



EDWARD McMILLAN-SCOTT
VICE-PRESIDENT

CUBA TODAY – Information Note by Edward McMillan-Scott MEP

November 3 2006

Mr Edward McMillan-Scott MEP (EPP-ED/Conservative UK) Vice President, European Parliament (EP) and founder of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) visited Cuba privately from October 29 – 31 2006 with Vaclav Havel's International Committee for a Democratic Cuba, and organised by People in Need (PiN), primarily a Czech development NGO, in the context of his current review of the EIDHR 2007 – 2013.

He met a number of opposition figures, including centre-left Mr Osvaldo Paya, leader of *Movimiento Cristiano* and winner of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize 2002; centre-right Martha Roque Caballo, leader of *Asamblea para Promover la Sociedad Civil*; Miriam Leiva and the Damas de Blanco - the *Ladies in White* (wives and mothers of political prisoners, Sakharov Prize 2005); as well as the American, British, French and deputy German ambassadors, the Head of the EU Mission Mr Sven Huhn von Burgsdorff, his assistant Christina Martinez and other personalities.

He was accompanied in Cuba by Mr Nikola Horesz from PiN, who had been warned on his arrival in Havana by Cuban security – who had a file on him - that this would be his last visit. Markus Meckel MP (Bundestag SPD deputy foreign affairs spokesman) who had been expected to join McMillan-Scott, was refused a visa on October 28: another German MP, invited by the Cuban Central Committee, refused to travel in sympathy. Accordingly, McMillan-Scott, travelling on a tourist visa issued in London, cut short his visit having met the key scheduled personalities.

A broadcast quality film was made of all the interviews, which were conducted in the homes of the participants, and is awaited by McMillan-Scott from a diplomatic bag.

Osvaldo Paya referred to the appearance on Cuban TV of Fidel Castro on October 28, looking extremely frail and with dilated pupils. He said that his opposition movement, which had initiated the Varela Appeal, had prepared a transition towards democracy based on a national consultation. He said many other opposition figures were infiltrated. He and his family were harassed but he maintained his job as a hospital technician. He handed McMillan-Scott a CD with his 'manifesto'.

Martha Roque Caballo, a more populist figure, was preparing to make a public declaration in the context of an international diplomatic conference in Montevideo. She too has prepared a transitional programme 'Para propiciar el dia despues' (getting ready for the day after), which she handed to McMillan-Scott. Her flat is assaulted by loud pop music from a neighbouring property, which she says is more or less continuous.

The Ladies in White, who regularly parade in Havana, primarily discussed their situation and that of their spouses, mostly imprisoned since March 2003, especially the failing health of many of them.

The consensus among diplomats (McMillan-Scott also attended a reception for NGOs at the German residence) was that Paya is the most unifying potential leader.