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Cuba-U.S. Relations: Chronology of Key Events 1959-1999

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Cuba-U.S. Relations: Chronology of Key Events 1959-1999

Summary

This chronology outlines major events in U.S.-Cuban relations from Fidel Castro's rise to power in 1959 through 1999. The chronology provides more detailed information on events since 1994, including U.S. legislative action and congressional hearings and significant economic and political events in Cuba.

In the 1960s, U.S.-Cuban relations deteriorated quickly as the Castro government espoused Communism and aligned itself with the Soviet Union. After Cuba began expropriating U.S. property in 1960, the United States began imposing economic sanctions. In 1961, diplomatic relations were broken in January, and in April the United States sponsored the failed Bay of Pigs invasion led by Cuban exiles to overthrow Castro. President Kennedy imposed a near total embargo on Cuba in February 1962. In the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the United States confronted the Soviet Union over the introduction of nuclear missiles in Cuba.

In the 1970s, there were some efforts toward normalizing relations, but these were undermined by Cuba's policy of supporting revolutionary movements abroad. The U.S. embargo was modified in 1975 to allow U.S. foreign subsidiaries to trade with Cuba. Under the Carter Administration, the United States essentially lifted its ban on travel with Cuba and "interests sections" were established in Havana and Washington in 1977. In the late 1970s, prospects for normalized relations dimmed with Cuba's increased military role in Africa and its support for revolutionary movements in Central America and the Caribbean.

The 1980s began with the Mariel boatlift in which some 125,000 Cubans were allowed to leave their island nation for the United States by boat. The Reagan Administration adopted a harder line policy toward Cuba. In 1982, it reimposed restrictions on travel to Cuba, although certain categories of travel were permitted. The 1983 U.S. invasion of Grenada ended Cuban support for the revolutionary government of that country. U.S. government-sponsored broadcasting to Cuba, Radio Marti, began operations in 1985.

In the 1990s, U.S. sanctions were strengthened, while a policy of providing support to the Cuban people gained momentum. In 1992, the United States tightened its embargo on Cuba with the Cuban Democracy Act, which again banned U.S. foreign subsidiary trade with Cuba. The act also included measures of support for the Cuban people such as the establishment of direct telephone service. With the loss of backing from the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Cuba experienced rapid economic decline. In the summer of 1994, thousands of Cubans began fleeing to the United States by boat. This led to two U.S.-Cuban migration accords. In February 1996, Cuban military jets shot down two U.S. civilian planes, killing four Americans. The action led to approval of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, which strengthened U.S. sanctions. In the aftermath of Pope John Paul's visit to Cuba in January 1998, the Clinton Administration has taken policy initiatives to support the Cuban people, including an expansion of direct flights and increased exchanges.

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1959 - 1993

- 01/01/59** — Facing widespread opposition and a formidable rebel force, President Fulgenico Batista, who ruled essentially as a dictator and was Cuba's dominant leader for over 25 years, fled the country. Fidel Castro's armed 26th of July Movement became the predominant political force. In the new revolutionary government that was established, Castro's supporters gradually displaced members of less radical groups. (The 26th of July Movement was named for a July 26, 1953 attack on the Moncada army barracks in Santiago, Cuba by an armed opposition group led by Castro. Castro was imprisoned after the attack, but was subsequently released in 1955 under an amnesty law. Soon after, Castro went to Mexico to help form a guerrilla group to overthrow the Batista government. In December 1956, Castro returned to Cuba aboard the yacht *Granma* with a force of 81 men. Castro's forces eventually grew to several thousand.)
- 01/07/59** — The United States recognized the new Cuban government. Trials and executions of former Batista supporters began in January.
- 05/17/59** — The Cuban government approved an agrarian reform law providing for the expropriation of farmlands over 1,000 acres and forbidding foreign land ownership.
- 06/59** — Seizures of U.S.-owned ranches and farms began.
- 02/13/60** — Cuba signed trade and economic agreements with the Soviet Union.
- 05/08/60** — Cuba and the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations.
- 06/29/60** — The Cuban government seized U.S.-owned oil refineries.
- 07/06/60** — President Eisenhower cut the remainder of Cuba's 1960 sugar quota. Cuba passed a "nationalization law," authorizing the expropriation of U.S.-owned property.
- 08/06/60** — Cuba began to nationalize U.S.-owned companies in response to the U.S. reduction of Cuba's sugar quota.

- 10/19/60** — The Eisenhower Administration prohibited exports to Cuba, except nonsubsidized food, medicines, and medical supplies.
- 10/24/60** — Cuba expropriated remaining U.S.-owned properties.
- 01/03/61** — The United States broke diplomatic relations with Cuba in response to a Cuban demand to decrease the size of the U.S. Embassy staff within 48 hours.
- 04/16/61** — Castro made a public admission that the Cuban revolution was "socialist."
- 04/17-19/61** The United States sponsored the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion led by Cuban exiles to overthrow the Castro government.
- 11/61** — A U.S. covert action program was developed to assist Cuban internal opposition to overthrow the Castro government; known as Operation Mongoose, the program lasted through October 1962.
- 12/02/61** — Castro declared himself to be a Marxist-Leninist: "I am a Marxist-Leninist and will be a Marxist-Leninist until the last day of my life."
- 01/22/62** — At the initiative of the United States, the Organization of American States (OAS) excluded Cuba from the organization.
- 02/07/62** — President Kennedy imposed a near total embargo on trade with Cuba. Pursuant to the President's directive, the Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), issued the Cuban Import Regulations.
- 10/62** — The United States confronted the Soviet Union over its attempts to place offensive nuclear missiles in Cuba. After the United States imposed a naval blockade on Cuba, the crisis ended with a Soviet decision to withdraw the missiles and a U.S. pledge not to invade Cuba.
- 12/23-24/62** More than 1,000 Cuban exiles imprisoned after the Bay of Pigs invasion were released and returned to the United States under an agreement that included delivering \$53 million in private donations of food.
- 1963** — On July 8, 1963, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control issued a more comprehensive set of economic sanctions, the Cuban Assets Control Regulations (CACR), which replaced the Cuban Import Regulations issued in February 1962. (The regulations which have been amended many times, remain in force today.)
- 1964** — In July, the OAS voted to suspend diplomatic and trade relations with Cuba because of its support for subversive activities in Venezuela.

- 10/65** — More than 3,000 Cubans leave from Camarioca in a boatlift to the United States.
- 11/65** — Freedom flights to the United States began with some 250,000 Cubans emigrating to the United States by 1971.
- 1966** — Congress enacted the Cuban Adjustment Act (P.L. 89-732). This gave the Attorney General the right to grant permanent resident status to Cubans who had been inspected and admitted or paroled into the United States after January 1, 1959, and had been physically present in the United States for one year. The objective was to give Cubans who had fled the island a preferential procedure for seeking permanent residency.
- 1973** — Cuba and the United States signed an anti-hijacking agreement in February, with each side agreeing to prosecute hijackers or return them to each other's country for prosecution.
- 08/75** — The United States modified its trade embargo on Cuba to allow U.S. subsidiaries in third countries to trade with Cuba. This change took place after the OAS approved a resolution in July allowing members to individually determine the nature of their respective economic and diplomatic relations with Cuba.
- 12/20/75** — President Gerald Ford denounced Soviet and Cuban military involvement in Angola's civil conflict, stating that Cuban actions would preclude an improvement in U.S.-Cuban relations. This effectively ended secret normalization talks by U.S.-Cuban officials (meetings had taken place in January and July 1975.)
- 10/76** — Cuba suspended the 1973 anti-hijacking agreement with the United States after a bomb exploded on a *Cubana* airlines flight taking off from Barbados.
- 03/18/77** — The Carter Administration did not renew restrictions on U.S. travel to Cuba. (The authority that imposed the restrictions had to be renewed every six months.)
- 08/77** — Cuba and the United States signed an accord on fishing rights in boundary waters between the two nations.
- 09/77** — Cuban and U.S. diplomats began serving in "interests sections" in each other's capitals.
- 1978** — Prospects for improved U.S.-Cuban relations dimmed during the year because of Cuba's increasing military role in Africa. In September, anti-Castro Cuban exile groups bombed Cuba's Mission to the United Nations in New York. In October and November, U.S. press reports indicated that the Soviet Union had provided Cuba with a squadron of MIG-23s, causing some to question whether the U.S.-Soviet

agreement of 1962 had been violated; on November 30, President Carter stated that the Soviets had provided assurances that no shipment of arms to Cuba had violated the 1962 agreement and that the United States had no evidence of nuclear weapons in Cuba.

- 1979** — The Carter Administration confirmed an announcement by Senator Frank Church in August of the presence of a Soviet combat brigade of 2,000-3,000 men in Cuba. (Congressional hearings later established that the brigade had been in Cuba since 1962.) Cuba's encouragement for revolutionary movements in Central America and the Caribbean, including support for the leftist government of Maurice Bishop in Grenada, increased tensions between the United States and Cuba and further dimmed prospects for improved relations. By the end of the year, Cuba had freed a total of 3,900 political prisoners in a program begun in 1978.
- 1980** — From April through September, around 125,000 Cubans fled their island nation for the United States in the so-called Mariel boatlift. The exodus was precipitated when more than 10,000 Cubans crowded the grounds of the Peruvian Embassy seeking political asylum after the Cuban government withdrew its guards around the embassy. Subsequently, the Cuban government opened the harbor at Mariel, encouraging a mass exodus by allowing Cuban Americans in the United States to pick up by boat anyone who wished to leave from Mariel. U.S. officials particularly objected to the fact that the Cuban government encouraged criminals and mental patients to leave. On September 11, 1980, an official of Cuba's Mission to the United Nations in New York was assassinated by anti-Castro terrorists.
- 02/24/82** — The Secretary of State added Cuba to the list of countries supporting international terrorists, for its complicity with the M-19 Movement in Colombia. (Being on the list excludes Cuba from a wide range of U.S. foreign assistance programs.)
- 04/19/82** — The U.S. Treasury Department announced the reimposition of travel restrictions to Cuba, although it did not impose restrictions for certain categories of travelers (U.S. government officials, scholars, journalists, and Cuban Americans visiting their relatives).
- 1983** — The United States intervened militarily in Grenada to protect U.S. lives, restore stability to the island, and end Cuban influence. Eighteen U.S. servicemen, 24 Cubans, and 45 Grenadians were casualties in the military operation.
- 1984** — On December 14, the United States and Cuba signed a migration agreement for the normalization of immigration procedures. The United States agreed to issue up to 20,000 preference immigration visas each year, and to continue granting immigrant visas to Cuban residents who were close relations of U.S. citizens, but these

immigrants would not be counted against the annual 20,000 limit. Cuba agreed to accept the return of 2,746 so-called excludables who had arrived in the 1980 Mariel boatlift. In addition, up to 3,000 former Cuban political prisoners would be allowed into the United States during FY1985, with the size of the program and any increases in subsequent fiscal years to be determined.

