moved to the Russian Orthodox Church, where they were offered a religious service. Shortly before noon, Mikhail Novikov, captain of the boat, gave Elio Gamez, vice president of the Cuban Friendship Institute (ICAP), 60 photographs related to different moments in the history of brotherhood between the two countries. The donated images were taken by Nikolai Chiguir, first correspondent on the island of the Soviet news agency *TASS*, from 1959 to 1963 and from 1975 to 1979. Gamez acknowledged on behalf of ICAP and the Cuban people this beautiful gesture and noted that thanks to this journey through the seas of the world, these photographs had been exhibited (*ACN*, 10/4/10).

**April 10:** Cuba and South Africa signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) and collaboration in the information technologies and communications spheres. Cuban Minister Commander of the Revolution Ramiro Valdés and his South African counterpart General

Siphiwe Nyanda penned the MOU and toasted to its success. Nyanda highlighted the good health of the bilateral relations and said his country was interested in collaborating with Cuba in the telecommunications field. The South African Minister told the press that countries that are friends can help each other and finding new ways and possibilities of exchange, which is the reason his delegation is in Cuba. He also talked about the visits they made to the Computing Sciences University, the Central Institute of Digital Research and the Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade and Investment Ministries. Cuba and South Africa have relations in other fields, like public health care and education, which include in the African country the use of the Cuban “Yes I can” literacy method. Siphiwe Nyanda is visiting Cuba since April 7 following an invitation made by Ramiro Valdés (ACN, 10/4/10).

**April 11:** Spain will continue to demand that Cuba respect human rights and release its political prisoners, Deputy Prime Minister Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega said in an interview published by the Madrid daily *El Pais*. The Spanish government’s policy toward Cuba is one of “critical and demanding dialogue,” Fernandez de la Vega said. “With firmness in the demand for respect for human rights, which carries with it the request for the immediate release of political prisoners,” the deputy prime minister said. The death of Orlando Zapata Tamayo made evident that “no advances” have been made but “we cannot stop demanding that human rights be complied with. We have offered the possibility for (Guillermo) Fariñas to come to Spain and we’re going to continue demanding that human rights be respected,” Fernandez de la Vega said. Zapata died on February 23 after an 85-day hunger strike (EFE, 11/4/10).

**Abril 11:** El presidente de Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, calificó de “delincuente” al preso político cubano Orlando Zapata Tamayo, quien murió el pasado 23 de febrero tras 86 días de huelga de hambre, informaron fuentes oficiales nicaragüenses. Ortega, uno de los principales aliados del régimen cubano en la región, dijo al clausurar en Managua un foro de dirigentes de partidos centroamericanos de izquierda que la prensa internacional “vinculada al imperio” no se ha referido a 30 personas que se hallan en huelga de hambre en la República Árabe Saharaui “en defensa de una causa justa”. “Pero en Cuba un delincuente se va a una huelga de hambre y lo convierten en patriota y muere y lo convierten en héroe, hay que fijarse en la gran diferencia”, añadió. “El imperio en Cuba no tiene patriotas y por eso sencillamente tiene que recurrir a delincuentes”, insistió el gobernante sandinista. Dijo que esto se debe a que desde hace años los europeos y Estados Unidos “quieren volar la piedra angular de la revolución latinoamericana, que es Cuba y actualmente se lanzan con toda furia contra Venezuela” (EFE, 11/4/10).

**April 11:** Cuban President Raul Castro met with Rafael Ramirez, Venezuela’s Vice-president and Minister of Energy and Oil. The meeting took place in keeping with the excellent state of bilateral bonds, and marked the end of two days of exchanges between the distinguished visitor and Ricardo Cabrisas, Vice- President of the Cuban Council of Ministers, who was also present in the meeting, the *Granma* newspaper reported. Ramirez and Cabrisas, co-presidents of the Cuba-Venezuela Intergovernmental Commission, reviewed, along with other officials from the two nations, the development of the fulfilment of the accords adopted during its 10th Session, held in December (ACN, 12/4/10).

**Abril 12:** El secretario de Estado Vaticano, cardenal Tarcisio Bertone, dijo en Chile que la Iglesia sigue “con atención los problemas de Cuba” y que “sin duda” ese país debe ser ayudado,

como pidió Juan Pablo II, para que “el mundo se abra a Cuba y Cuba se abra al mundo”, informó ANSA. “Seguimos con atención los problemas de Cuba, esta prueba de coraje de estos jóvenes”, comentó el cardenal, al ser consultado por ANSA sobre las huelgas de hambre que realizan opositores políticos en la isla. “Sin duda todos debemos ayudar a Cuba, como decía Juan Pablo II, que se abra el mundo a Cuba y que Cuba se abra al mundo. Ayudar a Cuba, ayudar a los gobernantes, ayudar a los cubanos de Cuba, a los cubanos de fuera”, agregó el secretario de Estado Vaticano. “Nosotros —prosiguió— también hemos pedido muchas veces que se interrumpa el embargo, porque damnifica a las poblaciones”. Hay que “ayudar a Cuba a crecer en la consideración de la vida humana, de los derechos humanos”, remarcó. Bertone, en rueda de prensa en Santiago, resumió que “hay muchos problemas en Cuba, los obispos han tomado posición”. “Yo no he visitado más Cuba, no me he encontrado más con el presidente Raúl Castro”, dijo en alusión a la visita que realizó hace un año a La Habana (*Diario de Cuba*, 12/4/10).

**April 13:** A delegation of six French senators, headed by socialist Bernard Piras, president of the France-Caribbean Friendship Group, is on an official visit to Cuba. They’re parliamentarians from the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), the current party in the government, and of the Socialist Party, second political force in that country, the *Granma* newspaper reported. Visitors met with Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon and with Tourism Deputy Minister Maria Elena Lopez. The French Senate’s France-Caribbean Friendship Group is one of the largest in that House, with 59 members, representing the entire political spectrum of that European nation. Over the last few years, it has backed actions in favor of Cuba, against the US blockade of the island, and in support of the struggle for the release of the five Cubans incarcerated in the United States (*ACN*, 13/4/10).

**April 13:** A bronze bust of Fidel Castro will be unveiled in Caracas, outside the National Assembly building, announced Gerson Pérez, a leader of the ruling PSUV, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. According to the Venezuelan newspaper *El Nacional*, the bust, the work of six sculptors, will be unveiled to mark the 49th anniversary of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion on April 17, 1961 (*The Miami Herald*, 13/4/10).

**April 13:** The ambassador of the Republic of Congo to Cuba, Pascal Onguemby, rejected the lies included in an anti-Cuba resolution recently approved by the European Parliament. Addressing participants in the inauguration of the Eleventh International Conference on African Culture in the Americas that began in Santiago de Cuba, the African diplomat spoke on behalf of the ambassadors from Burkina Faso, Cape Verde and Mozambique, as well as the cultural attaché from Angola. Onguemby noted that, in spite of US pressure, Africa supports and defends Cuba as a token of gratitude for the island’s altruistic and historic solidarity and co-operation (*ACN*, 13/4/10).

**Abril 14:** El Senado pidió al gobierno de España, como hiciera el día anterior el Congreso, “impulsar un diálogo” con las autoridades cubanas para intentar lograr “a corto plazo” la liberación de “todos los presos de conciencia y políticos” cubanos. La Cámara Alta aprobó una moción firmada por todos los grupos, excepto por el PP, cuya redacción es idéntica a una enmienda presentada por los socialistas a una proposición no de ley de los “populares” que salió adelante en el Congreso. El consenso alcanzado en el Senado ha sido mayor, ya que el texto

recabó el apoyo de todos los grupos, con 248 votos a favor, con un único voto en contra y una abstención. El texto condena también la muerte del preso Orlando Zapata y pide al Ejecutivo cubano que abra las cárceles donde permanecen los presos de conciencia a Cruz Roja Internacional y el relator de la ONU de Derechos Humanos (*Europa Press*, 14/4/10).

**Abril 14:** El disidente Guillermo Fariñas, en huelga de hambre y sed desde hace 50 días, agradeció al Senado y al Congreso de España que hayan pedido la liberación de todos los presos de conciencia en la isla. “Por fin España, que al final de cuentas es la madre patria, se está dando cuenta de que debe ponerse de parte de las víctimas y no de los victimarios”, dijo Fariñas por teléfono desde la sala de cuidados intensivos del hospital de Santa Clara donde está internado desde mediados de marzo. El sicólogo y periodista de 48 años empezó su huelga de hambre y sed el 24 de febrero, después de la muerte del opositor preso Orlando Zapata Tamayo al cabo de un ayuno de 85 días, y exige al general Raúl Castro, la excarcelación de 26 opositores enfermos. “Aunque yo me muera, por lo menos esos presos van a salir en libertad en algún momento”, dijo Fariñas, que espera que su estado mejore cuando le coloquen de nuevo el catéter por el que le administran sueros y alimentos líquidos, que debieron quitarle por una infección (*EFE*, 14/4/10).

**April 14:** Vuk Jeremic, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, paid tribute to Cuba’s National Hero Jose Marti, with the placing of a wreath at the memorial named after the Apostle. Accompanied by Ernesto Senti, director for Europe of the island’s Foreign Ministry, the distinguished visitor toured the halls of the building, and received a detailed explanation on the Cuban Revolution. The Serbian Foreign Minister is on an official visit to the island, at the invitation of his Cuban counterpart, Bruno Rodriguez. He’s heading the delegation of that European country to the Meeting of Political Consultations between the foreign ministries of the two nations, to take place in Havana (*ACN*, 14/4/10).

**April 14:** Cuba proposed the creation of a general convention on international terrorism to put an end to double standards and the politically-biased war on terrorism. In a communiqué circulated in the UN by its diplomatic mission, Cuba stressed that acts of terrorism have never originated or financed in its territory. Cuba has an updated legislation regarding terrorism, as well as a juridical system that prevents those actions and punishes those who engage in them, according to a *Prensa Latina* report. The document rejects the US list of so-called terror-sponsor nations and denounces the inclusion of Cuba in the list. It reiterates the Cuban support of efforts for bilateral co-operation in the war on international terrorism based on mutual respect of the countries’ sovereignty (*ACN*, 14/4/10).

**April 14:** Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez held at the Foreign Ministry, official talks with his Serbian counterpart, Vuk Jeremic, who is on an official visit of the island. Rodriguez expressed his satisfaction for the state of bilateral relations, and acknowledged that there’s still a great potential for co-operation in the spheres of science and the economy. He thanked Serbia for its solidarity and for the vote of that European country in favor of the resolution Cuba presented before the United Nations against the US economic, commercial and financial blockade of the island. For his part, Vuk Jeremic said that being the first Serbian Foreign Minister to officially visit Cuba makes him feel very proud, and highlighted the excellent bonds existing between the two states. He also expressed the gratitude of his government for Havana’s stance against the secession of the Serbian region of Kosovo from Serbia, with the carrying out of diplomatic

actions so the European nation recovers its national sovereignty. The distinguished visitor championed the strengthening of bilateral bonds, and in this regard underlined the meeting with Cuban Minister for Foreign Trade and Investment, Rodrigo Malmierca, as a prelude to the Intergovernmental Joint Commission, to take place on July 6 (ACN, 14/4/10).

**Abril 15:** Colombia, Cuba, Haití, Honduras y Venezuela integran la lista negra de los derechos humanos de la Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, que publicó su informe anual. La CIDH insta a La Habana a liberar a los opositores condenados en la “Primavera Negra”. En el caso de Cuba, la CIDH observa que desde hace décadas las carencias provienen de la falta de elecciones libres, los límites a la libertad de expresión y las restricciones a la independencia de los jueces. Además, la Comisión se queja de la escasa información disponible sobre la situación de derechos humanos, “como consecuencia de una política de Estado destinada a restringir el flujo de información”. La CIDH insta a La Habana a liberar inmediatamente a los opositores condenados en la llamada “Primavera Negra” de 2003, y recuerda que algunos sufren problemas de salud sin que se les provea de una adecuada atención médica. Respecto al embargo comercial y financiero de Estados Unidos pide que termine por el impacto que generan tales sanciones en los derechos humanos de la población cubana ([Situación de los derechos humanos en Cuba](#); *BBC Mundo*, 16/4/10).

**Abril 15:** El Senado mexicano rechazó, en una apretada votación, aprobar un punto de acuerdo para expresar al gobierno de Cuba su condena por la muerte del opositor Orlando Zapata Tamayo y solicitarle una apertura de diálogo con los disidentes en la isla. De los 128 senadores, 43 votaron en contra del dictamen y 42 lo hicieron a favor, mientras que el resto de los legisladores se ausentaron en el momento de la votación o no acudieron a la sesión. El tema causó divisiones al interior de los partidos Acción Nacional (PAN, en el poder), Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) y de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), pues algunos de sus legisladores habían adelantado que votarían a favor y otros en contra, al tiempo que crecían las presiones de distintos sectores para que hubiera un pronunciamiento de México. La propuesta de iniciativa fue presentada el pasado 18 de marzo, pero su discusión fue aplazada en tres ocasiones después de que el embajador de Cuba en México, Manuel Aguilera, presionara a los senadores para evitar que se aprobara (*EFE*, 15/4/10).

**Abril 15:** El presidente de Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, anunció que conmemorará el 19 de abril el bicentenario de la independencia de Venezuela junto a los mandatarios del ALBA, incluido el general Raúl Castro, quienes coincidirán en Caracas en una nueva cumbre del bloque regional. Durante un concurrido acto político celebrado en Caracas para conmemorar su retorno al poder hace ocho años, tras un fallido golpe de Estado que duró 48 horas, Chávez anunció además la próxima visita del presidente de China, Hu Jintao. El 18 de abril Hu abandonará Venezuela y comenzarán a llegar al país los presidentes de la Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de América (ALBA) para participar en la cumbre que se realizará en Caracas, cuando se inician los festejos por la Independencia de Venezuela. “Comienza a llegar (la presidenta de Argentina) Cristina Kirchner, (de Cuba) Raúl Castro, (de Bolivia) Evo Morales, (de Ecuador) Rafael Correa”, enumeró Chávez, citando además al mandatario nicaragüense, Daniel Ortega, entre otros. Según Chávez, en la conmemoración del 19 de abril también estarán presentes delegaciones de Vietnam, Bielorrusia, China, Rusia, Argelia, Irán, Libia y “de todos los países

sudamericanos”. La última cumbre del ALBA se realizó en La Habana (*AFP, Diario de Cuba, 15/4/10*).

**Abril 15:** El presidente de Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, viajó en la madrugada a Cuba para reunirse con Fidel y Raúl Castro, informó el diario *El Nacional*. Chávez partió desde el Aeropuerto Internacional Augusto César Sandino, de Managua, tras concluir una visita de trabajo a Nicaragua y reunirse con su presidente, Daniel Ortega. El mandatario venezolano, principal aliado político y económico del régimen cubano, tiene previsto también un encuentro con Fidel Castro. Según *El Nacional*, el anuncio fue hecho luego de la firma de una serie de instrumentos en materia de salud, turismo y alimentación entre Venezuela y el gobierno sandinista de Ortega, otro aliado de los Castro, para fortalecer los vínculos bilaterales de ambas naciones dentro de la Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de América (ALBA) (*Diario de Cuba, 15/4/10*).

**April 15:** Cuban President Raul Castro welcomed his Venezuelan counterpart Hugo Chavez, who arrived in Havana for a working visit accompanied by several of his ministers. Raul received Chavez at Havana's Jose Marti international airport, where the Venezuelan delegation arrived from Nicaragua (*ACN, 15/4/10*).

**April 16:** The President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, accompanied by government officials, carried out a working visit to Cuba. During his stay on the island, he met with Commander in Chief Fidel Castro. During the meeting, they tackled different aspects of the fruitful relations of work existing between the two peoples, as well as several topics of the international situation *Granma* and *Juventud Rebelde* newspapers reported. In exchanges with the President of the councils of State and Ministers, Raul Castro, the performance of co-operation between the two countries and ways to consolidate the development of wide-ranging economic and social projects, were examined. Before his departure, Chavez, accompanied by Raul, Cuban leaders, and the Venezuelan delegation, visited a community in the process of expansion, located in the Havana municipality of Playa, where they animatedly spoke with neighbours (*ACN, 16/4/10*).

**Abril 16:** La Feria del Disco en Cuba concedió uno de sus nueve premios internacionales al cantautor español Joaquín Sabina, quien lo consideró “un honor” por ser de un país que “sabe tanto de música”, dijo en un mensaje divulgado en La Habana. “Es un honor que me distinga un país que tanto sabe de música”, comentó en el mensaje Sabina, de 60 años, al agradecer el premio que la Feria entregó al CD “Vinagre y rosas”, lanzado al mercado en noviembre pasado. Al informar sobre el premio, el diario oficial *Granma* destacó la “postura ética” de Sabina, pues rechazó sumarse “a la campaña mediática contra Cuba”, a raíz de las huelgas de hambre del preso político Orlando Zapata, fallecido el 23 de febrero, y del opositor Guillermo Fariñas. “No firmaré ningún manifiesto, ni ninguna carta sobre la situación actual (en la isla), mientras siga existiendo, por ejemplo Guantánamo (la prisión que Washington mantiene en su base naval en Cuba) o el bloqueo (embargo que Estados Unidos aplica contra la isla desde 1962)”, dijo Sabina, quien se encuentra en México (*AFP, 17/4/10*).

**April 16:** The secretary-general of the Organization of American States asked the Cuban government to free ailing political prisoners, as demanded by hunger-striking dissident Guillermo Fariñas. “There's a hunger strike going on, that of Mr. Fariñas, which is really

terrible. I hope this can be resolved quickly,” Jose Miguel Insulza told *Efe* after speaking in Madrid at a seminar about relations between the European Union and Latin America. The release of “political prisoners who are ill” would be a demonstration of goodwill that would not weaken the Cuban regime,” the OAS chief said. “Far from weakening it, I think it would improve its image.” “It’s all in the hands of the Cuban government,” the former Chilean foreign minister said, adding that in any case, people should not be locked up for their opinions. Guillermo Fariñas, 48, began his hunger strike on Feb. 24, when jailed dissident Orlando Zapata Tamayo died following an 85-day fast. Fariñas, a psychologist, is demanding that Cuban President Raul Castro free 26 political prisoners said to be in bad health. For Insulza, Zapata’s death has meant a downturn in the international community’s perception of Cuba, representing “a negative factor” for the communist government in Havana (*LAHT*, 21/4/10).

**Abril 16:** El presidente venezolano, Hugo Chávez, celebró el viernes el séptimo aniversario de la llamada Misión Barrio Adentro, por la que miles de médicos cubanos han sido enviado a prestar atención en las barriadas más pobres y peligrosas del país sudamericano. En un discurso televisado, el mandatario reconoció que 69 médicos cubanos han muerto en Venezuela, informaron medios de prensa. Sin dar detalles de las causas, dijo: “69 patriotas cubanos han muerto aquí cumpliendo esta misión”. El diario venezolano *El Nacional* informó el pasado mes que la lista médicos fallecidos consta en “una placa conmemorativa” en el Centro de Diagnóstico Integral Salvador Allende, de Caracas. En los últimos años, la prensa del país sudamericano ha publicado reportes sobre el asesinato de médicos cubanos, pero rara vez las muertes fueron confirmadas por las autoridades (*Diario de Cuba*, 16/4/10).

**April 16:** Ricardo Alarcon, President of the National Assembly of the People’s Power, met with a French parliamentary delegation headed by Senator Bernard Piras, president of the France-Caribbean Friendship Group. The delegation is made up by five senators from different political affiliations, members of the Group, and the executive secretary of the latter, the *Granma* newspaper reported. The delegation also met with ministers and deputy ministers from several organizations, as well as with Communist Party leaders (*ACN*, 17/4/10).

**Abril 16:** La Organización Mundial Contra la Tortura (OMCT) expresó su preocupación por las “condiciones extremas” de detención existentes en Cuba, por la falta de garantías para la libertad de expresión y de asociación y la represión contra disidentes, así como por el estado de salud de Guillermo Fariñas, en huelga de hambre desde hace 52 días. “A la OMCT le preocupa que el Señor Guillermo Fariñas pueda morir en cualquier momento debido al deterioro inevitable de su salud en circunstancias agravadas por las secuelas de anteriores huelgas de hambre”, señaló esta ONG en un comunicado. En él, se expresa igualmente la preocupación por el estado de salud de otro disidente, Darsi Ferrer Ramírez, preso de conciencia detenido en la cárcel de alta seguridad de Valle Grande. La OMCT insta a las autoridades cubanas a que den la necesaria atención médica a Fariñas y a Ferrer Ramírez, y a que liberen inmediatamente a todos los prisioneros de conciencia. “En caso de no hacerlo, pedimos que inviten a una misión independiente de la Alta Comisionada para los Derechos Humanos de las Naciones Unidas, para que pueda establecer las condiciones de detención y las garantías que hayan tenido ó no a un debido proceso”. Esta organización contra la tortura pide igualmente el fin de “los arrestos arbitrarios contra periodistas independientes” y que se agilice la visita del relator especial de la ONU sobre la Tortura, aceptada por Cuba en 2009, así como que se acuerde otra visita del relator (*EFE*, 16/4/10).

**April 17:** The unveiling in Caracas of a bronze bust of Fidel Castro, originally set for this week, has been postponed until April 30, the Venezuelan newspaper *El Nacional* reported. It will rise outside the National Assembly building. The bust is a replica of the one in the National Museum of Art of Belarus, created by sculptor Anatoliy Anikevich in 1973. Gerson Pérez, a leader of the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela, said that Castro's "historic character and the contributions of the Cuban Revolution must be recognized. The honors will be multiplied, because a second bust will be erected in Haiti and a third one will be donated to the [Venezuelan] National Arts Gallery" (*The Miami Herald*, 17/4/10).

**April 18:** Cuban President Raul Castro arrived in Venezuela to participate in the main celebrations for the bicentennial of the beginning of Venezuela's struggle for independence, including the Ninth Summit of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of the Americas (ALBA) regional co-operation and integration bloc. Upon his arrival at the Simon Bolivar airport in Caracas, Raul said he was happy to be there only a few days before the 57th anniversary of his first visit to Venezuela. He highlighted the day coincidence in the beginning of Venezuela's independence struggle 200 years ago and another anniversary of the Cuban victory against Bay of Pigs mercenary invasion on April 19, 1961. The Cuban delegation was welcomed by Venezuelan Vice President Elias Jaua. Also present were the Venezuelan Foreign Minister, Nicolas Maduro, and the Cuban ambassador in Caracas, Rogelio Polanco. The Cuban delegation includes Vice President and Commander of the Revolution Ramiro Valdes; Vice President Ricardo Cabrisas; Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla; the minister of Foreign Investment and Collaboration, Rodrigo Malmierca; and Havana Historian Eusebio Leal (*ACN*, 18/4/10).