- 1985** — U.S. government radio broadcasting to Cuba (Radio Marti) began operations in May. As a result, Cuba suspended the 1984 migration agreement with the United States.
- 1987** — Cuba announced that it was going to reactivate the 1984 migration agreement with the United States to allow for the repatriation of "excludables" to Cuba. Subsequently, riots broke out at a U.S. federal prison holding these Cubans.
- 1988** — Cuba signed an agreement with Angola and South Africa for a phased withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola and for the independence of Namibia, ending South African occupation.
- 1990** — U.S. Government television broadcasting to Cuba (TV Marti) began on an experimental basis in March and regular operations began in August.
- 1991** — The breakup of the Soviet Union resulted in the loss of annual Soviet assistance and subsidies to Cuba that U.S. officials estimated at about \$4.5 billion each year. On March 6, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights approved a resolution requesting the appointment of a U.N. special representative to examine the human rights situation in Cuba.
- 01/92** — Castro stated that Cuban support for insurgents abroad was a thing of the past.
- 03/03/92** — The U.N. Commission on Human Rights approved a resolution (by a vote of 23 to 8, with 21 abstentions) expressing concern about the numerous reports of violations of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms in Cuba and urging Cuba to cooperate with the U.N. special representative on Cuba.
- 04/18/92** — President Bush instructed the Department of the Treasury to issue regulations implementing a provision of the Cuban Democracy Act, still pending before Congress, that would prohibit entry into U.S. ports of vessels engaged in trade with Cuba.
- 09/92** — Cuba announced the suspension of construction of Cuba's nuclear power plant at Juragua that was being built with Russian assistance.
- 10/23/92** — President Bush signed the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 into law (P.L. 102-484, Title XVII), which included provisions to tighten the embargo and measures of support for the Cuban people.

- 11/24/92** — The U.N. General Assembly approved a resolution (59 in favor, 3 opposed, and 71 abstaining) on the need for the United States to lift its embargo on Cuba.
- 02/93** — For the first time, the Cuban government allowed for direct elections to the National Assembly of People's Power, the national legislature. However, voters were not permitted a choice of candidates, the candidates were screened by candidacy commissions composed of members of government-controlled mass organizations.
- 03/10/93** — The U.N. Commission on Human Rights approved a resolution (by a vote of 27 to 10, with 15 abstentions) calling upon Cuba to permit the Special Rapporteur to carry out his mandate to investigate the human rights situation in Cuba and to carry out the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur to improve the human rights situation.
- 06/29/93** — The Clinton Administration slightly amended restrictions on U.S. travel to Cuba, adding to the categories of travel allowed persons seeking to travel "for clearly defined educational or religious activities" and "for activities of recognized human rights organizations."
- 07/01/93** — In Cojimar, Cuban Border guards opened fire on a boat of Cubans attempting to flee to the United States; three people were killed. The incident led to protests by several hundred Cubans in Cojimar; the Cuban military dispersed the protesters.
- 07/23/93** — The Clinton Administration issued guidelines for improved telecommunications between Cuba and the United States as provided for in the Cuban Democracy Act.
- 07/26/93** — Cuba announced that its citizens would be allowed to own U.S. dollars and would be allowed to shop at dollar-only shops previously limited to tourists and diplomats.
- 07/29/93** — The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence held an open hearing on the prospects for democracy in Cuba.
- 08/04/93** — The House Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs held a hearing on recent developments in Cuba policy, including telecommunications and the dollarization of the Cuban economy.
- 09/93** — The Cuban government announced two economic reforms. First, regulations were issued authorizing self-employment in more than 100 occupations, mostly in the service sector. Second, cooperative farms were given more autonomy and private citizens were allowed to farm unused state land to create cooperatives.
- 10/93** — A group of 174 U.S. citizens of the Committee for Freedom to Travel defied U.S. travel restrictions and traveled to Cuba to protest U.S.

restrictions. While some passports were confiscated when the travelers returned from Cuba, the Justice Department did not prosecute any of the travelers.

- 11/03/93** — The U.N. General Assembly, for the second consecutive year, approved a resolution (88 in favor, 4 opposed, and 57 abstaining) on the need for the United States to lift its embargo on Cuba.

- 11/18/93** — The House Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittees on Economic Policy, Trade, and Environment and Western Hemisphere Affairs and on International Operations held a joint hearing on U.S. policy and the future of Cuba. The hearing focused on the Cuban Democracy Act and U.S. travel to Cuba.

1994

- 03/94** — The U.N. Commission on Human Rights approved a resolution condemning Cuba's violations of human rights and its failure to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur. The resolution was approved by a vote of 24 to 9, with 20 abstentions.
- 03/17/94** — The House Ways and Means Committee's Subcommittees on Select Revenue Measures and on Trade held a hearing on H.R. 2229, the Free Trade with Cuba Act. The hearing featured testimony by Members of Congress, the Administration, and outside witnesses.
- 03/24/94** — The House Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere held a hearing on H.R. 2578, "The Free and Independent Cuba Assistance Act of 1993." The hearing featured testimony by Members of Congress, the Administration, and outside witnesses.
- 04/22-24/94** Cuba hosted a conference of Cuban exiles entitled "Emigration and the Nation" that included the participation of some Cuban Americans who favor a change in U.S. policy toward Cuba. (Subsequently, in late April a videotape of a conference reception featuring a Cuban American exile greeting Castro warmly was broadcast on Florida television, and incensed many in Miami's conservative Cuban American community.)
- 04/29/94** — According to U.S. officials, the Cuban Border Guard rammed and sank a private vessel, the "Olympia," which had fled Cuba and was about 25 nautical miles offshore. Three of the 21 Cubans on board drowned, including two six-year old children.
- 05/01-02/94** Cuba's National Assembly approved a measure giving the government broad authority to implement an economic adjustment program.
- The Cuban government issued a decree-law providing for the confiscation of goods and assets obtained through illegal enrichment.
- 05/19/94** — The House Committee on Agriculture's Subcommittee on Foreign Agriculture and Hunger held a hearing on the agricultural implications of renewed trade with Cuba. The hearing featured testimony by Members of Congress and outside witnesses.
- 06/23/94** — A group of about 200 U.S. citizens organized by the Committee for Freedom to Travel arrived in Cuba. The Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Controls had recently frozen the group's bank account that was to be used for the trip, but the group managed to raise alternative funds. (Subsequently, in October 1994, the Treasury Department released the money after the group submitted statements that the funds were not controlled by Cuban interests and would not be used for unlicensed travel to Cuba.)

- 07/13/94** — According to U.S. officials, approximately 40 Cubans (many of whom were children) drowned when the tugboat "Trece de Marzo" — stolen by a group of Cubans attempting to flee Cuba — sank after being rammed by a Cuban Border guard vessel. President Clinton later condemned the sinking as "an example of Cuban brutality." The Cuban government maintained that the tugboat sinking occurred when a pursuing Cuban vessel collided with the tugboat causing it to sink. Cuban officials blamed the incident on the United States for an immigration policy that encouraged Cubans to leave the island illegally.
- 07/22/94** — The Senate approved an amendment to H.R. 4603 (the FY1995 State Department appropriations bill) which expressed the sense of the Senate condemning the sinking of the tugboat by the Cuban government on July 13.
- 08/03/94** — Cuba's National Assembly approved a new tax law to take effect in 1995. The measure would initially begin taxing self-employed people, but would be extended to salary earners when the nation's current economic crisis was over.
- 08/05/94** — Castro threatened to unleash an exodus of Cubans if the United States continued to encourage Cubans to leave illegally. In response, U.S. officials reiterated statements that the United States would not allow a replay of the 1980 Mariel boatlift and stated that Castro would not dictate U.S. immigration policy.
- Press reports indicated that several thousand Cubans rioted in a seafront Havana district and adjacent downtown area after Cuban security forces attempted to prevent Cubans from hijacking boats to flee the country; 35 Cubans, including 10 policemen, were reportedly injured in clashes with police.
- 08/07/94** — More than a half million Cubans gathered in Havana to show support for the Cuban government and to pay tribute to a policeman killed in an attempted ferry hijacking on August 4.
- 08/15/94** — The Cuban government stopped preventing Cubans from fleeing to the United States by boat. The change in Cuban policy led to a surge of migration to the United States, the largest since the Mariel boatlift of 1980.
- 08/19/94** — With escalating numbers of Cubans fleeing to the United States, President Clinton abruptly changed U.S. migration policy toward Cubans and announced that, instead of welcoming Cubans fleeing their island nation, "illegal refugees from Cuba" would not be allowed to enter the United States. Instead, the Coast Guard was directed to take refugees rescued at sea to the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo while the Administration explored the possibility of other "safe haven" nations in the Caribbean Basin region.

- 08/20/94** — President Clinton announced four measures against the Cuban government. First, cash remittances to Cuba would no longer be permitted. Previously, U.S. citizens could provide up to \$300 quarterly to their relatives in Cuba. Second, charter flights between Havana and Miami would be restricted to those designed "to accommodate legal migrants and travel consistent with the purposes of the Cuban Democracy Act." Restrictions on travel to Cuba were tightened, prohibiting family visits (except in cases of terminal illness or severe medical emergency) and requiring professional researchers to apply for a specific license, whereas in the past they could travel freely under a general license. Third, the United States would use all appropriate means to increase and amplify its broadcasts to Cuba. Fourth, the United States would continue to bring before the U.N. and other international organizations evidence of human rights abuses in Cuba.
- 08/22/94** — The first Cuban refugees interdicted at sea were brought to the U.S. base at Guantanamo.
- 08/24/94** — Cuban officials announced that Cuba was ready to talk with the United States about the migration crisis, but indicated that the United States must be willing to discuss the "true causes" of the exodus, including the trade embargo.
- 08/25/94** — President Clinton offered a resumption of talks on the issue of immigration, but stated he had no interest in expanding the talks into a broad discussion of issues between the two countries.
- The Senate Committee on Armed Services held a hearing on the escalating numbers of Cubans fleeing Cuba for the United States. The hearing featured testimony by the Department of Defense and the Department of State.
- 08/27/94** — The Clinton Administration announced that it would participate in limited talks with Cuba dealing with "issues related to the promotion of legal, orderly and safe migration."
- 09/01/94** — U.S.-Cuban talks on migration issues began in New York.
- 09/04/94** — Panama agreed to accept up to 10,000 Cubans to be housed on U.S. military bases for not more than six months.
- 09/09/94** — The United States and Cuba signed a migration agreement that stemmed the flow of Cubans fleeing to the United States by boat. Under the agreement, the United States and Cuba would facilitate safe, legal, and orderly Cuban migration to the United States, consistent with a 1984 U.S.-Cuba migration agreement. The United States agreed to ensure that total legal Cuban migration to the United States would be a minimum of 20,000 each year, not including immediate relatives of U.S. citizens. The United States agreed to discontinue the practice of granting parole to all Cuban migrants who reach the United States

(consistent with the Administration's August 19, 1994 policy change), while Cuba agreed to take measures to prevent unsafe departures from Cuba.