**Abril 18:** Unos dos mil médicos cubanos enviados a misión en Venezuela han huido a Estados Unidos vía Colombia, según una investigación publicada por el diario *El Tiempo*. "Por Maracaibo (Venezuela) y Cúcuta (Colombia) están escapando los médicos enviados a Barrio Adentro, misión de salud del gobierno chavista", señala el matutino. Se trata de personal de esa misión que el pasado viernes cumplió 7 años y que lleva servicios de salud a los lugares más pobres de Venezuela y atendida por profesionales cubanos. Según desertores, en Venezuela hay en esa misión unos 40,000 profesionales de la salud y 14,480, según el gobierno venezolano, "como parte de un convenio entre los presidentes Raúl Castro y Hugo Chávez", recuerda el periódico (*EFE*, 18/4/10).

**April 19:** The First Vice-president of the Cuban councils of State and Ministers, Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, met with Don Vicente Alvarez, President of the Principality of Asturias, who is on an official visit to the island. While welcoming the distinguished visitor, the top Cuban leader underlined the good state of relations between Asturias and Cuba and expressed his country's willingness to strengthen and deepening its ties with this Spanish Autonomous Community, to which the island is united by historic and cultural bonds. For his part, the Asturian President, expressed his satisfaction for this, his second visit to the country, and referred to the potentialities that exist to diversify and expand economic and commercial relations as well as those of co-operation between the peoples and governments of Asturias and Cuba (*ACN*, 19/4/10).

**April 19:** The current role of Venezuela as agglutinating and pro-Latin American nation was highlighted, during the main celebration to commemorate in Havana the bicentennial of that country's independence. "Once more, the land of Bolivar moves the entire continent, with airs of independence and dignity based on a generous sense of pro-Latin American solidarity" said José Ramón Machado Ventura, First Vice-president of the councils of State and Ministers. Machado delivered the closing speech of the meeting, held at the Universal Hall of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), in the presence of other Cuban leaders, chiefs and officers from the FAR and the Ministry of the Interior, workers, and representatives from Venezuela, headed by their ambassador, Ronald Blanco. Prior to Machado Ventura's speech, Ronald Blanco thanked the island for everything it has done and it still doing for his country and his people. Also presiding over the meeting were, among others, Politburo members Esteban Lazo, Vice President of the Council of State, and Abel Prieto and Yadira Garcia, ministers of Culture and Basic Industry, respectively (ACN, 19/4/10).

**April 19:** Cuban President Raul Castro said in Caracas that the only alternative for Latin American peoples is to unite, to fight and to win. During the closing session of the Ninth Summit of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of the Americas (ALBA) regional integration and co-operation bloc, Raul congratulated the Venezuelan people on behalf of Fidel Castro and the Cuban people on the occasion of the bicentennial of the beginning of Venezuela's independence war. The Cuban president highlighted the role of Simon Bolivar in the emancipation of Latin American peoples. He also praised ALBA's results in the training of human resources, mainly in the education and health sectors, and its contribution to regional energy saving programs, among others. Raul also referred to the Cuban people's victory over the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion and condemned an ongoing anti-Cuba media campaign led by the United States and its European allies. The president of the Cuban councils of State and Ministers noted that neither Cuba nor Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador or any other ALBA member country will be defeated through blockades and lies (ACN, 20/4/10).

**April 20:** The presidents of Cuba and Venezuela, Raul Castro and Hugo Chavez, held a bilateral meeting in Caracas at the Palacio de Miraflores, seat of the Venezuelan government. After his arrival in Miraflores, Raul was welcomed with honors and the Cuban and Venezuelan anthems were played, the *Bolivarian News Agency* reported. The leaders then reviewed the troops of the Venezuelan Presidential Guard of Honor inside the facility. The Cuban president participated in several activities to commemorate the bicentenary of the beginning of Venezuela's independence war and in the Ninth Summit of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of the Americas (ALBA) regional integration and co-operation bloc held in Caracas (ACN, 20/4/10).

**April 20:** Cuba commemorated the Palestinian Prisoner's Day and repudiated the brutal and inhuman way the government of Israel treats Palestinians in their own land. Dr. Rodrigo Alvarez Cambras, president of the Cuban-Arab Association, said that Palestine is an occupied territory that Israel has turned it into a gigantic prison with the complicity of the world's major powers the world. Alvarez Cambras said that currently there are about 12,000 Palestinians in prison, who are not subject to judicial process or being charged, but subjected to physical and mental torture in flagrant violation of the human rights. He noted that Israel has expelled thousands of Palestinians from their land to whom they deny the right of return, while the United States, Europe and the international mass media ignore these facts. He also highlighted the feelings of brotherhood and

solidarity between Cuba and Palestine, united in the fight for just causes, and called on the world to denounce this injustice (ACN, 20/4/10).

**Abril 20:** Tres agrupaciones disidentes cubanas pidieron a eurodiputados nominar para el Premio Sajarov al periodista opositor Guillermo Fariñas, en huelga de hambre desde hace 56 días para reclamar la liberación de presos políticos, dijo un comunicado. “Es justo y necesario que la preocupación y el interés mostrados (...) por la suerte de nuestro hermano de causa en huelga de hambre y sed se refleje en su proposición para un galardón tan importante como el Premio Sajarov, que otorga el Parlamento Europeo”, subrayó la nota, entregada a la prensa internacional. “En los últimos meses la opinión pública internacional ha denunciado con más constancia y energía las violaciones de los derechos humanos perpetradas por el gobierno cubano”, agrega el texto, suscrito por las organizaciones Agenda para la Transición Cubana, Alianza Democrática Cubana (ALDECU) y Unidad Liberal de la República de Cuba. “Pensamos que ningún compatriota nuestro tiene más merecimientos que él para recibir ahora ese homenaje”, añade el texto, tras resaltar que algunos parlamentos han aprobado documentos en los que “se expresa preocupación por la suerte del abnegado luchador”, agrega la misiva (*El Nuevo Herald*, 21/4/10).

**April 21:** Cuban Vice President Esteban Lazo is leading his country’s delegation to the World Peoples’ Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, which continues in Cochabamba, Bolivia. This event that closes on April 22 after three days of exchanges, will ratify the commitment from social, indigenous, scientific and peoples’ movements and organizations in their struggle against climate change, *Granma* newspaper reported. The Cuban delegation is also comprised of First Deputy Science, Technology and Environment Minister Fernando Gonzalez, and Deputy Foreign Minister Abelardo Moreno (*Prensa Latina*, 21/4/10).

**April 21:** Cuban President Raul Castro concluded a visit to Venezuela where he participated in the official celebrations for the bicentenary of the beginning of Venezuela’s independence war and in the Ninth Summit of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of the Americas (ALBA) regional integration and co-operation bloc. Shortly before leaving Caracas, Raul, who was seen off by his Venezuelan counterpart Hugo Chavez, spoke with reporters. “All the meetings we have, either in Havana or Caracas, are important. I am really happy to see that our relations with our Venezuelan brothers are strengthening and developing,” Raul said. “We are getting closer and closer with the Venezuelan people. We are the same.” “It is the same homeland,” Chavez added. During his stay in Caracas, Raul also participated in a military parade along the Paseo de los Proceres (Avenue of the Independence Heroes) and in a solemn session of the Venezuelan National Assembly. Regarding the meeting with Chavez at the Palacio de Miraflores —seat of the Venezuelan government— the Cuban president noted that, although they also spoke of politics, they focused on economic topics such as investments, technology, development opportunities and the replacement of imports, *Prensa Latina* news agency reported (ACN, 21/4/10).

**April 21:** Edmond Mulet, head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, congratulated the Cuban health personnel working in Haiti. “I want to formally congratulate the Cuban government and, in particular, the doctors and other health professionals currently working here in Haiti, often in very difficult conditions and giving all their love to the long-suffering Haitian people,” he said.

During a courtesy visit to the Cuban embassy in Port-au-Prince, the UN official said he was interested in learning about the Cubans' work in Haiti in detail. "I headed the UN Mission in Haiti some years ago and since then I realized that the Cuban doctors' work here was extraordinary," he added. "We realize you are carrying out an excellent mid and long term planning work to have clinics, hospitals and other health facilities all across the country." "This project has gained momentum as Cuba, on behalf of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of the Americas (ALBA), and other countries are coordinating their efforts with the Haitian Ministry of Public Health," Mulet pointed out (*ACN*, 22/4/10).

**April 22:** Nine sailboats participating in the 11th edition of the Transcaraibes des Passionnés Regatta arrived to Cuban coasts after a three-week crossing from the island of Guadeloupe. Before disembarking for the second time in the port of the city of Cienfuegos, the more than 20 crew members made stopovers in Saint Martin, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Jamaica –the latter a point of recent inclusion in their route. Jorge Sierra, a business specialist with the Marlin Marina in Cienfuegos, told *ACN* that the sailboats began their journey on March 30 from Guadeloupe's Bas Du Fort nautical club (*ACN*, 23/4/10).

**April 23:** Vice President Esteban Lazo said that Cuba will not yield to imperialist blackmail in reference to a recent anti-Cuba media campaign led by the United States and its European allies to discredit the Cuban Revolution. Addressing over 30,000 participants in the closing rally of the First World Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, Lazo pointed out that Cuba will never be a colony of the United States. Also in the presence of Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez and Bolivia's Evo Morales, the Cuban official noted that Cuba will support the agreements reached at the summit in Cochabamba to defend Mother Earth. Lazo praised the initiative of host President Evo Morales of convening this summit as a decisive contribution to the defense of Nature, something in which —he affirmed— we can't give in. He added that the meeting contributed to raise awareness among the people about topics such as climate change and the need to find real solutions to this issue that threatens humanity. The Cuban VP said that Evo Morales and the Bolivian people should be proud of the results of last December's general elections and the regional elections on April 4, when the ruling Movement Towards Socialism consolidated its leadership in Bolivia (*ACN*, 23/4/10).

**April 23:** Cuban Vice President Esteban Lazo described the recently concluded World Conference on Climate Change as a resounding success. He told *Prensa Latina* in Bolivia before returning to Cuba that Evo Morales' initiative to lead the Summit was excellent and that it confirmed his leadership in the world battle for the defense of the planet (*ACN*, 24/4/10).

**Abril 25:** Varios centenares de personas se manifestaron en Madrid en apoyo a Cuba y con el fin de pedir un "alto a las agresiones imperialistas" contra la isla. El acto tenía como fin demostrar a Cuba que "no está sola" ante la "febril" campaña, que en opinión de los organizadores, pretende desacreditar el proceso "revolucionario" de ese país. La iniciativa fue convocada por el Movimiento de Solidaridad con la Revolución Cubana, cuya coordinadora Alicia Hermida, leyó un comunicado junto al actor español Willy Toledo. Ambos denunciaron el "acoso mediático, político, diplomático y económico" desarrollado contra la isla y los demás países en Latinoamérica que llevan a cabo una "política independiente y soberana", frente a los "abusos" de Estados Unidos y la Unión Europea. La marcha transcurrió desde la céntrica Glorieta de

Bilbao de la capital española hasta la cercana Plaza de Colón, y estuvo encabezada por una pancarta con el lema “Cuba no está sola. Por un mundo mejor, defendamos la revolución.” “Viva Cuba, Fidel y el Che”, o “qué tendrá Fidel, que los americanos no pueden con él”, eran algunas de las frases que se corearon durante el recorrido (*EFE*, 25/4/10).