- 09/17/94** — Cuba announced that all farmers would be allowed to sell part of their produce on the open market.
- 10/05/94** — The Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on the Constitution held a hearing on the constitutional right to international travel featuring testimony by a Member of Congress and outside witnesses.
- 10/12/94** — The U.S. State Department announced it would hold a visa lottery for about 6,000 Cubans pursuant to the migration accord of September 9, 1994.
- 10/24-26/94** Cuban and U.S. officials held talks in Havana to review the implementation of the September 9, 1994 agreement on immigration issues. Dennis Hays, Director of the State Department's Office of Cuban Affairs, headed the U.S. delegation, while Ricardo Alarcon, President of the National Assembly of People's Power, headed the Cuban delegation.
- 10/26/94** — For the third consecutive year, the U.N. General Assembly approved a resolution on the need for the United States to lift its embargo on Cuba. The vote was 101 to 2, with 48 abstentions. Israel joined the United States in voting against the resolution.
- 11/25/94** — Direct dial long distance service between the United States and Cuba began. Companies offering the telephone services were AT&T, IDB Worldcom, LDDS Communications, MCI, Sprint, and Wil-Tel.
- 12/07-08/94** Over 200 U.S. military personnel were injured in riots by more than 1,000 Cuban refugees at U.S. camps in Panama. The Cubans were protesting their prolonged detention amid continuing uncertainty regarding their final destination.

1995

- 01/18-19/95** U.S. and Cuban delegations met in New York for a second round of talks reviewing the 1994 migration accord. The U.S. delegation, headed by State Department official Dennis Hays, announced that 20,000 visas would be issued by September.
- 01/25/95** — The House International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere held hearings on the sinking of the "March 13th Tugboat." (See entry for July 13, 1994.)
- 02/01/95** — Since the agreement to house Cubans on U.S. bases in Panama was scheduled to expire March 6, 1995, and Panama indicated that it would not be renewed, the Department of Defense began to transfer the Cubans in Panama back to Guantanamo. The transfer, dubbed "Operation Safe Passage," was completed by late February 1995.
- 02/09/95** — Senator Jesse Helms introduced S. 381, the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (Libertad) Act, a comprehensive initiative designed to: strengthen international sanctions against the Castro government in Cuba; develop a plan to support a transition government leading to a democratically elected government in Cuba; and protect American property rights abroad.
- 02/14/95** — In the House, Representative Dan Burton introduced, H.R. 927, the House version of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (Libertad) Act.
- 02/23/95** — The House International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere held a hearing on Cuba and U.S. policy.
- 03/07/95** — The U.N. Commission on Human Rights approved a resolution (by a vote of 23 to 8 with 23 abstentions) calling upon Cuba to end all violations of human rights, including permitting freedom of peaceful expression and assembly and ending immediately the detention and imprisonment of human rights defenders. The resolution also extended the mandate of the U.N. Special Rapporteur for one year and called upon Cuba to permit the Special Rapporteur the opportunity to carry out his mandate in full by allowing him to visit Cuba.
- 03/16/95** — The House International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere held a hearing on the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act and on the U.S. embargo on Cuba, featuring testimony by Members of Congress, the Administration, and outside witnesses.
- 03/22/95** — The House International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere marked up H.R. 927, the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act and reported the bill to the full committee.

- 03/25/95** — Cuba signed the Tlatelolco Treaty, a Latin American regional nuclear non-proliferation regime.
- 04/17-18/95** U.S. and Cuban delegations, headed by State Department official Dennis Hays and Cuban official Ricardo Alarcon, met in New York for a third round of talks reviewing the September 1994 migration agreement. Hays noted that the September 1994 agreement was working and that both sides expressed commitment to maintain it.
- 04/21/95** — Cuban dissident and human rights activist Francisco Chaviano was sentenced to 15 years in prison for falsifying documents to help people obtain visas to the United States. In an April 24, 1995, statement, the U.S. State Department called on the Cuban Government either to dismiss the charges against Mr. Chaviano and release him, or to present the charges in open court in accordance with internationally recognized standards of jurisprudence. These included representation by a lawyer of his own choosing, access to the evidence against him, and the capability to present exculpatory evidence and witnesses in his own defense.
- 04/27/95** — Canada and Mexico agreed to work together to oppose the passage of U.S. legislation to impose sanctions on countries that trade with Cuba.
- 05/02/95** — The United States and Cuba reached a new migration accord that would build upon the September 1994 U.S.-Cuban migration agreement. Under the new accord (which was negotiated outside of the regular rounds of talks reviewing the September accord), the United States would parole those Cubans housed at Guantanamo into the United States, but would intercept future Cuban migrants attempting to enter the United States by sea and would return them to Cuba. Cuba and the United States would cooperate jointly in the effort, and according to the Administration, "migrants taken to Cuba will be informed by United States officials about procedures to apply for legal admission to the United States at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana." Both countries also pledged to ensure that no action would be taken against those migrants returned to Cuba as a consequence of their attempt to emigrate illegally.
- 05/18/95** — The House International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere held a hearing on the Clinton Administration's change in U.S. immigration policy toward Cuba.
- 05/22/95** — The Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere and Peace Corps Affairs held a hearing on the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act that featured testimony by Members of Congress and the Administration.
- 05/23/95** — A French human rights group, France-Libertés (which visited Cuba between April 28 and May 5, 1995, interviewing political prisoners held in eight prisons) announced that Cuba would release six political

prisoners, including two prominent dissidents, Sebastián Arcos Bergnes and Yndamiro Restano, both sentenced in 1992.

- 05/25/95** — Pastor Orson Vila Santoyo, a Pentecostal minister in Camagüey province who refused to refrain from holding religious services in his home, was arrested, charged with "illicit association," and tried and sentenced on the same day. *Human Rights Watch Americas* also noted that scores of "casas culto," or evangelical meeting places operating out of homes, were closed by Cuban authorities in late May 1995, indicating that the Cuban government was worried by the increasing popularity of evangelical Christianity. (see entry of April 22, 1996 for Santoyo's release).

- 06/07/95** — A Cuban nuclear energy official, Miguel Serradet Acosta, stated that an international team was expected to recommend that construction be renewed on the Juragua nuclear plant.

- 06/08/95** — U.S. officials stated that Cuban authorities arrested Robert Vesco, a U.S. fugitive who fled the United States more than 20 years ago to escape fraud charges.

- 06/13/95** — The Cuban government added 19 new job categories to the list of some 130 self-employment occupations that have been legalized since September 1993.

- 06/14/95** — The Cuban government legalized the operation of private food catering, including the operation of home restaurants or *paladares* that already had sprung up in cities across Cuba. The new regulations reportedly include large monthly licensing fees that could force some operations out of business.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere and Peace Corps Affairs held a second hearing on the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act that featured testimony by Members of Congress and outside witnesses.

- 06/30/95** — The House Committee on Ways and Means' Subcommittee on Trade held a hearing on "The Economic Relationship between the United States and Cuba after Castro."

- 07/09/95** — Cuba held elections for over 14,000 seats in 169 municipal assemblies. About 97% of eligible voters participated, although estimates of opposition (as demonstrated by abstention and blank or spoiled ballots) ranged from 14% by the Cuban government to 25% by opposition sources. While there were generally two candidates for each assembly position, the candidates did not include any known opponents of the Communist Party.

- 07/11/95** — Twenty-five Members of Congress asked Secretary of State Christopher to deny a visa to Fidel Castro, who reportedly planned to

attend ceremonies in New York for the 50th anniversary of the U.N. in October.

The House International Relations Committee approved, by a vote of 28-9, H.R. 927, its version of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act.

- 07/13/95** — According to press reports, a Cuban Border Guard vessel rammed at least one boat in a flotilla of boats carrying Cuban Americans attempting to enter Cuban territorial waters to protest the Cuban government's sinking of a tugboat on July 13, 1994. In addition to the boats, six small aircraft entered Cuban airspace. The Cuban government condemned the incursion, and maintained that it did not ram the boat, but simply maneuvered to keep it from entering Cuban waters. The U.S. State Department noted that the United States deeply regretted the incident, although it did reiterate that when Americans enter the airspace or territorial waters of another country, they are subject to the rules and laws of that country.

- 07/17-18/95** U.S. and Cuban officials held a fourth round of talks in Havana reviewing implementation of the U.S.-Cuban migration agreements.

- 08/01/95** — The House International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere held a hearing on the yet to be finished Juragua nuclear plant near Cienfuegos in Cuba.

- 09/02/95** — One small boat sank (with one rescued man dying from a heart attack) and two dozen others were forced back by rough seas as a flotilla of Cuban Americans attempted to sail to Cuba's territorial waters to protest Castro's rule.

- 09/05/95** — Cuba's National Assembly of Peoples Power approved a new foreign investment law which allows fully owned investments in Cuba by foreigners in all sectors of the economy, with the exception of defense, health, and education. The new law allows Cubans living abroad to invest in Cuba, although this provision had been criticized during debate because it discriminates against Cubans living in Cuba who cannot invest.

- 09/09/95** — Cuba announced that its citizens would be able to open savings accounts in hard currency or Cuban convertible currency at the National Bank of Cuba and the Popular Savings Bank.

- 09/21/95** — The House approved H.R. 927, its version of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, by a vote of 294 to 130. As approved by the House, some of the bill's sanctions were softened. The bill retained a number of provisions designed to increase pressure on Cuba, including a property rights provision allowing U.S. nationals to sue in U.S. federal court anyone who traffics in property confiscated in Cuba.

- 10/06/95** — President Clinton announced measures to ease some U.S. restrictions on travel and other activities with Cuba, with the overall objective of promoting democracy and the free flow of ideas. The new measures included: authorizing U.S. news media to open news bureaus in Cuba; licensing U.S. nongovernmental organizations to provide assistance to Cuban nongovernmental organizations; and authorizing general licenses for transactions relating to travel to Cuba for Cuban Americans to visit close relatives once a year in humanitarian cases. At the same time, the President stated that his Administration would tighten the enforcement of the embargo to sustain pressure for reform.
- 10/18/95** — The State Department announced that it would grant Castro a visa to attend the United Nations 50th anniversary celebration. The visa was granted in accordance with rules governing the U.S. role as host of the U.N. headquarters in New York.
- 10/19/95** — The Senate approved its version of H.R. 927, the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, by a vote of 74-24. After two unsuccessful attempts to invoke cloture on the measure (on October 12 and October 18), Senator Helms agreed to delete Title III of the bill, the property rights provision that would allow U.S. nationals to sue in U.S. federal court those persons who traffic in property confiscated in Cuba. The agreement to drop Title III led to a unanimous vote to invoke cloture, and led to Senate approval of H.R. 927.
- 10/21/95** — Cuba authorized the establishment of currency exchange houses, which began buying dollars at a rate of 25 pesos to one dollar.
- 10/21-25/95** President Castro arrived on a five-day visit to New York to participate in the U.N.'s 50th anniversary activities. He addressed the United Nations General Assembly on October 22, and, in a reference to the U.S. embargo of Cuba, condemned "ruthless blockades that cause the death of men, women and children, youths and elders, like noiseless atom bombs." Among his other activities, Castro also was warmly welcomed at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem where he addressed a crowd of supporters and met with journalists, media executives, and business leaders.
- 10/23/95** — The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) noted that Cuban government surveillance and harassment had increased against three independent journalist groups (The Bureau of Independent Press in Cuba; Habana Press; and Cuba Press) as the groups have gained importance abroad.
- 11/02/95** — The U.N. General Assembly, for the fourth consecutive year, approved a resolution on the need of the United States to lift its embargo on Cuba. The resolution was approved by a vote of 117 to 3, with 38 abstentions. Israel and Uzbekistan joined with the United States in opposing the resolution.

- 11/3-6/95** The Cuban government held a second conference on Cuba and emigration with the participation of Cuban exiles, including Cuban Americans.
- 11/27/95** — A new umbrella dissident organization of about 100 groups known as the *Concilio Cubano* (formed in October 1995) issued an official declaration of four goals: 1) to work toward an absolutely peaceful transition toward a democratic, law-abiding state that has no place for violence, hatred or revenge; 2) unconditional amnesty for political prisoners; 3) changes in the judicial system to guarantee respect for human rights; and 4) the participation of all Cubans, without exclusion, in the peaceful transition.
- 11/27-28/95** Cuban and U.S. officials met in New York for a fifth round of talks to review the implementation of the bilateral migration accords.

1996

- 01/01/96** — Cuba began implementation of an income tax on hard currency income, with tax rates ranging from 10 to 50 percent.
- 01/14/96** — Four independent Cuban journalists were detained and questioned by Cuban authorities after a Miami-based exile group flew over Havana and dropped leaflets on January 13, 1996, calling on Cubans to exercise their political rights and engage in peaceful civil resistance. The detentions were denounced by the Inter-American Press Association and a French press rights group known as Reporters Without Borders.
- 01/31/96** — The U.S. Department of Defense announced that the last of some 32,000 Cubans intercepted at sea and housed at Guantanamo had left the U.S. Naval Base.
- 02/10/96** — The Cuban government released three political prisoners after Representative Bill Richardson secured their release after a meeting with President Castro a day earlier. The United States welcomed the release of the prisoners and called on Cuba to release all political detainees.
- 02/15/96** — The Cuban government began a crackdown on members of the *Concilio Cubano*, an umbrella dissident organization that had applied for permission to hold a national meeting on February 24, 1996 (see November 27, 1995 entry on the *Concilio*). The crackdown included arrests (with two members sentenced to long prison terms), harassment, and intimidation. The U.S. Department of State criticized the crackdown on the *Concilio Cubano* on February 21 and noted in a statement that "this wave of repression dramatically demonstrates the Castro regime's unwillingness to engage in a process of political reform and its determination to maintain absolute control over Cuban society."
- 02/24/96** — Cuban Mig-29 fighter jets shot down two U.S. private airplanes, Cessna 337s, in the Florida Straits flown by members of the Cuban American group, Brothers to the Rescue. Four crew members were killed in the attack. U.S. officials asserted the incident occurred over international waters. U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher called the attack on civilian planes a blatant violation of international law. President Clinton immediately condemned the Cuban action and ordered F-16 fighter jets to the site of the shooting to protect Coast Guard rescue teams searching for survivors.
- 02/25/96** — Cuban officials reported that the two U.S. planes were shot down inside Cuban airspace, between 5 and 8 miles off the Cuban coast. They asserted that the pilots flying the planes had been warned by air controllers of the risk they were putting themselves in, and were justifiably shot down.

02/26/96 — President Clinton condemned the downing of the two U.S. aircraft as a "flagrant violation of international law." He announced that the United States was pressing the Security Council to impose sanctions against Cuba until it respected civilian aircraft and compensated the families of the victims. In addition, the President announced the following unilateral measures: he asked Congress to pass legislation permitting immediate compensation for victims' families from blocked Cuban accounts in this country; he pledged to work with Congress to secure passage of the Helms-Burton bill (H.R. 927, the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act); he promised to expand Radio Marti broadcasting; he imposed additional travel restrictions on Cuban diplomats in the United States and limited visits by Cuban officials; and he suspended all charter flights to Cuba indefinitely. The President also stated that he would not rule out any additional steps in the future if required.

In Cuba, Ricardo Alarcon, the President of Cuba's legislative body, blamed the United States for the shooting incident, asserting that the United States allowed Cuban exile groups to run rampant. Cuban state television broadcast an interview with a former Brothers to the Rescue pilot, Juan Pablo Roque, who maintained that the group planned to smuggle arms into Cuba to assassinate Cuban leaders. Roque, who mysteriously returned to Cuba before the downing of the Cessnas, was a former Cuban air force Mig fighter pilot who defected from Cuba in 1992. Roque denied accusations that he was a Cuban agent who infiltrated the Brothers to the Rescue and asserted that he returned to Cuba because he was disillusioned with people who claim they love Cuba, but then try to attack it. (On February 28, the Federal Bureau of Investigation stated that Roque worked as an informant for over 2 years obtaining information about Cuban American groups that might be violating U.S. law in their activities against Cuba.)

02/27/96 — The U.N. Security Council approved a statement strongly deploring Cuba's actions in shooting down the U.S. civilian airplanes. The statement noted that international law requires that states must refrain from the use of weapons against civil aircraft in flight and must not endanger the lives of persons on board and the safety of aircraft. It also requested the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to investigate the incident and reports its findings to the Security Council as soon as possible. Cuba opposed the Security Council's action and Cuban Foreign Minister Robert Robaina claimed that the Security Council action was taken before he was able to arrive in New York to speak to the Security Council.

The Clinton Administration provided transcripts of radio conversations in which the Cuban Mig pilots joked while firing at the two Cessnas.

02/28/96 — A House-Senate conference committee approved H.R. 927, the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, after reaching a compromise with the Clinton Administration on a property rights provision in the

bill. The provision would provide a right of action for U.S. citizens to file suit in U.S. federal courts against those involved in the "trafficking" of expropriated property in Cuba. The conference accepted a change that would allow the President to delay implementation of the provision for six month periods on the grounds of national interest and expediting a transition to democracy in Cuba. The Administration also conceded ground on two provisions, one that would make mandatory a ban on entry to the United States of aliens involved in the trafficking of expropriated U.S. property abroad, and a second that would codify the existing economic embargo of Cuba, including the Treasury Department's Cuban Assets Control Regulations (under part 515 of title 31, Code of Federal Regulations). No presidential waiver would be provided for any codified embargo provision.

Cuban Foreign Minister Robert Robaina again stated that Cuba was justified in shooting down the two U.S. civilian planes. Instead of presenting its side to the U.N. Security Council, Robaina stated that Cuba would confer with representatives of the 110-nation Non-Aligned Movement about the possibility of calling a special meeting of the U.N. General Assembly to hear Cuba's side of the dispute.

- 02/29/96** — The Clinton Administration announced that the President would issue orders making clear that the unauthorized entry by U.S. aircraft and vessels into Cuban territory is prohibited and that firm legal action will face those who violate this prohibition. The President also approved a strong warning to the Cuban government not to violate basic norms of international conduct, and that the United States will not tolerate the loss of American lives. The President took these actions in light of a planned ceremony by Cuban Americans on March 2, 1996, commemorating the four civilians killed near the site where the two planes were shot down. The Cuban government stated that it would take whatever measures necessary to prevent a violation of its territory, but a Cuban spokesman noted that there should be no problems if the participants remain in international waters.

In testimony before the House International Relations Committee, State Department official Peter Tarnoff stated that the two Cessnas were shot down when they were 5 and 16 nautical miles respectively beyond Cuba's 12-mile territorial waters.

- 03/01/96** — President Clinton declared a national emergency and authorized and directed the Secretary of Transportation to issue rules and regulations to prevent unauthorized U.S. vessels from entering Cuban territorial waters.

The conference report (House Report 104-368) to H.R. 927, the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, was filed in the House.

- 03/02/96** — Escorted by the U.S. Coast Guard, a Cuban-American flotilla attempted to sail to the place where the four civilian airmen were shot

down by Cuban fighters. Because of rough seas, a brief memorial service was held 26 miles from where it had originally been scheduled. In the evening, a memorial service was held for the downed pilots in the Orange Bowl in Miami. An estimated 50,000 were in attendance.

- 03/05/6** — The Senate approved the conference report to H.R. 927, the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act (Helms-Burton), by a 74-22 vote.

The European Union condemned the Helms-Burton bill. "We condemn in the strongest possible terms specific provisions of the bill which run the risk of putting non-American companies investing in Cuba on the wrong side of American justice," a European Commission spokesman stated.

The governments of Canada and the 14-member Caribbean Community (CARICOM) expressed their objection to the Senate approval of the Helms-Burton bill in a joint statement which expressed their "strongest objection to the extraterritorial provisions" that were "inconsistent with...international law..."