**April 26:** The minister of Culture of Cuba, Abel Pietro, informed in Luanda that Angolan trainers of music, dance and plastic arts will be assisted by Cuban instructors, through a co-operation programme being elaborated by the government of Luanda and the Ministry of Culture of Cuba. “There is a very good idea by the governor to include Cuban arts instructors at some schools, in order to assist in the training of Angolan trainers of music, dance and plastic arts”, the Cuban minister told the press at the end of a meeting with the governor of Luanda, Francisca do Espírito Santo. The Cuban minister said that the objective is to benefit children and teenagers, similar to what happens in Cuba, in order to change the lives of the population, children’s behaviour and spirit of the community. Abel Pietro is visiting Angola at the invitation of his Angolan counterpart, Rosa Cruz e Silva, and will be leaving on April 29 (*AngoPress*, 26/4/10).

**April 27:** Cuba’s ambassador to the Ukraine, Felix Leon, was presented with the Merit Order (Third Degree), given by the President of Ukraine, Victor Yanukovich. Personalities from the field of politics in the Ukraine attended the ceremony held at the island’s legation, where acting Health Minister Vasily Lazorishenets conferred the medal upon Leon. He underlined the personal contribution of the ambassador in the carrying out of the Chernobyl Program, by way of which almost 24,000 Ukrainian children who were the victims of the nuclear catastrophe that took place on April 26, 1986, have received medical treatment (*ACN*, 27/4/10).

**April 27:** The Inter-American Press Association has denounced the arrest and imprisonment of Cuban blogger Dania Virgen García, a member of the support team for the Ladies in White. García was arrested on April 22 on undisclosed charges, tried and sentenced to 20 months’ imprisonment within 48 hours. Her destination was Manto Negro (Black Cloak) women’s prison, outside Havana. García did not have a particularly high profile in the dissident movement, so her arrest appears to be a warning to bloggers in general and the Ladies in White in particular. In her website, *El Blog de Dania*, she identifies herself as an independent journalist and the representative in Havana of the Freedom and Democracy Party of Holguín. She is associated with the Commission for Attention to Political Prisoners and their Relatives, (CAPPF) and the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (CDHD). An editorial on García’s arrest and the implications for the Ladies in White appears in *The Wall Street Journal* ([Women Who Brave Mobs](#); *The Miami Herald*, 27/4/10).

**Abril 27:** Las representantes de las Damas de Blanco en Europa y Estados Unidos han pedido a España y a otros 40 países “interesarse” en la defensa de sus compañeras en Cuba que están siendo “víctimas del incansable hostigamiento” por parte de las autoridades del gobierno de Raúl Castro. La organización, integrada por esposas y familiares de los 75 presos de la llamada Primavera Negra de 2003, ha sido blanco de recientes ataques por partidarios del castrismo que han impedido a la fuerza durante tres domingos consecutivos las manifestaciones que acostumbran a realizar semanalmente estas mujeres. Ante esta situación, las Damas de Blanco en el extranjero han pedido a estos gobiernos “interesarse personalmente e involucrar a aquellas personas o instituciones consideren, en la defensa de estas mujeres, y sus familiares, para que

cesen los hostigamientos que padecen en las calles de La Habana y en toda Cuba, tanto físicos como verbales por defender el derecho a la libertad”. La representante de la organización en Europa, Blanca Reyes, dijo a *Europa Press* que desde la muerte a finales de marzo del preso de conciencia Orlando Zapata Tamayo, “la situación ha empeorado” y se han acentuado “los ataques y las agresiones” contra las mujeres que piden la libertad de unos 54 opositores que todavía están detenidos en las cárceles cubanas. La carta ha sido enviada a los presidentes de 41 países de Europa y América Latina, “que respetan los Derechos Humanos”. Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador y Bolivia han sido excluidos porque “no son democráticos, porque apoyan al gobierno (de Castro) y se van a hacer de oídos sordos de nuestra petición”, aclaró Reyes (*Europa Press*, 27/4/10).

**April 29:** More than one thousand trade union members from 32 countries are already in Cuba to participate in the May Day celebrations at Havana’s Jose Marti Revolution Square. “Some of them belong to the Fifth World Brigade in Solidarity with Cuba while others represent 141 trade unions,” Alfredo Machado, a member of the National Secretariat of the Cuban Workers’ Confederation (CTC), said. The brigade members met with relatives of Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando Gonzalez and Rene Gonzalez, the five Cubans who remain imprisoned in the United States since 1998. A member of the Cuba-Laos Friendship Association, Thanmavath Virasdarong, told *ACN* that they are carrying out actions in their country, in co-ordination with the Cuban Friendship Institute (ICAP), to spread the truth about Cuba’s reality (*ACN*, 29/4/10).

**April 29:** Cuba accused the German foundation Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) of maintaining close ties with the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the official daily *Granma* said. *Granma* reported that the KAS recently organized a conference in Brussels entitled “Cuba-EU Policy: Between Pragmatism and Values,” attended mostly by CIA agents and experts in Latin America. “Clearly we are in the presence of another intervention of the US intelligence service in the field of global politics in Europe,” *Granma* said. The newspaper cited the Venezuelan-American researcher Eva Golinger, who revealed that since the 1960s, the KAS has been striving to isolate and undermine the Cuban Revolution. Golinger said the foundation is closely linked with the Cuban American National Foundation and the Centre for a Free Cuba, both largely funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a Washington-based non-profit organization supported by the US national budget (*Xinhua*, 129/4/10).

**April 29:** Culture minister, Rosa Cruz e Silva, and his Cuban counterpart, Abel Prieto, signed in Luanda a protocol of co-operation to re-launch and reinforce cultural interchange between both countries. The protocol will include areas such as Artistic Training, in which the country will count on Cuban teachers to teach various courses, such as plastic arts, dance, music, theatre and cinema. As part of this protocol, the countries will produce movies and documentaries about the liberation struggle, recovering cinematographic heritage, training of staff in Cuba and showing movies between both countries. The agreement includes also the “Slave Route” project, with the expectation of publications on linguistic existence of “Congo, Mayombe and Angola” in Cuba, exchange of lecturers, exhibitions, archiving and production of publication on slave traffic from Angola to that country, among others. Abel Pietro is in Angola under the invitation of his Angolan counterpart, Rosa Cruz e Silva. The Cuban minister was also received by the National

Assembly Speaker, Paulo Kassoma, as well as held meetings with the Angolan Writers Association and the Agostinho Neto Foundation (*All Africa.Com*, 29/4/10).

**April 30:** Jorge Inocencio Dombolo, member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Party “Movement for the Liberation of Angola” (MPLA) placed a wreath by the bust of late Angolan President Antonio Agostinho Neto, in Havana. Accompanied by Rodolfo Puente Ferro, coordinator for Africa of the Department of International Relations of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, the head of the Angolan delegation toured the park dedicated to the African National Heroes, where Neto’s bust is located. The MPLA Party delegation arrived in Cuba at the invitation of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. The group will participate in the celebrations for International Workers Day; will meet with leaders from the Party and the government; and will tour places of economic, social and historic interest (*ACN*, 30/4/10).

**April 30:** Cuba declared at the United Nations Organization that the development of new types of nuclear weapons is unacceptable. Rodolfo Benitez, Cuba’s acting permanent representative at the UN, addressed participants in the Second Conference on Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones underway in New York, the venue of the top international organization, the *Prensa Latina* news agency reported. The diplomat criticized the investment of astronomical amounts of money (millions of dollars) in the perfecting of these armaments, and contrasted that reality with the fact that more than 100 countries will not be able to meet the Millennium Development Goals due to lack of financial resources. Benitez expressed that, in spite of the economic crisis and the existence of millions of hungry people in the world, the military expenditure grows every year and reaches the figure of 1.464 trillion dollars (*ACN*, 30/4/10).

## Security

**Abril 1:** Las autoridades del régimen sienten el justificado temor de que sucedan nuevos actos de desobediencia civil en la isla. Incluso, el gobierno de La Habana teme alzamientos de la población civil, que ha sentido las bocanadas de aire fresco que dejan a su paso las marchas que realizan las Damas de Blanco. Quizás por esto mismo, la cúpula gobernante teme que el control de la situación se les escape de las manos y para asegurarlo ha ordenado reprimir por la fuerza cualquier nueva marcha que se produzca en la capital o provincias. Según varias fuentes en Cuba, el martes 23 de marzo a las 5 de la tarde y hasta pasadas las 12 de la noche, se llevaron a cabo largas reuniones en el Ministerio de las Fuerzas Armadas en La Habana. Este hecho no ocurría desde fines del 2006 cuando Raúl Castro convocó a los principales mandos militares, para informarles de los problemas de salud de Fidel Castro. En esta última convocatoria castrense se dictaron órdenes de apretar filas y mantenerse en alerta. Los guardias que custodian instalaciones del gobierno y el edificio del Comité Central y Consejo de Estado, portan armas más eficaces para enfrentar posibles actos subversivos. Las reuniones prosiguieron en otros sectores de la dirigencia cubana. A tempranas horas de la mañana del 24 de marzo, se efectuó una con todos los delegados provinciales del Partido y del Gobierno. Al finalizar la reunión, el General Lucio Morales Sabat estableció el estado de alerta para el Ejército Occidental. Al mismo tiempo se han dado estrictas órdenes de no permitir ninguna otra caminata de la Damas de Blanco. Por su parte, los corresponsales extranjeros comenzaron a recibir advertencias de no cubrir ningún evento ni filmar ningún suceso en la calles de La Habana y el interior del país, so

pena de ser expulsados del país. Los embajadores de Alemania y de la República Checa han sido llamados al Ministerio del Interior y se les ha llamado la atención por la intromisión de sus subalternos en lo que el gobierno castrista califica como “asuntos internos del país” (*Payo Libre*, 1/4/10).

**Abril 6:** Los cubanos que se encuentran en Venezuela bajo acuerdos de cooperación, están pasando de cumplir funciones de asesoría a ocupar cargos clave en ministerios y organismos de la administración pública, incluyendo altas posiciones en el sector militar, denunciaron líderes de la oposición. “Es un secreto a voces que los cubanos ocupan posiciones clave en el gobierno chavista”, dijo Julio Borges, presidente del opositor Primero Justicia, que exigió al gobierno revelar los nombres y los cargos públicos que ocupan los cubanos. En una conferencia de prensa en Caracas, Borges dijo que la mayoría de los cubanos que trabajan en Venezuela ya no son los médicos ni entrenadores deportivos, sino asesores “que se han posicionado al máximo nivel en los sectores más importantes del sector público”. De acuerdo con un estudio realizado por el politólogo Carlos Romero, de la Universidad Central de Venezuela (UCV), hay cubanos en altos niveles en el Ministerio de Electricidad, en Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA), en el Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia (Sebin), en el Servicio Autónomo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería (Saime), en el sistema de notarías públicas, en el Banco Central de Venezuela y en Fuerte Tiuna, la plaza militar más importante del país con sede en la capital venezolana. Romero destacó el caso del general de brigada cubano Frank Yáñez, jefe del Grupo de Coordinación y Enlace de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Cuba en Venezuela, que dirige una misión militar de 20 altos oficiales acantonados en Fuerte Tiuna, con una importante capacidad de mando sobre operaciones de la FAN venezolana. De acuerdo con Rocío San Miguel, experta en temas militares que preside Control Ciudadano, una organización no gubernamental que monitorea el sector militar venezolano, la presencia de militares cubanos en altos mandos “sirve para estructurar y fortalecer las milicias bolivarianas”. Añadió que ya está regularizada la participación del alto mando militar venezolano en cursos de comando en Cuba, y la participación de oficiales venezolanos en ejercicios militares en la isla (*El Nuevo Herald*, 6/4/10).