The House International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere held a hearing on the enforcement of penalties against violations of the U.S. embargo on Cuba.

- 03/06/96** — The House approved the conference report to H.R. 927, the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, by a vote of 336-86.

The Mexican Foreign Ministry issued a statement condemning the Helms-Burton bill. The Ministry promised to challenge several provisions of the bill under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

In speaking before the U.N. General Assembly, Cuban Foreign Minister Roberto Robaina claimed that the February 24th incident was the direct result of the failure of the United States to control the repeated violations of Cuban airspace by Brothers to the Rescue, which he called a "terrorist" organization. U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., Madeleine Albright, replied that Cuba, in its diplomatic exchanges with the United States, had never alleged that Brothers to the Rescue was a terrorist organization or that it had planned terrorist violence. She stated that Cuba violated international law by using weapons against civilian aircraft, and that the United States could not allow the Cuban government to "transfer blame" to the victims.

In Montreal, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) unanimously adopted a resolution "strongly deploring" the February 24th incident and ordered an investigation to be completed within 60 days. Earlier in the day, Ricardo Alarcon, President of the Cuban National Assembly and delegate to the ICAO meeting, stated that Cuba

could suspend the access of U.S. airlines to Cuban airspace in response to what is seen as "repeated violations of Cuban territory and sovereignty."

- 03/08/96** — The 14-member Rio Group of Latin American nations condemned the Helms-Burton bill. According to an Argentine Foreign Ministry statement, the Rio Group expressed their most "energetic rejection towards the approval of this legislation that violates the principles and norms of international law."
- 03/12/96** — President Clinton signed H.R. 927, the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, into law (P.L. 104-114).
- 03/23/96** — The Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee approved a report presented by Army head Raul Castro that signaled an ideological crackdown on reformers in Cuba. The report warned against "so-called nongovernmental organizations" in Cuba that serve as "a Trojan horse to foment division and subversion." The report singled out Cuba's Center for the Study of the Americas for criticism.
- 04/22/96** — The European Union issued a statement in which they expressed "deep concern" over the effects that the Helms-Burton legislation could have on transatlantic trade. The EU stated that the law "...is contrary to international law and to the interest of the EU concerning trade and investment."
- Amnesty International reported that Pentecostal minister Orson Vila Santoyo was conditionally released from prison (see entry of May 25, 1995 for Santoyo's arrest).
- 04/23/96** — The U.N. Commission on Human Rights approved a resolution (by a vote of 20 to 5, with 28 abstentions) calling on Cuba to bring its observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms into conformity with international law, and to end all violations of human rights. The resolution, which deplored the detention and harassment of members of *Concilio Cubano*, again called on Cuba to permit the Special Rapporteur to visit Cuba.
- 05/05/96** — The EU requested formal talks with the United States over the Helms-Burton law, on the grounds that the law could possibly violate world trade rules.
- 05/28/96** — The Rio Group of Latin American and Caribbean countries formed a special commission to analyze the Helms-Burton Act.

In implementing Title IV of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act (P.L. 104-114), the State Department began sending out advisory letters to foreign companies thought to be trafficking in U.S. properties confiscated in Cuba. Three companies received letters: *Sherritt International*, a Canadian mining company; *Grupos Domos*, a

Mexican telecommunications company; and *STET*, an Italian telecommunications company. The letters advised the companies that they may fall under the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act's provision that denies U.S. visas to those aliens involved in the trafficking of U.S. properties confiscated in Cuba. (Ultimately, visa sanctions were imposed on several executives from *Sherritt* and *Grupos Domos*, but the sanctions on *Grupos Domos*' executives were withdrawn in 1997 when the company disinvested from U.S.-claimed property in Cuba. Action against *STET* was averted by a July 1997 agreement in which the company agreed to pay the U.S.-based ITT Corporation \$25 million for the use of ITT-claimed property in Cuba for ten years.)

- 06/04/96** — The OAS adopted a resolution denouncing the Helms-Burton legislation on Cuba, and ordered the Inter-American Juridical Committee to examine the legislation and to reach a conclusion as to whether it is valid under international law. The resolution criticized the law for "extra-territorial effects that damage other countries' sovereignty...and affect freedom of trade and investment."
- 06/06/96** — Cuba's Foreign Investment Minister announced that the government planned to create free trade zones and industrial parks on the island in order to encourage foreign investment.
- 06/14/96** — The State Department issued guidelines to enforce Title IV of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act dealing with the denial of visas to aliens trafficking in U.S. property confiscated by the Cuban government. The guidelines stipulated that the admission sanction would not apply to persons solely having business dealings with those excludable under the title's provisions.
- 06/27/96** — The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) released its report on the investigation into the February 1996 downing of the two civilian planes which concluded that the two Cessnas had been flying in international waters. The ICAO's Council also adopted a resolution condemning "the use of weapons against civil aircraft as being incompatible with the elementary considerations of humanity and the rules of international law."
- The House International Relations Committee's Subcommittees on International Operations and Human Rights and on the Western Hemisphere held a hearing on the human rights situation in Cuba.
- 07/07/96** — Cuban military officer, Lt. Colonel Jose Fernandez Pupo hijacked a commercial flight originating in Santiago de Cuba, and forced the plane to land at the U.S. Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where he requested political asylum. President of the Cuban National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcon, called for the hijacker to be returned to Cuba, citing U.N. international hijacking agreements and the May 1995 U.S.-Cuba migration accord.

- 07/11/96** — The House International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere held a hearing on the implementation of the Helms-Burton legislation.
- 07/16/96** — Acting under provisions of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act (P.L. 104-114), President Clinton announced that he would allow Title III of the law to go into force on August 1, 1996, but at the same time he announced that he was suspending for a six-month period (until February 1, 1997) the right of individuals to file suit against those persons trafficking in U.S. property confiscated in Cuba.
- 07/26/96** — In a follow-up to the ICAO's June 27 report on Cuba's downing of two civilian aircraft, the U.N. Security Council adopted a resolution (with 13 votes and two abstentions) condemning Cuba's action and reaffirming the principle that shooting down civilian planes violates international law.
- 07/30/96** — The Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere and Peace Corps Affairs held a hearing on the implementation of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act and its consistency with international law.
- 08/16/96** — President Clinton announced that he had appointed Stuart Eizenstat, Department of Commerce Undersecretary for International Trade, as a special envoy to engage U.S. allies over the next six months on concrete measures to advance democracy in Cuba. The action was taken in order to comply with the provision of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, which allows the President to suspend the right of individuals to file lawsuits (under Title III of the law) if the suspension will expedite a transition to democracy in Cuba.
- A plane hijacked by three Cuban men outside of Havana crashed into the Gulf of Mexico, 30 miles off the southwest Florida coast. The three Cubans requested political asylum while the pilot requested to return to Cuba.
- 08/19/96** — The State Department announced in a written statement that in the previous week Cuba had revoked the visa of U.S. diplomat Robin Meyer, who was the human rights officer for the U.S. Interests Section in Havana. Meyer had close contacts with Cuban dissidents and human rights activists, and Cuba accused her of giving advice and support to the Cuban dissidents, including the distribution of anti-government literature. In response to Cuba's action, the Clinton Administration expelled a Cuban diplomat in Washington, Jose Luis Ponce.
- 08/27/96** — U.S. fugitive Robert Vesco was sentenced in Cuba to 13 years in prison for economic crimes involving a scheme to market a drug alleged to be effective against cancer and AIDS. His Cuban wife was sentenced to nine years in prison.

- 08/28/96** — The Inter-American Juridical Committee of the OAS concluded that the Helms-Burton legislation on Cuba was not in conformity with international law.
- 09/02/96** — The State Department submitted a report to Congress on the "Settlement of Outstanding United States Claims to Confiscated Property in Cuba," required by section 207 of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act (P.L. 104-114). The report estimated that in addition to the 5,911 claims against the Cuban government certified by the Foreign Claims Settlement Commission (and valued currently at approximately \$6 billion), there could be an additional 75,000 to 200,000 claims by Cuban Americans generated under the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, with value estimates of tens of billions of dollars.
- 09/18/96** — The House International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere held a hearing on the February 1996 shutdown of two U.S. civilian planes by Cuba.
- 09/30/96** — The FY1997 Omnibus Appropriations Act, P.L. 104-208, was signed into law. It included a provision that would repeal the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act upon determination by the President that a democratically elected government was in power in Cuba (see 1966 entry).
- 10/01/96** — Mexico's Congress approved legislation to block the effect of the Helms-Burton legislation on Mexican companies.
- 10/16/96** — The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights issued its final report on Cuba's July 13, 1994 sinking of the "13th of March" tugboat. The report concluded that Cuba violated the American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man, and that Cuba was legally obligated to indemnify the survivors and the relatives of the 41 individuals who died.
- 10/17-18/96** Hurricane Lili struck Cuba, destroying thousands of homes and damaging agricultural crops. Subsequently, disaster assistance poured in from other countries, including the United States, with Catholic Relief Services flying two planeload of supplies to Cuba. These were the first direct U.S.-Cuba flights since President Clinton suspended direct flights in the aftermath of Cuba's shutdown of two U.S. planes in February 1996.
- 10/28/96** — The EU approved legislation to retaliate against the Helms-Burton legislation on Cuba and against another U.S. law sanctioning U.S. companies for investing in Iran and Libya.
- 11/07/96** — Cuba announced that it had approved the establishment of a Cable News Network (CNN) bureau in Havana, which would be the first U.S. news bureau there in over 30 years. The Clinton Administration

stated that it would study the request to see if it conforms to U.S. regulations regarding contact with Cuba.

The Canadian Senate approved legislation blocking judgments from the Helms-Burton legislation on Cuba from being recognized in Canada. The legislation also permits Canadians to recover in Canadian courts any amounts awarded under the Helms-Burton legislation.