**April 11:** The chief of the Armed Forces General Staff, General Álvaro López Miera, arrived in Moscow at the head of a Cuban military delegation, the *Prensa Latina* news agency reported. He was welcomed by Lt. General Alexander Burutin, Deputy Chief of the Russian General Staff. López Miera, who is also Vice Minister of the Cuban Armed Forces, plans to meet with his Russian counterpart, General Nikolai Yegorovich Makarov, “about the status of [Russo-Cuban] co-operation, the outlook for its expansion and the observance of the agreements” already made, *Prensa Latina* said. Makarov visited Cuba in mid-September 2009 to discuss the modernization of the Cuban armed forces under Russian auspices. The Cuban delegation plans to visit the General Staff’s Military Academy and inspect a brigade that has been restructured under a reform in Russian Army organization. The *RIA-Novosti* news agency identifies that unit as the Fifth Motorized Rifle Brigade, in the Moscow suburb of Alabino. The group will visit an armaments factory “where it will observe a demonstration of the advances of [Russia’s] defense systems.” The tour ends on April 14 (*The Miami Herald*, 12/4/10).

**April 13:** Cuba remains a faithful and reliable partner of Russia, Defense Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov told a Cuban delegation headed by General Álvaro López Miera, in Moscow.

According to a Defense Ministry spokeswoman, Russians and Cubans “discussed the preservation of stability in Latin America and the world at large, as well as the status and prospects of bilateral co-operation in military and military-technical spheres.” No specifics were mentioned. “Military partnership has assumed an important place in the overall spectrum of bilateral relations,” Serdyukov said. That kind of co-operation “between our countries is entering a qualitatively new level” (*The Miami Herald*, 14/4/10).

**April 15:** Army Corps General Alvaro Lopez Miera, Deputy Minister of the General Staff of Cuba’s Revolutionary Armed Forces, was decorated in Moscow by the Russian Association of Veterans of Angola (UVA). Lopez Miera, a member of the Politburo of the Cuban Communist Party and a Hero of the Republic of Cuba, was also given the honorary membership of that institution, the *Granma* newspaper reported. During the ceremony, the leadership of UVA said that it considered the visitor a symbol of what the people of the Caribbean island and its armed forces did in the Southern Cone of Africa. For his part, Lopez Miera said: “As I told the head of the Russian General Staff, Nikolai Makarov, during our official meeting, with the actions of our troops and peoples we contributed to prevent that Apartheid continued to exist to the present day.” Lopez Miera is heading a delegation of the Revolutionary Armed Forces on a visit to Russia, and part of its members toured military enterprises (*ACN*, 15/4/10).

**April 16:** Cuban General Álvaro López Miera arrived in Hanoi, after his visit to Moscow, and was welcomed by Vietnamese President Nguyen Minh Triet. López is Vice Minister of the Cuban Armed Forces and chief of the Armed Forces General Staff. According to the Vietnamese newspaper *Nhân Dân*, “Lopez Miera stated that the current visit is a good opportunity to learn from the experiences of the Vietnamese people’s armed forces. He praised the progress Vietnam has made since his last visit 10 years ago and expressed his determination to contribute to tightening relations between the two armies and speeding up bilateral co-operation programs.” López met also with his Vietnamese counterpart, General Nguyen Khac Nghien. “The two shared experiences in building and developing armies and discussed bilateral co-operation on national defense,” said the *Vietnam News Agency*. President Triet said he hoped López’s visit “would contribute to boosting the traditional friendship, solidarity and comprehensive co-operation between the two Parties, States and people, including the armed forces.” The *Voice of Vietnam* reported that “Miera and his entourage paid floral tributes to the late President Ho Chi Minh at his mausoleum and laid wreaths at the Monument for Fallen Combatants. “They paid a courtesy visit to Defense Minister Gen. Phung Quang Thanh and visited the High Command of the Air Defense-Air Force and a number of units of the Vietnam People’s Army” (*The Miami Herald*, 19/4/10).

**April 22:** A former Venezuelan army general denounced what he called the widespread involvement of Cuban troops in President Hugo Chavez’s military. Former Brig. Gen. Antonio Rivero, who used to head the government’s emergency management agency, said his decision to retire from the army this month was motivated mainly by “the presence and meddling of Cuban soldiers” in Venezuela’s armed forces. He told reporters that Cubans are now involved in training troops, including courses for snipers, and are also playing a role in intelligence, weapons, communications and other areas. There was no immediate reaction from Chavez’s government. Rivero’s televised remarks add to claims by government critics that Cuban advisers and operatives hold various positions in the government and military. Rivero said in his infantry

division there were “classes like the one for snipers” where Cuban soldiers and personnel provided training. He said Cubans were also involved in teaching military doctrine at the command level, and are also in divisions like military engineering. Cubans, he said, are now placed “at a high level in vital areas of national security.” Rivero also denounced the “politicization” of the military, including the slogan soldiers now repeat when saluting: “Socialist homeland or death!” During a meeting in Caracas this week, neither Chavez nor Cuban President Raul Castro publicly discussed details of Cuban advisers’ other government roles. The Cuban president said before leaving on Wednesday that he is pleased relations are growing stronger. Increasingly, Castro said, “we’re the same thing” (AP, 23/4/10).

**April 23:** Army Corps General Alvaro Lopez Miera, Deputy Minister and Chief of Staff of Cuba’s Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) highlighted in Pyongyang the strengthening of bonds between his country and North Korea. During his meeting with Kim Yong Chun, Minister of the Popular Armed Forces of the People’s Democratic Republic of Korea and Ri Yong Ho, Chief of Staff, Lopez Miera underlined the successes of that nation in the construction of a new society. He spoke highly of the friendship forged in common struggle, guided by the ideas of Commander in Chief Fidel Castro and President Kim Il Sung, top leader of the People’s Democratic Republic of Korea (1912-1944), and continued by the current presidents of the two nations: Raul Castro and Kim Jong Il, *Prensa Latina* news agency reported. The news agency added that Kim Yong Chun and Ri Yong Ho reiterated their country’s permanent solidarity with Cuba, particularly in its struggle against the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States on the island. Lopez Miera visited military units and toured places of political and social interest (ACN, 23/4/10).

**Abril 24:** El integrante del Frente Cívico Militar Bolivariano, Héctor Herrera, y el contralmirante Luis Cabrera Aguirre, del Estado Mayor Presidencial de Venezuela, negaron que militares cubanos estén ocupando áreas estratégicas en el Ejército de ese país, como denunció el general retirado Antonio Rivero, informó un diario local. Herrera lamentó que el ex funcionario “haya perdido el rumbo” y aseguró que Rivero siempre defendió la nueva doctrina militar basada en la “guerra popular de resistencia”, donde hay asesores cubanos y de otros países, reportó *El Tiempo*. “Para nada ellos (los cubanos) tienen la conducción de aspectos administrativos, logísticos y operacionales”, dijo Herrera. El contralmirante Luis Cabrera Aguirre, integrante del Estado Mayor Presidencial, rechazó las críticas a la colaboración que prestan los militares cubanos y afirmó que ninguna Fuerza Armada está exenta de recibir conocimientos, ya sean tecnológicos o de operaciones, de otros países. “No estamos adquiriendo armas cubanas, pero ellos sí tienen un adelanto en la guerra asimétrica. Y una de las razones por las cuales Cuba ha permanecido allí firme, frente a los embates de EEUU, es que conoce la preparación en este tema. Entonces ellos vienen y nos ayudan a ir desarrollando esas técnicas”, apuntó (*Diario de Cuba*, 25/4/10).

**April 24:** A Cuban military delegation headed by General Álvaro López Miera arrived in Beijing from North Korea, continuing a tour that has taken it to Russia and Vietnam. The group will remain in China until April 29, said *Cuba’s National Information Agency*. The purpose of the visit, as stated in the three other countries on the group’s itinerary, is “to strengthen the links between the armed forces of both countries.” According to the Chinese news agency *Xinhua*, López Miera, Vice Minister of the Armed Forces and chief of its General Staff, met with his

Chinese counterpart, Chen Bingde. “Chen hailed the sound communication and exchange of visits between military leaders of the two countries, saying it guaranteed a smooth development of Sino-Cuban military exchanges and co-operation,” *Xinhua* reported. López Miera met in Pyongyang with his North Korean counterpart Ri Yong Ho, who described the Cuban official’s visit as “a milestone in developing the friendly and cooperative ties between the armies of the two countries and the overall bilateral relations” (*The Miami Herald*, 25/4/10).

**April 25:** President Hugo Chavez dismissed a retired general’s concerns about a growing Cuban presence in Venezuela’s military, accusing the officer of helping opponents portray his government a pawn of Fidel Castro. Former Brig. Gen. Antonio Rivero has denounced a widespread involvement of Cuban troops in the military. Chavez made no denials on that point, saying that Cubans are merely aiding soldiers in a limited capacity, and he defended his government’s increasingly close co-operation with communist-led Cuba. “What Cubanization? The Cubans are helping us here,” Chavez said during his television and radio program (*Winston-Salem Journal*, 26/4/10).

**Abril 25:** El general retirado venezolano Antonio Rivero, quien denunció la presencia de personal cubano en varios niveles de la Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana, fue detenido por la Dirección de Inteligencia Militar (DIM). Rivero, ex director nacional del cuerpo de socorristas Protección Civil, pasó el pasado 7 de abril a retiro de las Fuerzas Armadas por decisión propia debido a desacuerdos con el gobierno del presidente venezolano, Hugo Chávez, según explicó él mismo a la prensa. El diario caraqueño *Últimas Noticias* publicó que el militar fue “detenido anoche por la DIM” y permanece en el Fuerte Tiuna, la principal guarnición de Caracas. El general en retiro denunció que personal cubano desarrolla actividades de planificación y conformación de la organización militar, capacitación y adiestramiento dentro de la Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana. “Más allá de un intercambio militar, la inclusión de militares cubanos está más allá de lo que debería ser permitido. Están en un área estratégica, en seguridad del Estado”, dijo en una rueda de prensa (*Cubaencuentro*, 27/4/10).

**April 27:** Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping called for close military ties with Cuba during talks with a senior Cuban military official in Beijing. “To further develop China-Cuba friendly co-operation not only complies with the fundamental interests of the two countries, but also is of great significance for maintaining world peace and stability and boosting common development,” said Xi. Xi made the remarks during his meeting with Alvaro Lopez Miera, vice minister and chief of the General Staff of Cuba’s Revolutionary Armed Forces. Lopez expressed his admiration for China’s rapid economic and social development in recent years, hoping military ties would further boost co-operation between the two countries. Lopez, who arrived in China on April 24, will conclude his goodwill visit on April 29. Earlier he met Chinese Defence Minister Liang Guanglie and chief of the General Staff of People’s Liberation Army Chen Bingde (*Xinhua*, 27/4/10).

**Abril 29:** El presidente cubano, general Raúl Castro, se reunió en La Habana con el ministro de Defensa de Angola, el general Cândido Pereira Dos Santos, quien realizó una visita privada a la isla, según informó la televisión estatal. Castro y Pereira Dos Santos hablaron de las “excelentes relaciones” que existen entre ambos países y abogaron por “su continuo fortalecimiento” según el reporte televisivo, que mostró imágenes del encuentro aunque no precisó cuándo se celebró. A

la entrevista también asistieron el ministro y el primer viceministro de las Fuerzas Armadas cubanas, los generales Julio Casas Regueiro y Leopoldo Cintra Frías, respectivamente. Cuba y Angola han mantenido en los últimos 30 años una estrecha relación, marcada por la participación de más de 300,000 soldados cubanos en la guerra del país africano y la colaboración en sectores como la educación y la salud (*EFE*, 29/4/10).

**April 29:** Major General Peng Shuigen, chief of Shanghai's Garrison, and Cuban Army Corps General Alvaro Lopez Miera, vice minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), talked about the relations between the military of their countries. Pen Shuigen told the Cuban senior military official about particular aspects of the city and the area under his command, and the work of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Both officials agreed that their meeting will contribute to strengthen bonds between FAR and PLA, and committed to continue working to that aim. The Cuban delegation traveled to Shanghai from the north-western province of Shaanxi, where he met with the Chief of the Military Region and visited the Terracotta Warriors Museum. As part of the program in China, Lopez Miera met as well with the vice president of the Asian country Xi Jinping, the Defense minister general colonel Liang Wanglie, and the chief of PLA's General Mayor Staff, general colonel Chen Bingde, among other senior military officials (*ACN*, 29/4/10).

**Abril 30:** El Ministerio de las Fuerzas Armadas (FAR), a través de los comités militares de La Habana, está convocando a jóvenes reservistas para organizar actos de repudio contra la oposición, informó la agencia independiente cubana *Hablemos Press*. "A los que asisten se les entrega una mochila con uniformes [de entrenamiento], escudos, esposas y tonfas para agredir a todas las personas que se manifiesten en contra del sistema", denunció Pedro García Hernández, uno de los convocados por las FAR. García Hernández decidió no presentarse a la citación del Comité Militar tras enterarse de los objetivos de la misma. Según el reporte, el pasado 28 de abril se reunieron "decenas de jóvenes citados" en la escuela primaria Emilio Núñez (calle Misión No. 108, municipio de la Habana Vieja). Allí realizaron "un juramento". La denuncia asegura que la convocatoria la dirigen militares de alta graduación de las FAR y el Ministerio del Interior. El periodista independiente Roberto de Jesús Guerra, director de *Hablemos Press*, dijo que decenas de reservistas han sido trasladados a las unidades militares de El Cacahual para recibir entrenamiento. El operativo intenta "contrarrestar" los eventos organizados por la oposición interna. "Quieren hacerle creer al mundo que es el pueblo quien está reprimiendo", señaló García Hernández (*Diario de Cuba*, 30/4/10).

## US-Cuba Relations

**April 1:** Cuba's foreign minister met with a top US State Department official to coordinate medical help for quake-ravaged Haiti, one of the highest level encounters in years between the Cold War enemies, officials said. State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley told reporters in Washington that Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez and Cheryl Mills, the chief of staff to US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, met on the sidelines of a donor conference at the United Nations that raised \$9.9 billion for Haiti. "We don't agree with Cuba and Venezuela on very much, but we all agree on the importance of assistance to Haiti," Crowley said. Cuba issued a communique from the United Nations, confirming the meeting between Mills and Rodriguez

and saying it hoped to see more such dialogue. “We would hope that future exchanges of this nature are a possibility,” the statement said (*AP*, 2/4/10).

**April 1:** El canciller de Cuba, Bruno Rodríguez, y Cheryl Mills, jefa de gabinete de la secretaria de Estado de Estados Unidos, dialogaron en Nueva York sobre la situación del contratista estadounidense Alan Gross, detenido en la isla desde el pasado 4 de diciembre, informó Philip Crowley, vocero de la cancillería del país norteamericano. Las autoridades cubanas acusan a Gross de espionaje (*IPS*, 2/4/10).

**April 2:** The US Federal Bureau of Investigations has been interrogating American citizens who recently traveled to Cuba, *Granma* newspaper revealed. The Cuban daily reported that at least 10 Americans who recently visited the island through cultural exchange programs have been questioned by FBI agents at home or over the phone. Most of the questioned travelers went to Cuba with the Venceremos Brigade, a group that sends up to 100 people to the island every year to participate in exchange programs, do volunteer work and meet Cuban artists (*ACN*, 2/4/10).

**April 2:** Arguing that ending US-Cuba flights would “cause serious harm to US foreign policy,” the Justice Department has opposed a bid by a Cuban spy’s ex-wife to collect on a \$27 million court judgment she won against Havana by garnishing the flight charterers’ income. Ana Margarita Martinez of Miami filed a lawsuit earlier this year to confiscate the money that eight charter companies, all based in South Florida, pay to Cuban agencies for landing rights and other fees. She won the \$27 million judgment in 2001, arguing that Juan Pablo Roque had married her on orders from his Cuban intelligence chiefs in Havana. He returned to the island days before Cuban warplanes shot down two Brothers to the Rescue airplanes in 1996, killing all four men aboard. But the Justice Department, in a 52-page submission, argued that the garnishments could halt flights that are of national interest, and that Martinez lacks the required US Treasury Department license to seize the funds. “Facilitating greater contact between separated family members (...) will encourage positive change in Cuba by decreasing the Cuban people’s dependency on the Cuban government, promoting democratic values and increasing Cubans’ access to information,” wrote Ricardo Zuniga, acting head of the State Department’s Cuba desk, in an affidavit submitted by the Justice Department. “The garnishment of payments made by licensed US air carriers that provide the charter service to Cuba could result in the termination” of the flights, Zuniga added. “Disruption in licensed air charter service would cause serious harm to US foreign policy toward Cuba.” The Justice Department also noted that it “in no way condones” the acts of the Cuban government that led Martinez to sue Havana. The Cuban government does not defend itself against such lawsuits (*El Nuevo Herald*, 2/4/10).

**April 2:** Travelers from 14 countries that have been home to terrorists will no longer automatically face extra screening before they fly to the US. Beginning this month, anyone traveling to the US will instead be screened based on specific information about potential terrorist threats, a senior Obama administration official said. A person would be stopped if he or she matches a description, even if officials do not have a suspect’s name, according to the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive security issues. For example, if the US has intelligence about a Nigerian man between the ages of 22 and 32 whom officials believe is a threat or a known terrorist, under the new policy all Nigerian men within that age

range will receive extra screening before they are allowed to fly to the US. If intelligence later shows that the suspect is not a terrorist, travelers will not be screened against that description. The new procedures replace those that went into effect after the attempted bombing of a jetliner en route to Detroit on Christmas Day. Those rules required extra screening, such as full-body pat-downs, for everyone from, or traveling through, any of these 14 countries: Afghanistan, Algeria, Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen (*AP*, 2/4/10).

**April 5:** The United States said that Cuba had a responsibility to improve prison conditions, rejecting President Raul Castro's characterization of hunger strikes as US and European-backed "blackmail." State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said the United States was concerned about overcrowding, poor hygiene and a lack of drinking water in Cuban jails, along with the detention of some 200 political prisoners. "Somehow prisoners are rebelling against these conditions and we're led to believe that this is the responsibility of the United States?" Crowley told reporters. "No, it's the responsibility of the Cuban government. It has fundamental responsibilities under international law for its citizens, including those in custody, and they should live up to those obligations," he said. He noted that Cuba does not allow foreign humanitarian agencies such as the International Red Cross to monitor its prisons (*AFP*, 6/4/10).

**April 6:** A US judge rejected a lawsuit by Pernod Ricard SA to stop rival Bacardi Ltd from selling "Havana Club" branded rum in the United States. Pernod is likely to appeal the ruling, the latest legal twist in a decades-long trademark dispute. Both companies sell rum under the Havana Club name; Pernod outside the United States and Bacardi within it. The ruling by US District Judge Sue Robinson in Wilmington, Delaware is the latest in more than 13 years of US litigation between the companies over which company controls the trademarked name. In its 2006 lawsuit filed in Wilmington, Delaware federal court, Pernod Ricard USA LLC claimed Bacardi USA Inc had no right to use the Havana Club trademark, where it had begun in Florida selling rum under that name. Pernod, which sold 3.4 million cases of Havana Club during its last fiscal year, also accused Bacardi of false advertising by misleading consumers into believing that its rum is made in Cuba, as Pernod's is, when in fact it is made in Puerto Rico. But Robinson concluded that Bacardi's rum has a Cuban heritage, having derived from a family recipe first used in that country around 1930, roughly three decades before Fidel Castro took power. In her 22-page ruling, Robinson also found that because Bacardi's labels "truthfully (and prominently)" show that its rum is "distilled and crafted in Puerto Rico," its labeling is neither false nor misleading. Pernod showed "no evidence that today's Havana Club rum product differs from the original pre-revolutionary Cuban rum in any significant respect," Robinson wrote. Vincent Palladino, a partner at Ropes & Gray LLP in New York representing Pernod, said, "We are very disappointed in the ruling. We believe the judge committed fundamental errors on the law, and in all likelihood we will be appealing." A Bacardi spokeswoman had no immediate comment, saying the privately held company had yet to review the ruling. According to the ruling, Havana Club rum was developed by the Arechabala family in Cuba, whose assets were seized by Castro's government in 1960. Bacardi has said it bought the rights to the Havana Club trademark and remaining rum assets still owned by the Arechabala family in 1997 (*Reuters*, 6/4/10).

**April 7:** Continuing his perennial campaign against the Castro regime, Miami Republican Representative David Rivera wants to prohibit the state from distributing a "virtual stamp of

approval” on goods being exported from Florida to Cuba. The so-called “certificate of free sale” is a written document that guarantees a product that claims to be manufactured in Florida really is manufactured there and isn’t a bootlegged product. It’s akin to a certificate of authenticity that comes with a signed baseball – and sent with goods exported around the world. Rivera argues such goods with the certificates shouldn’t head to the Communist nation, or any other country that the federal government accuses of sponsoring terrorism – a list that also includes Syria, Iran and Sudan. Rivera’s bill has cleared two committees with no debate, including the House government operations committee. “This is a priority for me,” said Rivera, who is running for congress. “If there is one certificate of export distributed, it’s too many” (*The Miami Herald*, 7/4/10).

**Abril 7:** El presidente estadounidense, Barack Obama, mantiene el compromiso de buscar una “mejor interlocución de pueblo a pueblo” con Cuba, aseguró en Bogotá el subsecretario de Estado para el Hemisferio Occidental, Arturo Valenzuela. “Lo que es problemático es el hecho de que Cuba no ha liberalizado, no ha permitido una mayor apertura”, admitió Valenzuela durante una comparecencia ante universitarios en la capital colombiana. Sin embargo, “eso no significa, por ejemplo, que no estemos buscando tener un cierto diálogo con Cuba, y lo hemos hecho y hemos tenido, hemos reinaugurado conversaciones con Cuba en temas de interés mutuo, como es el tema migratorio”, apuntó el diplomático, que habló ante estudiantes de la Universidad de los Andes. Valenzuela señaló que Obama durante su primer año de gobierno revirtió muchas de las medidas contra Cuba adoptadas por su antecesor, George W. Bush, como las de “tratar de congelar más la interacción entre la sociedad norteamericana y la sociedad cubana”. Muchas medidas fueron levantadas, entre ellas las que limitaban los viajes de cubano estadounidenses a la isla, indicó Valenzuela, y resaltó que, dentro de este ambiente, Estados Unidos valora el hecho de que haya podido trabajar en conjunto con Cuba en la reciente catástrofe de Haití. “En ese sentido valoramos eso, (y) valoramos el hecho de que hemos podido, incluso también con Venezuela, un diálogo fluido en temas humanitarios de tanta importancia”, enfatizó el alto cargo (*EFE*, 7/4/10).

**April 7:** US Senator Robert Menendez spoke by telephone with Guillermo Farinas, a cyber journalist on a hunger strike in Cuba, the US politician said. Farinas has “undertaken tremendous personal risk and sacrifice to simply expose the ongoing human rights abuses in Cuba,” Menendez, the son of Cuban immigrants, said in a statement. Farinas began his hunger strike on February 24, one day after learning of the fate of Orlando Zapata, who died after 85 days without food protesting prison conditions. “Individuals like Guillermo Farinas and Orlando Zapata Tamayo are evidence of the unbearable brutality of the Castro regime and the tragic state of political prisoners in Cuba,” said Menendez. “Guillermo was resolute in his position that the rights of Cuba’s political prisoners must be honored,” said Menendez, who represents the state of New Jersey. The senator said he spoke to Farinas, currently in a hospital in the Cuban city of Santa Clara (*AFP*, 8/4/10).