- 11/11/96** — At the sixth annual Ibero-American summit, the leaders of Latin America, Spain, and Portugal issued a statement criticizing the Helms-Burton legislation on Cuba which they said "ignores the fundamental principle of respect for the sovereignty of states." In the same statement, the leaders asserted that "Freedom of expression, association and assembly, full access to information, and free, periodic and transparent elections are essential elements of democracy." Fidel Castro signed the statement, although there had been much speculation that he would not.
- 11/12/96** — The U.N. General Assembly for the fifth consecutive year approved a resolution criticizing the U.S. embargo of Cuba. The resolution was approved by the largest margin so far, 138 to 3, with 28 abstentions.
- 11/19/96** — Fidel Castro met with Pope John Paul II in Rome. The Pope accepted an invitation to visit Cuba at a later date.
- 11/20/96** — European Union members agreed to create a dispute settlement panel in the World Trade Organization to examine the third country provisions of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act.
- 12/02/96** — The European Union adopted a resolution setting forth a common policy on Cuba. The resolution stated that the objective of EU relations with Cuba "is to encourage a process of transition to pluralist democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as sustainable recovery and improvement in the living standards of the Cuban people." It also stipulated that full EU economic cooperation with Cuba "will depend upon improvements in human rights and political freedom."
- 12/04-06/96** In Havana, the United States and Cuba held a sixth round of migration talks to review the implementation of the bilateral migration accords. John Hamilton, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, led the U.S. delegation, while Cuban National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon headed the Cuban delegation.
- 12/06/96** — In the aftermath of the U.S.-Cuban migration talks, some confusion occurred when press reports indicated that the United States would return to Cuba those Cubans who manage to arrive illegally in the United States. In response, a State Department spokesman issued the following statement on Dec. 6, 1996: "Any Cuban who is determined to be a refugee or found to have a valid claim to asylum in the United

States will not be returned to Cuba. The United States Government is not contemplating repatriation of individuals who are already established within our borders."

- 12/12/96** — The U.S. Attorney's Office in Miami announced that the Cuban government handed over to U.S. authorities more than six tons of cocaine seized from a Colombian freighter that drifted into Cuban waters in October.
- 12/14/96** — In an EU summit meeting in Dublin, the EU maintained that it would lend its support to progress towards democracy in Cuba, including the possible negotiation of an economic cooperation agreement. The EU noted, however, that any cooperation agreement would contain a suspension clause in the event of a serious breach in human rights in Cuba.
- 12/24/96** — In implementing Title IV of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act (P.L. 104-114), the State Department sent out advisory letters to an Israeli agricultural company, *B.M. Group*, and a Panamanian company, *Motors Internationale*, warning that the companies were thought to be dealing in U.S. properties confiscated in Cuba. Under that title, executives or major shareholders of foreign companies trafficking in U.S. property confiscated in Cuba may be denied admission to the United States. (Visa sanctions were ultimately imposed on executives from *B.M. Group*, but not from *Motors Internationale*.)

Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power approved a law on the "Reaffirmation of Cuban Dignity and Sovereignty" which, among other provisions, declared the Helms-Burton bill "illegal, inapplicable and without value or legal merit"; excluded any U.S. person or corporation that attempts to utilize the provisions of the Helms-Burton legislation from any possible future negotiations with Cuba on compensation for nationalized properties; and declared unlawful "any form of collaboration, direct or indirect, which favors the application" of the Helms-Burton legislation. The law also offered Cuban government support to foreign companies that want to hide their investments in Cuba to avoid potential U.S. sanctions.

1997

- 01/03/97** — President Clinton ordered a second six-month suspension of Title III of the Helms-Burton legislation, which would have allowed lawsuits against those persons trafficking in U.S. property confiscated in Cuba (see July 16, 1996 entry).
- 01/27/97** — Pursuant to Title II of the Helms-Burton legislation, President Clinton issued a report on what assistance the United States and the international community would provide to Cuba once it begins the transition to democracy.
- 01/29/97** — The European Union announced it would move ahead with its complaint against the United States in the World Trade Organization over the Helms-Burton legislation.
- 02/12/97** — The Clinton Administration announced that CNN and nine other U.S. news organizations could operate in Cuba. The Cuban government subsequently approved CNN and in March 1997 it became the first U.S. news organization to open an office in Cuba since 1969.
- 02/20/97** — The WTO appointed a dispute settlement panel for the European Union's challenge to the Helms-Burton legislation.
- 04/11/97** — The United States and the European Union reached an understanding over their dispute regarding the Helms-Burton legislation. The Clinton Administration agreed to consult with Congress about an agreement that would allow the President to waive Title IV of the legislation regarding visa restrictions and to continue to suspend Title III lawsuits as long as the EU continued stepped up efforts to promote democracy in Cuba. The EU agreed to suspend its WTO dispute settlement case and to work with the United States to develop an agreement on disciplines for strengthening investment protection related to property confiscated by Cuba and other governments.
- 04/12/97** — A bomb exploded at the Melia Cohiba Hotel in Havana. An unexploded bomb was discovered a few days later in a planter at the same hotel.
- 04/16/97** — The U.N. Commission on Human Rights, by a vote of 19 to 10 with 24 abstentions, approved a resolution that regretted profoundly Cuba's violations of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms and urged Cuba to ensure freedom of expression and assembly and the freedom to demonstrate peacefully.
- 04/21/97** — The EU notified the WTO that it was suspending its request for a dispute settlement panel over the extraterritorial reach of the Helms-Burton legislation.

- 04/30/97** — A report issued by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, an agency of the Organization of American States, denounced the Cuban government for its systematic trampling of civil rights and political freedom, the killing of civilians, the subhuman conditions of its prisons, and for maintaining a legal system that perpetuates the violation of human rights.
- 05/97** — The Cuban government enacted legislation to reform the banking system and establish a new Central Bank to operate as an autonomous entity.
- 07/10/97** — Cuba said it will complete construction of the Juragua nuclear power plant. Construction began in 1982, but was halted in 1992 due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the termination of its support for Cuba. The Department of State reiterated U.S. concerns about the quality of the plant's construction and about Cuba's ability to operate it safely.
- 07/12/97** — Bombs exploded at the Nacional and Capri hotels in Havana. The blasts prompted the Cuban government to take new security measures, including the cancellation of a U.S. tour by Cuba's national baseball team.
- 07/16/97** — President Clinton announced the third consecutive six-month suspension of Title III of the Helms-Burton Legislation (see July 16, 1996 entry).
- Cuba's state security arrested and imprisoned the four leaders of the "Dissident Working Group" — Vladimiro Roca, Felix Bonne, Rene Gomez Manzano, and Marta Beatriz Roque — after they wrote "The Homeland Belongs to Us All," a political and economic critique of the Fifth Communist Party Congress' draft platform.
- 08/04/97** — A second bomb exploded in the lobby of the Melia Cohiba Hotel in Havana.
- 08/22/97** — A bomb explosion occurred at the Sol Palmeras hotel in Varadero.
- 09/04/97** — Four bombs exploded in three of Havana's seaside hotels and in a famed restaurant in Old Havana. An Italian businessman was killed in one of the explosions. Cuban officials arrested a Salvadoran, Raul Ernesto Cruz Leon, who admitted responsibility for the bombing campaign in Havana.
- 10/8-10/97** The Cuban Communist Party (PCC) held its 5th Congress (the last one was held in 1991) in which the party reaffirmed its commitment to a single party state and reelected Fidel and Raul Castro as the party's first and second secretaries. At the close of the Congress, Fidel endorsed brother Raul as his successor.

- 11/05/97** — The U.N. General Assembly, for the sixth consecutive year, approved a resolution criticizing the U.S. embargo on Cuba. The resolution was approved by a vote of 143 to 3 (U.S., Israel, and Uzbekistan), with 17 abstentions.
- 11/13/97** — The families of three of the four men killed in the shooting down of the Brothers to the Rescue planes brought suit in Miami federal court under a new U.S. law that allows survivors of U.S. victims of terrorism to sue nations the United States classifies as terrorist states.
- 11/18/97** — President Clinton signed the FY1998 defense authorization bill into law, P.L. 105-85. Section 1228 calls for the Secretary of Defense to carry out, by March 31, 1998, a comprehensive review and assessment of Cuban military capabilities and the threats to U.S. national security posed by Cuba, and an assessment of the contingency plans developed by the Secretary to counter any threat posed by Cuba to the United States.
- 11/19/97** — President Clinton signed the FY1998 District of Columbia appropriations bill into law, P.L. 105-100. Title II, section 202 enables Nicaraguans and Cubans physically present in the United States to adjust to permanent resident status. The measure will affect around 5,000 Cubans in the United States not eligible under the Cuban Adjustment Act.
- 12/17/97** — A federal judge ordered Cuba to pay \$187.6 million in punitive and compensatory damages to the families of three Americans killed when Cuban military jets shot down two civilian planes in international air space in February 1996.

1998

- 01/11/98** — Cuba held elections for the 601-seat National Assembly of People's Power, the national legislature. As in the February 1993 elections, voters were not offered a choice of candidates and the candidates were selected by committees composed of members of government-controlled mass organizations. As a result of the elections, the Communist Party, the only party allowed to field candidates, controlled about 94% of the Assembly.
- 01/16/98** — President Clinton, for a fourth time, suspended for a six-month period the right to file lawsuits under Title III of the Helms-Burton legislation, which would have allowed U.S. citizens to sue those persons trafficking in confiscated U.S. property in Cuba (see July 16, 1996 entry).
- 01/21-25/98** Pope John Paul II visited Cuba and conducted a series of open-air masses across the country that were televised. Numerous Catholic groups from the United States traveled to Cuba, as did thousands of journalists from around the world. In addition to encouraging Cubans to come back to the Church, the Pope also criticized the U.S. embargo as "unjust and ethically unacceptable," and criticized the Cuban government for denying freedom to the Cuban people.
- 02/12/98** — The Vatican announced that Cuba had freed dozens of detainees in response to the Pope's request to release "prisoners of conscience" during his January visit, when Vatican officials gave the Cuban government a list of more than 200 prisoners.
- 03/04/98** — The House International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere held a hearing on the visit of Pope John Paul to Cuba and an assessment of its impact of religious freedom in Cuba.
- 03/12/98** — The House International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade held a hearing on the implementation of the Helms-Burton legislation two years after its enactment.
- 03/20/98** — Following Pope John Paul's trip to Cuba, President Clinton announced four changes in U.S. policy: (1) the resumption of licensing for direct humanitarian charter flights to Cuba (which had been curtailed after the February 1996 shoot-down of two U.S. civilian planes); (2) the resumption of cash remittances up to \$300 per quarter for the support of close relatives in Cuba (which had been curtailed in August 1994 in response to the migration crisis with Cuba); (3) the development of licensing procedures to streamline and expedite licenses for the commercial sale of medicines and medical supplies and equipment to Cuba; and (4) a decision to work on a bipartisan basis with Congress on the transfer of food to the Cuban people.