**Abril 8:** Cuba acusó a Estados Unidos y Europa de implementar una “febril” campaña para “demonizar” al país y desestabilizarlo con la excusa de que no se respetan los derechos humanos en la isla, dijo el gobierno. En un extenso editorial, *Granma*, el diario del gobernante Partido Comunista, dijo que sus enemigos en Estados Unidos y algunos gobiernos en Europa intentan desacreditar a la revolución y poner fin a su sistema socialista unipartidista, lanzando a la muerte

a “sus mercenarios”. “El imperio y sus aliados se han lanzado a una nueva cruzada para intentar demonizar a Cuba. Su poderosa maquinaria política y mediática ha puesto en marcha una colosal operación de engaño con el objetivo de desacreditar el proceso revolucionario, desestabilizar al país (...)”, dijo el periódico. “Ahora centran su cínica campaña en un nuevo huelguista cuyos delitos comunes y actos contrarrevolucionarios fueron denunciados en *Granma* (...) a quien se le brinda toda la atención médica calificada”, dijo el diario. “Se mundializa su show mientras se silencian cínicamente su crueldad y antecedentes criminales, sus agresiones y amenazas de muerte a una doctora (...)”, destacó *Granma* ([Defenderemos la verdad con nuestra moral](#); *Reuters*, 8/4/10).

**April 8:** The Obama administration has lifted its ban on trips to Cuba to deliver US aid to pro-democracy groups, apparently toughening its posture after Havana’s recent abuses, officials said. Such trips were halted after the December 3 arrest of Alan P. Gross, a US Agency for International Development subcontractor who had delivered satellite communications equipment to Jewish groups. The State Department this week notified organizations that receive US funds for Cuban democracy programs that they can resume the trips, said three officials of groups involved in the programs. “To me, this sends a clear signal that [the Obama administration] is not in agreement with what’s going on in the island,” said one of the officials, who like the others requested anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue (*The Miami Herald*, 8/4/10).

**April 9:** Cuba’s President Raul Castro and his brother, ex-leader Fidel Castro, have sought to sabotage US moves to improve ties because they fear it will threaten their power, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said. Clinton said Cuba’s response to Obama administration efforts to enhance co-operation revealed “an intransigent, entrenched regime” that had no interest in political reform or ending the isolation imposed by Washington’s 48-year old economic embargo on the island. “It is my personal belief that the Castros do not want to see an end to the embargo and do not want to see normalization with the United States, because they would lose all of their excuses for what hasn’t happened in Cuba in the last 50 years,” Clinton said. “I find that very sad, because there should be an opportunity for a transition to a full democracy in Cuba and it’s going to happen at some point, but it may not happen any time soon.” “If you look at any opening to Cuba you can almost chart how the Castro regime does something to try to stymie it,” Clinton said while answering questions at Kentucky’s University of Louisville. Clinton noted that in 1996, when her husband former President Bill Clinton was seeking to improve ties, Cuba shot down two small US planes that were distributing leaflets. The incident effectively ended that overture. Over the past year, despite Obama’s willingness to improve ties, Cuba arrested a US contractor on suspicion of espionage while political prisoner Orlando Zapata Tamayo died after an 85-day hunger strike in protest against prison conditions, Clinton said. “It’s a dilemma,” Clinton said. “I hope (they) will begin to change. We’re open to changing with them, but I don’t know that that will happen before some more time goes by” (*The Washington Post*, 9/4/10).

**April 10:** A Cuban diplomat who defected with her husband in Mexico in March has told relatives in Cuba they are in the United States, an uncle said, adding that she was likely being debriefed by US intelligence agents. Yusimil Casañas had worked in the personal office of former Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, ousted last year along with former Vice President Carlos Lage and others in a purge that some Cuba analysts perceived as a sign of instability within the island’s ruling class. Casañas, 25, who was assigned to the passport section of the

Cuban embassy in Mexico City, and her husband, Michel Rojas, 32, disappeared March 17 and were not heard from, said Esteban Casañas Lostal, an uncle who lives in Canada. Casañas called her mother in Cuba on April 8 and reported that she and Rojas were “safe in the United States” but that she could not reveal exactly where they were, Casañas Lostal told *El Nuevo Herald*. A Rojas cousin in Miami, Jose Carrasco, told the press the husband also called his mother, father and a cousin in Cuba on April 8 to report they were safe in the United States, but also gave no specific location. “It’s very likely that they are in the process of being investigated” by US intelligence, said Casañas Lostal, who noted that his niece’s knowledge of Perez Roque’s diplomatic and personal activities could be valuable to the US government (*The Miami Herald*, 10/4/10).

**April 12:** Cuba’s official media said that US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was both dishonest and cynical in suggesting that Fidel and Raul Castro don’t want Washington to end its 47-year-old economic embargo against the communist-ruled island. In a commentary entitled “Hillary Clinton: the lady lies,” *Radio Reloj* says that the secretary of state “formulated (last) Friday a group of ideas about Cuba in which ignorance and falsehoods in bulk were mixed.” “If cynicism needed an expression that would immortalize it, the US secretary of state just (gave) it,” *Radio Reloj* said. “The UN General Assembly has demanded the end of that policy of isolation, but, on the contrary, several White House administrations maintained it and intensified it, something that, according to Hillary Clinton, benefits the government of the island,” the commentary continues. “The thesis that the Cuban revolution needs the embargo to maintain itself afloat has been put forward by the propaganda of Washington,” *Radio Reloj* said. “It’s been repeated so much that it invites one to propose to the US government that, if the Cuban revolution depends on the embargo to exist, then suspend it for a year and it would collapse,” the station commented. “But the White House has not accepted the challenge; on the contrary, it has intensified the siege even more,” *Radio Reloj* said, also alluding to the recent wave of international criticism of Cuban authorities after the death in February of imprisoned dissident Orlando Zapata Tamayo after an 85-day hunger strike (*EFE*, 12/4/10).

**April 19:** A majority of Americans believe the United States should improve its long-strained relationship with Cuba and re-establish diplomatic and business ties, an opinion poll showed. A Cuba Business Bureau/Insider Advantage poll of 401 people showed that 58 percent of those surveyed supported full diplomatic relations with Cuba, while 33 percent opposed it. The poll, which had a margin of error of plus or minus five percentage points, also showed that 61 percent believed US citizens should be allowed to travel to Cuba and 57 percent thought Washington should allow US companies to do business in Cuba (*Reuters*, 19/4/10).

**April 19:** Venezuela’s President Hugo Chávez, is the “main source of concern” for the United States due to his capacity to influence and the oil resources of his country,” said Chávez’s political mentor Fidel Castro. “Chávez is the main source of concern for the empire, due to his capacity to influence the masses and due to the huge natural resources of a country that have been pillaged mercilessly. He is the person they rigorously strike in an attempt at taking away his authority,” Castro wrote in one of his Reflections, which was published in the Cuban press. The former Cuban President, 83, said that Washington and its allies “run the risk again of underestimating Chávez and the Venezuelan people,” but, he added, “I have not the slightest doubt that again they will be taught an unforgettable lesson.” Castro described the US foreign

policy as an “immense hypocrisy.” He also said that in the case of Cuba the Caribbean island would never yield to “the media-inspired blackmail and terror.” He referred to the criticisms made by the United States and Europe for Cuba’s political prisoners and the situation of human rights in the island ([The brotherhood between the Bolivarian Republic and Cuba](#); *AFP*, 19/4/10).

**April 20:** Latin America’s left-wing leaders have demanded the “immediate and unconditional end” to the US blockade of Cuba and slated international media corporations for distorting the truth about the continent’s progressive governments. Heads of state of the member nations of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of our America (Alba) meeting in Caracas tore into the unilateral US embargo and declared that President Barack Obama’s policies on Cuba were “continuing the imperialism that promotes war.” Venezuela’s President Hugo Chavez was joined by Cuba’s President Raul Castro and the leaders of Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua and several Caribbean island states in declaring a “manifesto of independence” that calls on the US government to accept “the will of the peoples of Latin America.” The manifesto, which celebrates the 200th anniversary of the beginning of Latin America’s fight for independence from the Spanish empire, also demanded the immediate release of the Cuban Miami five “anti-terrorist heroes who are unjustly imprisoned in US jails.” Mr Chavez pointed out that as well as blockading Cuba, the US still maintained a colonial grip” on Puerto Rico, whose fight for “independence and national sovereignty from US imperialism must be supported” (*Morning Star*, 21/4/10).

**Abril 21:** El subsecretario de Estado para el Hemisferio Occidental, Arturo Valenzuela, manifestó su “honda preocupación” por la situación de los derechos humanos en Cuba, acentuada tras la muerte en huelga de hambre del disidente Orlando Zapato Tamayo. El responsable de la diplomacia estadounidense para Latinoamérica habló sobre Cuba por videoconferencia ante el Foro Europa-América Latina-EEUU, celebrado en Madrid y organizado por la Secretaria General Iberoamericana (SEGIB), el Real Instituto Elcano y el centro de estudios Inter-American Dialogue de Washington. La inquietud de Valenzuela se ha acentuado “particularmente tras la muerte de Tamayo”, fallecido el pasado febrero, tras mantener una huelga de hambre en prisión durante 85 días. Pese a todo, puntualizó, “hemos empezado un proceso de contactos con el Gobierno cubano sobre asuntos de interés común. Hemos hablado de migración, de servicios postales y, más recientemente, sobre cómo coordinar mejor nuestros sistemas” ante tragedias como el terremoto que asoló Haití el pasado enero. Al mismo tiempo, explicó, el gobierno del presidente Barack Obama “ha revertido algunas de las medidas tomadas por la anterior administración (la de George W. Bush), en lo que respecta al levantamiento de algunas restricciones comerciales”. “Pero debo decir que en este punto particular, estamos avanzando de forma cauta. Todavía estamos preocupados por la situación de los derechos humanos en Cuba”, dijo Valenzuela (*El Nuevo Herald*, 22/4/10).

**April 21:** Cuba and the United States have held a series of unprecedented talks to coordinate aid to earthquake-stricken Haiti but so far have failed to reach agreement, a top Cuban official said. . The two longtime foes, which have had no diplomatic relations for half a century, have met three times so far to discuss co-operation on Haiti and could meet again soon, said Jorge Bolanos, who heads the Cuban Interests Section in Washington. “We have to continue because we have not produced any agreements” on how to coordinate bilateral aid to impoverished Haiti after it was devastated by a massive earthquake that killed an estimated 220,000 people in January, Bolanos

said. “We have not produced a definition of what the US could do” to rebuild Haiti’s health system, he added. Cuba dispatched doctors to its Caribbean neighbor to assist in the aid effort, and 700 of them remain, according to the Cuban envoy. It also opened up its airspace to the United States for aid transfers after the quake, in a gesture widely hailed by US officials. “That shows the disposition of Cuba to cooperate with any country, including the US,” Bolanos said in English. Cuba wants to build a hospital in Haiti, where Cuban doctors would help train Haitians to eventually manage the health centre. But Bolanos said the project needed co-operation from other countries to be implemented. “We need unity in Haiti,” Bolanos said, warning that aid to the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere should not be “a charity project,” nor should it seek to divide up the country into “market segments.” Haiti’s sovereignty must be respected by countries participating in reconstruction efforts he said, “so that the Haitian government could exercise “its authority and work for the benefit of the Haitian people, not foreign companies,” he said (*AFP*, 22/4/10).