- 04/98** — The State Department’s annual report to Congress, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, again listed Cuba as a supporter of “international terrorism.” The report stated: “Although there is no evidence to indicate that Cuba sponsored any international terrorist activity in 1997, it continues to provide sanctuary to terrorists from several different terrorist organizations.”
- 04/21/98** — The U.N. Commission on Human Rights rejected a resolution (by a vote of 16 to 19, with 18 abstentions) that would have condemned Cuba’s human rights record and would have extended the work of the Special Rapporteur to investigate the human rights situation in Cuba for another year.
- 04/21/98** — The European Union agreed to let its World Trade Organization challenge to the Helms-Burton legislation expire.
- 05/06/98** — The U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency issued a required congressional report (pursuant to P.L. 105-85, section 1228) on Cuba’s military threat to the United States. The report concluded that “Cuba does not pose a significant military threat to the U.S. or to other countries in the region” and “has little motivation to engage in military activity beyond defense of its territory and political system.” The report also concluded, however, that “Cuba has a limited capability to engage in some military and intelligence activities which would be detrimental to U.S. interests and which could pose a danger to U.S. citizens under some circumstances.”
- 05/07/98** — The House Ways and Means Committee’s Subcommittee on Trade held a hearing on U.S. economic and trade policy toward Cuba.
- 05/18/98** — The European Union and the United States reached a second understanding which set forth EU disciplines regarding investment in expropriated properties worldwide, in exchange for the Clinton Administration’s success at obtaining a waiver from Congress for the Title IV visa restrictions of the Helms-Burton legislation. Further investment in expropriated property would be barred. For past illegal expropriations, government support or assistance for transactions related to those expropriated properties would be denied. A Registry of Claims would also be established to warn investors and government agencies providing investment support that a property has a record of claims. These investment disciplines would be applied at the same time that President Clinton’s Title IV new waiver authority was exercised.
- 07/02/98** — The Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control issued licenses to nine air charter companies to provide direct passenger flights from Miami International Airport to Havana’s Jose Marti Airport. The flights had been suspended since February 26, 1996, following Cuba’s shutdown of two U.S. civilian aircraft.

- 07/15/98** — During Senate consideration of the FY1999 agriculture appropriations bill, H.R. 4101, the Senate approved a Dodd amendment, as modified by amendments by Senators Roberts and Torricelli, that would have prohibited the President from restricting any exports (including financing) of food, other agricultural products (including fertilizer), medicines or medical equipment as part of any policy of existing or future unilateral economic sanctions imposed against a foreign government. The Roberts modification restricted the Dodd amendment by providing a waiver to the President if he determines that retaining or imposing such sanctions would further United States national security interests. The Torricelli modification further restricted the Dodd amendment so that it does not apply to any country that "repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism." Since Cuba remains on the State Department's terrorism list, the Torricelli modification resulted in the Dodd amendment not applying to Cuba. Ultimately, the Dodd provision was deleted in conference with the House (H.Rept. 105-763 to H.R. 4101) and no further legislative action was taken.
- 07/16/98** — For the fifth time, President Clinton suspended for six months the right to file lawsuits under Title III of the Helms-Burton legislation that would have allowed U.S. citizens to sue persons trafficking in U.S. property confiscated in Cuba (see July 16, 1996 entry).
- 08/25/98** — A U.S. federal grand jury in Puerto Rico indicted seven Cuban Americans for plotting to kill Fidel Castro. The indictment stemmed from the October 27, 1997, seizure of a Miami yacht off the coast of Puerto Rico, with four Cuban exiles carrying two sniper rifles. One of the men reportedly stated that the four were plotting to kill Castro while he was visiting the Venezuelan island of Margarita in November 1997.
- 09/14/98** — Charges were filed in U.S. District Court in Miami against eight men and two women on spying for the Cuban government. An FBI affidavit filed stated that the eight acted "as clandestine agents of the Government of Cuba" with the objective of gathering and delivering defense information to aid Cuba.
- The House agreed to H.Con.Res. 254 (by a vote of 371-0), calling on Cuba to extradite Joanne Chesimard from Cuba to the United States. Chesimard, a U.S. fugitive from justice, was convicted in New Jersey in 1977 for the 1973 killing of a state trooper. She had been sentenced to life in prison, but escaped from prison in 1979.
- 09/15/98** — The House, by voice vote, agreed to H.Res. 362, commending the visit of Pope John Paul II to Cuba.
- 10/98** — Senator John Warner, along with 14 other senators from both parties, wrote to President Clinton calling for the formation of a "National Bipartisan Commission on Cuba," to conduct an analysis of current

U.S. policy that would help shape and strengthen the future U.S.-Cuban relationship. Another nine senators signed on to the letter in December 1998.

- 10/14/98** — For the seventh consecutive year, the U.N. General Assembly approved a resolution, 157-2, criticizing the U.S. embargo on Cuba (the United States and Israel opposed the measure, and there were 12 abstentions).
- 10/21/98** — President Clinton signed the FY1999 omnibus appropriations measure into law, P.L. 105-277. The measure contained several provisions on Cuba, including the following: 1) stipulated that foreign states are not immune from judgments for violations of international law, although a presidential waiver for national security is provided (see discussion below); 2) required reports to Congress on methods employed by the Cuban government to enforce the U.S.-Cuba migration agreement of September 1994 to restrict the emigration of Cubans to the United States and on the treatment by Cuba of persons returned pursuant to the U.S.-Cuba migration agreement of May 1995; 3) required the Clinton Administration to report to Congress on the enforcement of Title IV (visa restrictions) under the Helms-Burton Legislation; 4) withheld U.S. assistance for programs or projects of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Cuba; 5) required the President to withhold foreign assistance to any country that provides nuclear fuel and related assistance and credits to Cuba; and 6) prevented the United States from accepting payment for trademark licenses that were used in connection with a business or assets in Cuba that were confiscated unless the original owner of the trademark has consented.

President Clinton waived a provision in the FY1999 omnibus appropriations measure, P.L. 105-277, that stipulates that foreign states are not immune from judgments for violations of international law. The law would have allowed the families of three Americans killed when Cuban military jets shot down two planes in February 1996 to collect the judgement against Cuba from Cuban assets in the United States. The President maintained that the provision would have impeded the ability of the President to conduct foreign policy and would have impeded the effectiveness of U.S. economic sanctions imposed on foreign countries.

The Senate agreed to H.Con.Res. 254 by unanimous consent. The resolution calls on Cuba to extradite Joanne Chesimard from Cuba to the United States. (See September 14, 1998 entry for House action and background on the case.)

- 12/04/98** — The United States and Cuba held talks in Havana reviewing the 1994 and 1995 migration accords.
- 12/23/98** — Three diplomats stationed at the Cuban Mission to the United Nations in New York, were expelled, after ten agents were accused in September of spying for the Castro government. The State

Department stated that the action was undertaken against Cuba's diplomatic personnel for "activities incompatible with their status as members of a UN mission."

1999

- 01/04/99** — State Department officials stated that the Clinton Administration had decided not to set up the “National Bipartisan Commission on Cuba,” as proposed by a number of Senators in October 1998.
- 01/05/99** — President Clinton announced five measures to support the Cuban people that were intended to augment the March 1998 U.S. policy changes implemented in the aftermath of Pope John Paul’s visit. The five measures were (1) broadening cash remittances to Cuba, so that all U.S. residents (not just those with close relatives in Cuba) will be allowed to send \$300 per quarter to any Cuban family, and licensing larger remittances by U.S. citizens and non-governmental organizations to entities independent of the Cuban government; (2) expanding direct passenger charter flights to Cuba from additional U.S. cities other than the current flights from Miami, and to cities other than Havana; (3) reestablishing direct mail service to Cuba, which was suspended in 1962; (4) authorizing the sale of food to independent entities in Cuba such as religious groups and private farmers and farmer cooperatives producing food for sale in private markets; and (5) expanding people-to-people contact through two-way exchanges among academics, athletes, scientists and others.
- 01/12/99** — A bipartisan task force sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations released a report calling for more contact between the United States and Cuba. The group included critics and supporters of the U.S. embargo. Other recommendations included expanding direct flights to and from Cuba and the restoration of direct mail service.
- 01/15/99** — For the sixth time, President Clinton suspended for a six-month period the right to file lawsuits under Title III of the Helms-Burton legislation that would have allowed U.S. citizens to sue persons trafficking in U.S. property confiscated in Cuba (see July 16, 1996 entry).
- 02/16/99** — Cuba’s National Assembly approved a new measure, the “Law for the Protection of Cuba’s National Independence and Economy,” that would punish people with prison terms up to 20 years for collaborating with U.S. policy toward Cuba. Under the new measure, collaboration would include supplying or seeking information from the media.
- 02/25/99** — In response to U.S. telephone companies withholding payments to Cuba (because the payments were being sought in a judgement by the families of the three Americans killed when Cuba shot down two U.S. planes in February 1996), the Cuban government cut most direct U.S. telephone service.
- 03/03/99** — The Clinton Administration announced that it would intervene officially as a party in the U.S. telephone companies lawsuit and would support restoring telephone payments to Cuba as soon as possible.

- 03/10/99** — The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations held a hearing on the crackdown on human rights in Cuba.
- 03/11/99** — In Havana, the four-day trial of Salvadoran Raul Ernesto Cruz Leon wrapped up. Cruz Leon had been arrested in September 1997 on charges of setting off six bombs that targeted the island's tourist facilities. Cruz Leon pleaded guilty, maintaining that his motivation was financial, not political, and that he was paid \$4,500 for each bombing by Cuban exiles in El Salvador. Prosecutors sought the death penalty.
- 03/15/99** — A Cuban court convicted the four leaders of the “Dissident Working Group” — Vladimiro Roca, Feliz Bone, Rene Gomez Manzano, and Marta Beatriz Roque — on charges of “sedition” under the Cuban penal code after a one-day trial on March 1st. The sentences ranged from three and one-half to five years imprisonment. Activists, journalists, and diplomats from the United States and Europe were prevented from observing the trial. (See July 16, 1997 entry for their arrest.)
- Cuba put on trial a second Salvadoran, Otto Rene Rodriguez Llerena, who confessed to a bombing campaign and was charged with setting off a small bomb in Havana's Melia Cohiba hotel in August 1997, and bringing explosives into the country a year later. Prosecutors sought the death penalty.
- 03/18/99** — A federal judge awarded \$6.2 million of the telecommunications payments due to Cuba from U.S. companies to the families of three of the victims of the Brothers to the Rescue pilots shot down by Cuba in February 1996. The ruling was appealed by the telephone companies.
- 03/23/99** — The House approved H.Res. 99 (by voice vote), which expresses the sense of the House regarding human rights in Cuba. The legislation: condemns Cuba's repressive crackdown against the internal opposition and independent press; calls for the Clinton Administration to secure support for a U.N. Commission on Human Rights resolution condemning Cuba for its human rights abuses and for the reinstatement of a Special Rapporteur on Cuba; and calls for the Administration to nominate a special envoy to advocate internationally for the establishment of the rule of law for the Cuban people.
- 03/24/99** — The House International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere held a hearing on the current status and future direction of U.S.-Cuban relations.
- 03/25/99** — The Senate approved S.Res. 57 by a vote of 98-0, expressing the sense of the Senate that the United States should make all efforts to pass a U.N. Commission on Human Rights resolution criticizing Cuba for its human rights abuses and securing the appointment of a Special Rapporteur for Cuba.

- 03/28/99** — The first of two baseball games between the Baltimore Orioles and Cuba's national baseball team was held in Havana. Baltimore won by a score of 3-2.
- 04/01/99** — Two Salvadorans accused of planting bombs in Havana's tourist facilities in 1997 were sentenced to death by Cuban tribunals (see March 11 and March 15, 1999 entries).
- 04/23/99** — The U.N. Commission on Human Rights approved a resolution criticizing Cuba for its human rights record by a vote of 21-20, with 12 abstentions. It did not, however, appoint a Special Rapporteur.
- A U.S. District Court judge ruled that *Havana Club Holdings International*, a 50-50 joint venture between France's *Pernod Ricard* and a Cuban state company, could not prevent *Bacardi-Martini USA* from selling a premium aged rum made in the Bahamas under its own *Havana Club* label. An attorney for *Pernod Ricard* said the company is urging the European Union to file a complaint with the World Trade Organization.
- 05/03/99** — The Baltimore Orioles and Cuba's national baseball team played an exhibition game in Baltimore as part of the Clinton Administration's policy of increased people-to-people contact. Cuba's team won by a score of 12-6. There were several anti-Castro on-field protests by fans.
- 05/13/99** — The U.S. Treasury and Commerce Departments issued regulations regarding the commercial sale of food and agricultural commodities to independent entities in Cuba, such as religious groups, private farmers, and private restaurants. Some in the U.S. business sector expressed skepticism that the policy change would amount to much. The Treasury Department's new regulations also loosened restrictions on certain categories of travel to Cuba.
- 05/28/99** — Cuban Foreign Minister Roberto Robaina, was unexpectedly replaced by Fidel Castro's personal aide, Felipe Perez Roque.
- 05/31/99** — Cuba filed suit against the United States in Havana for \$181.1 billion in compensation for victims of anti-Castro attacks since 1959. The act is in response to a suit filed against Havana for killing four Brothers to the Rescue pilots in early 1996. The claim charges that the United States has caused thousands of deaths and injuries to Cuban citizens and massive economic damage as a result of the U.S. embargo against Cuba.
- 06/02/99** — The United States and Cuba held talks in New York on the implementation of the 1994 and 1995 migration accords. This was the 11th set of talks reviewing the migration accords.

- 06/07/99** — Approximately 25 Cuban dissidents began a 40-day hunger strike in Havana in an effort to call attention to the human rights situation in Cuba and to also call for the release of political prisoners.
- 06/16/99** — A Miami federal court judge ruled that the families of the Brothers to the Rescue pilots killed in the February 1996 shootdown by Cuban military jets might seek to identify Cuban assets held in the United States in an effort to collect on a \$187 million judgment issued in December 1997.
- 06/21/99** — U.S. State Department and U.S. Coast Guard officials met with their Cuban counterparts to discuss ways of improving coordination and communication in fighting drug-trafficking.
- 06/29/99** — The U.S. Coast Guard surrounded a small wooden rowboat and used a fire hose and pepper spray in an attempt to prevent six Cuban men from entering the United States illegally. The incident angered the Cuban-American community, sparking public protests. Coast Guard officials later announced the six men would be allowed to stay in the United States and apply for asylum. President Clinton later characterized the incident as “outrageous” and stated that the treatment was not authorized.
- 06/30/99** — During Senate floor consideration of S.1234, the FY2000 foreign aid appropriations bill, the Senate tabled (by a vote of 55-43) a Dodd amendment to terminate prohibitions and restrictions on travel to Cuba.
- 07/02/99** — The European Union said it is seeking World Trade Organization action against a U.S. court ruling stating that a joint venture between *Pernod Ricard* and a Cuban company, called *Havana Club Holdings*, could not prevent *Bacardi Martini USA* from selling rum made in the Bahamas under the *Havana Club* name (see April 23 entry).
- 07/09/99** — A boat being interdicted by the U.S. Coast Guard off the Florida coast capsized, resulting in the drowning of a Cuban woman.
- 07/13-15/99** The President of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Thomas Donohue, traveled to Cuba to support the development of the country’s small private sector.
- 07/16/99** — For the seventh time, President Clinton suspended, for a six-month period, Title III of the 1996 Helms-Burton legislation that would have allowed lawsuits against those persons trafficking in U.S. property confiscated in Cuba (see July 16, 1996 entry).

A group of Cuban dissidents in Havana ended their 40-day hunger strike with an appeal to foreign leaders to press Castro to accept political reforms.

- 07/23/99** — The U.S.-based Human Rights Watch issued a highly critical report on Cuba's human rights situation, "Cuba's Repressive Machinery: Human Rights Forty Years After the Revolution."
- 07/26/99** — Castro called on the United States to join Cuba in the fight against narcotics trafficking
- 08/04/99** — During Senate floor consideration of the FY2000 agriculture appropriations measure, S. 1233/H.R. 1906, the Senate approved a modified Ashcroft amendment that would terminate existing unilateral sanctions on agricultural or medical exports and require congressional approval before the imposition of any new agricultural or medical sanction. The provision would have allowed agricultural and medical exports to state sponsors of international terrorism, including Cuba, pursuant to one-year licenses issued by the U.S. government. The House version of the bill had no such provision, and ultimately the Ashcroft provision was not included in the conference report to the bill (H.Rept. 106-354) filed September 30, 1999. Several Senators expressed strong disapproval with the manner in which the issue was decided; the House and Senate Majority leadership had brokered an agreement that dropped the Ashcroft provision. (An attempted to table the Ashcroft provision — before it was modified to restrict exports to sponsors of international terrorism — was defeated by a vote of 28 to 70 on August 3, 1999.)
- 08/11/99** — A federal appeals court overturned a lower court decision and ruled that families of three Americans killed in February 1996 when Cuba shot down their planes could not collect \$6.2 million in telephone payments due to Cuba from U.S. companies. (See March 18, 1999 entry.)
- 09/17/99** — A Cuban court convicted two U.S. residents to jail terms of life and 30 years for the smuggling of migrants.
- 10/23-27/99** Illinois Governor George Ryan visited Cuba. Ryan, who met a wide range of Cubans, including dissidents and Fidel Castro, criticized the U.S. embargo during his visit. He also raised the issue of human rights and requested the release of the four imprisoned leaders of the "Dissident Working Group." (See entries for July 16, 1997 and March 15, 1999)
- 11/04/99** The House International Relations Committee held a hearing on the alleged torture of American prisoners of war in North Vietnam by Cuban interrogators in the late 1960s.
- 11/09/99** The United Nations, for the eighth consecutive year, approved a resolution calling for the end of the U.S. embargo on Cuba. The measure was approved by a vote of 155 to 2 (the United States and Israel), with 8 abstentions.

- 11/10/99** President Clinton declined to add Cuba to the annual list of major illicit drug producing or drug transit countries, stating that there was no evidence showing that drug trafficking through Cuba carries significant quantities of cocaine or heroin to the United States.
- 11/15-16/99** Cuba hosted the ninth Ibero-American summit, a meeting of the leaders of Spain, Portugal, and Latin American nations. Before the summit, there was a crackdown on opposition groups, and more than 30 dissidents were jailed. Nevertheless, several foreign visitors, including Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar and Portuguese President Jorge Sampaio, held meetings with leading dissidents. In the summit's Havana Declaration, the leaders reiterated their opposition to unilateral and extraterritorial applications of U.S. law, and specifically urged the United States "to put an end to the application of the Helms-Burton Act."
- 11/17/99** The House Committee on Government Reform, Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources, held a hearing on "Cuba's Link to Drug Trafficking." The hearing focused on the Administration's decision not to add Cuba to the annual list of major drug transit countries.
- 11/25/99** After a boat with 14 Cuban refugees sank off the coast of Florida, two adult survivors washed ashore at Key Biscayne, while fishermen found another survivor, five-year old Elian Gonzalez, clinging to an inner tube off the coast of Fort Lauderdale. The boy's mother drowned in the incident.
- 11/26/99** The Immigration and Naturalization Service released five-year old Elian Gonzalez into the custody of his paternal great-aunt and great-uncle in Miami after his discharge from the hospital.
- 11/27/99** The Cuban government delivered a diplomatic note to the U.S. Interests' Section in Havana seeking the return of Elian Gonzalez.
- 11/28/99** The father of Elian Gonzalez appealed on Cuban TV for the return of the boy to Cuba.
- 12/02/99** The Cuban government warned that relations with the United States could be harmed further if Elian Gonzalez was not allowed to return to his father in Cuba.
- 12/05/99** On Cuban broadcast media, Fidel Castro demanded the return of Elian Gonzalez to Cuba within 72 hours or vowed there would be mass Cuban demonstrations. He also threatened a boycott of upcoming U.S.-Cuba migration talks.
- 12/06/99** Thousands of Cubans began protesting at the U.S. Interests' Section in Havana for the return of Elian Gonzalez to Cuba.

12/08/99 President Clinton warned that politics should not enter into the decision regarding the custody of Elian Gonzalez. He emphasized that the important question was what would be best for the child. Relatives of the boy in Florida said that they would request political asylum for him to prevent his return to Cuba.

A U.S. Federal District court in Puerto Rico acquitted five Cuban Americans of plotting to assassinate Fidel Castro in October 1997. (See August 25, 1998 entry for their indictment.) Charges against another defendant were dismissed on December 1, 1999, while a seventh defendant did not stand trial because of illness.

12/09/99 The Immigration and Naturalization Service sent a letter to the father of Elian Gonzalez outlining the steps that he needed to take to make the case for the return of the child.

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