**Abril 23:** El gobierno de Estados Unidos impidió la participación de varios especialistas de ese país en el tercer Simposio Internacional de Ventilación Mecánica y Gases Sanguíneos, que se realiza en la central ciudad de Santa Clara, afirmó Armando Caballero López, quien encabeza el comité organizador del evento. Al encuentro asisten intensivistas de más de ocho países, interesados en temas como la ventilación artificial mecánica en los pacientes graves y el manejo de los casos críticos de A H1N1 (*IPS*, 23/4/10).

**April 24:** With US-Cuba relations at their lowest point since President Barack Obama took office last year, Cuban singer Carlos Varela will launch a six-city US tour next month with hopes of bringing the two countries a little closer. Varela, often referred to as Cuba’s Bob Dylan, will start in Los Angeles with a concert on May 5, then work his way across the country for a final show on May 15. Varela, 47, last performed a concert tour in the United States in 1998 but put on an impromptu show for members of Congress in Washington in December while lobbying for new US policy toward communist-led Cuba. Varela and his band will tour the United States amid new tensions triggered by the December arrest in Cuba of a US contractor suspected of espionage and the February death of a Cuban political prisoner on a hunger strike (*Reuters*, 24/4/10).

**April 25:** At a polling station in Havana, National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon challenged the United States and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to lift the near half-century-old trade embargo against Cuba for a year and see what happens. “Mrs. Clinton is a very intelligent woman, and I don’t want to be rude with her,” said Alarcon to news agencies in Cuba. “If she really believes the continuation of the embargo is in the benefit of our government, it’s very simple for her: ask Congress to lift the embargo.” Alarcon’s comments come less than one month after Clinton said it was her “personal belief that the Castros do not want to see an end to the embargo and do not want to see normalization with the United States because they would lose all of their excuses for what hasn’t happened in Cuba in the last 50 years” (*CNN*, 25/4/10).

**April 26:** Cuba’s Fidel Castro is warning about the “uncontainable” effects of climate change and the human capacity for self-destruction that has been created by scientific advancement. “(S)cience created the capacity of self-destroying the planet several times in a matter of hours. The greatest contradiction in our era is, precisely, the capacity of the species to destroy itself and

its incapacity to govern itself,” Castro said in a commentary published in the official media. Under the title, “The insanities of our era,” the retired Cuban president lists the “catastrophic” effects of global warming and cites US efforts toward new types of weapons and military technology. He incorporates into his “Reflection” a news story regarding the possibility that the United States might deploy an arsenal of intercontinental missiles with extremely powerful non-nuclear warheads and another about a recent launch from the Kennedy Space Centre of a new unmanned vehicle on a secret military mission. Those news items, Castro said, “express the philosophy of the empire in its attempt to make us believe in its ‘democratic’, ‘pacific’, ‘altruistic’ and ‘honest’ nature.” He also pointed to the role of US President Barack Obama in last December’s global climate change summit in Copenhagen, whose outcome Castro described as “disappointing” and “a painful deception” of world public opinion. “Human beings have succeeded in raising their possibilities of life to limits that exceed their own survival capacity. In that battle raw materials in their reach are being consumed at an accelerated rate,” Fidel Castro said. “Is it necessary for the child prodigy Barack Obama to explain that to us? Science has grown extraordinarily, but ignorance and poverty are also growing,” the 83-year-old Fidel said ([The Insanities of Our Times](#); *EFE*, 27/4/10).

**April 27:** Joaquín F. Monserrate, Political and Economic Counselor at the US Interests Section in Cuba, made some intriguing statements during an address, on April 22, in Puerto Rico, to members of an advisory trade organization. Speaking in San Juan to the Puerto Rican Institute for Mutual Aid to a Democratic Cuba, Monserrate said that “Cuba could open to business a lot earlier than it could become democratic. In fact, that’s a big possibility.” Although “opportunities [for trade] are very limited today, everything points to the fact that, from one moment to another, more profound changes will occur. The big question is when. Truth is, I don’t know. Nobody knows.” Monserrate’s comments were reproduced by the Puerto Rican newspaper *El Nuevo Día*. The State Department official told the businessmen that they should “look for experiences that will help you penetrate into Cuba.” One conduit is the Dominican Republic, he said. “If you have no presence in the Dominican Republic, you have nothing to look for in Cuba. The Dominican Republic, after concluding its free-trade treaty with the United States, becomes a barrio of Mayagüez. You’re going to have investment terms almost as if you were almost in the United States. Explore that market, because it will be useful to you,” he said, according to *El Nuevo Día*. “Use the government of the United States, which is your government,” Monserrate told his audience (*The Miami Herald*, 27/4/10).

**April 27:** Two admitted spies for Cuba, Walter and Gwendolyn Myers, have met with federal officials 50 to 60 times to divulge details of their three decades of clandestine work for the island, justice department officials said. The Washington couple pleaded guilty last November to sending secrets to the United States’ longtime antagonist and agreed to cooperate with the federal government in a deal with prosecutors that offered Gwendolyn Myers a much lighter sentence than she might have faced. Walter Kendall Myers – a former State Department employee with top secret clearance – agreed to a life sentence without parole; Gwendolyn Myers could have faced up to 20 years in prison, but under the plea deal, she now could serve between 6 and 7 ½ years. US District Judge Reggie B. Walton set a sentencing date for July 16. Assistant US Attorney Gordon Michael Harvey told Walton that the government had expected the “debriefings” with the couple to take six months, and that investigators were “still on track,” and expected to finish the talks in 30 to 40 days. The couple appeared in Walton’s courtroom for the

first time in months. They did not address the court. In November, they said through a lawyer that they had acted “not out of selfish motive or hope of personal gain but out of conscience and personal commitment” (*The Miami Herald*, 28/4/10).

**April 27:** Cuba denounced at the United Nations the radio and television attacks it’s being the victim of on the part of the United States, in open violation of International Law. The island’s permanent representative before the international body, Pedro Nuñez, addressed the critic while speaking during a debate at the General Assembly’s Information Committee, the *Prensa Latina* news agency reported. The diplomat affirmed that these illegal transmissions against Cuba do not respect objectivity and are not in accordance with the truth, falsify and distort information, are fabricated with premeditation, and incite to destructive hatred. A month ago, underlined the official, the Radio Regulations Board of the International Telecommunications Union reiterated that these broadcasts cause prejudicial interference to Cuban stations (*ACN*, 27/4/10).

**April 29:** Business and human rights groups urged Congress to ease the decades-old embargo on Cuba by passing a bipartisan bill to lift a ban on travel to the communist country and remove certain obstacles to legal farm sales. “We believe the proposed legislation represents a necessary step toward ending a US policy that has failed for decades to have any impact on improving human rights in Cuba,” Jose Miguel Vivanco, executive director the Americas division of Human Rights Watch, said at a congressional hearing. President Barack Obama’s election in November 2008 stirred hopes throughout the Hemisphere that the United States would move to end the embargo codified by Congress in 1963 and strengthened twice in the 1990s. Representative John Tanner, chairman of a trade subcommittee in the House of Representatives Ways and Means, called the hearing to examine a bill crafted by House Agriculture Committee Chairman Colin Peterson, a Democrat, and Republican Representative Jerry Moran. That legislation would lift restrictions on US citizens traveling to Cuba and remove certain obstacles to cash agricultural sales already allowed under previous reforms. “Lifting these travel and trade restrictions is about what is best for the United States,” Tanner said in a statement, adding it would create US jobs through additional farm sales and help the Cuban people through increased tourism (*Reuters*, 29/4/10).

**April 29:** US Chamber of Commerce Senior Vice President for International Affairs Myron Brilliant reminded Congress that the current US trade embargo on Cuba “is an anachronism” and easing restrictions will “facilitate a transition to democracy and full civil liberties” for the island nation. “As the administration seeks new initiatives to increase US exports, easing these trade barriers represents a no-cost measure that will help create thousands of American jobs,” Brilliant said in testimony about US-Cuba policy before the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Trade. He urged lawmakers to approve the Travel Restriction Reform and Export Enhancement Act (HR 4645), as a recent study said such legislation could boost US exports by as much as \$365 million. “We applaud recent efforts to ease restrictions on US exports and travel to Cuba as a first step toward a policy more likely to bring positive change to the Cuban people,” Brilliant said. “We commend members in both the House and Senate for introducing bills ranging in scope from lifting the travel ban and facilitating the sale of agricultural products to allowing investment in Cuba’s oil fields or definitively lifting the embargo.” “From the business community’s viewpoint, US policy toward Cuba is an anachronism,” Brilliant continued. “The

embargo made a martyr out of a tyrant and actually has helped prop up the Cuban regime” (*States News Service*, 29/4/10).

**April 29:** The political differences between Cuba and the United States will end in 50 years because the rise in ocean waters caused by global warming will make the island disappear, predicted US Ambassador to Mexico Carlos Pascual said. Addressing the forum Green Business Expo in Mexico City, Pascual said that “we don’t have to worry much in the United States about Cuba, because the environment is going to eliminate the problem for us.” However, he added, “maybe Fidel Castro can live 50 more years and has powers that we don’t know so far.” The comment drew laughter from his audience but earned a rebuke from the official Cuban website *Cubadebate*, which called it a “heavy and arrogant joke” (*The Miami Herald*, 29/4/10).

**April 29:** Cuba will celebrate in May the 50th anniversary of the first meeting between former Cuban leader Fidel Castro and late American writer Ernest Hemingway, the Hemingway Museum in Havana said. “The program will run from May 12 to 15, coinciding with the date when the former Cuban president and the Nobel Prize winner for literature personally met in Havana during a fishing tournament,” said museum director Ada Rosa Alfonso. Scholars recognized May 15 as the date when Hemingway and Castro officially met. However interviewed for the book *Hundred hours with Fidel* some years ago, the Cuban leader said that he had met with the writer on other two occasions, which he did not specify. Alfonso said the celebration will include art exhibitions, artistic galas and lectures (*Xinhua*, 29/4/10).

**Abril 30:** La fundación estadounidense Freedom House ha incluido a Cuba, Guinea Ecuatorial, Irán y Birmania entre los diez países con menos libertad de prensa en el mundo, según informó el servicio oficial de radiodifusión internacional del gobierno de Estados Unidos, *La Voz de América*. Según Freedom House, una organización de tendencias conservadores financiada con fondos del gobierno y próxima a la Agencia Central de Internacional (CIA), la libertad de prensa experimentó en 2009 un deterioro en el mundo por octavo año consecutivo. El informe indica que se han registrado importantes retrocesos en Oriente Próximo, África Subsahariana y América Latina y destaca que la región de Asia-Pacífico fue en 2009 la única parte del mundo en la que mejoró la libertad de prensa. Los diez países peor situados en la lista de Freedom House sobre libertad de prensa son Bielorrusia, Birmania, Cuba, Guinea Ecuatorial, Eritrea, Irán, Libia, Corea del Norte, Turkmenistán y Uzbekistán. En estos países, aseguró, no existen o apenas pueden operar los medios de comunicación independientes (*Europa Press*, 30/4/10).

**Abril 30:** Cuba debe 6,000 millones de dólares a Estados Unidos, en razón de las expropiaciones realizadas por el gobierno de Fidel Castro después de 1959 a personas y empresas del país norteamericano, según datos de la Comisión Federal de Liquidación de Reclamos. El gobierno de la isla considera, por su parte, que el embargo estadounidense ha causado pérdidas por más de 96,000 millones de dólares a la isla (*IPS*, 30/4/10).