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photo: Luboš Kárek

# FOREWORD

by Václav Havel

Over many years, various journalists have asked me why I pay such attention to the situations in Cuba, in Belarus, in Ethiopia or in Afghanistan. I regularly reply that I feel a close connection with Cuba and Belarus, due to the fact that their political regimes are the most similar to those with which I myself have a life-long, deep, personal experience. And I can offer my experiences most usefully to those who live in such conditions today. That is why Madeleine Albright, José María Aznar and myself initiated the foundation of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba, to which many very experienced and respected personages later joined up. I take pleasure in the fact that this committee, which works through the Czech NGO People in Need, has gained international prestige.

I recall how in 1989 the entire Czechoslovak opposition was taken aback by the rapid fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communist power in Central and Eastern Europe, and how

unprepared we were to find ourselves – literally overnight – facing the necessity of taking over the reigns of power. In that situation we dealt under pressure and in the space of days, sleepless nights, and sometimes hours with what is usually prepared for over many years. And it was that initial period which was the most important one when it came to taking power. Decisions were made in those days about whether or not to use violence. Decisions were made that would affect the country's fate for decades, and what we failed to achieve at the beginning was much harder to do when we tried to catch up afterwards. We had no shadow government prepared, no selected and trained capable people and specialists who could have immediately offered the public a trustworthy transformation of non-functioning constitutional bodies, and we had not prepared the basic legislative environment for the nascent democratic structures to ensure the functioning of the country in the earliest months. Nobody knows today when it

will happen in Cuba; but the very fact that there is a structured opposition, albeit disunited, is very important and encouraging. Sooner or later it will become part of a debate on the handover of power and the future of Cuba. And it is the ICDC which is capable of offering today's Cuban opposition multi-faceted help in order to be prepared and to avoid at least some of the mistakes that we made. At the same time, international solidarity and support is very important. Democratic countries should make contact with governing bodies con-

ditional on the release of prisoners of conscience, the relaxation of conditions for free civic dialogue and the upholding of basic civil rights. The ICDC can not only organise support and give speeches of solidarity with the free-thinking opposition; it can also effectively push at the governing bodies of the European Union and Latin American countries for a united approach to the regime of Fidel Castro. It can also offer dialogue between different streams of the Cuban opposition itself; that is where I see its main *raison d'être*.

I believe that every democratic government and every democrat should act today as if power in Cuba were going to be handed over tomorrow.

March 2007



photo: Mary Fetzko

Václav Havel, former Czech president and founder of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba, opening photo exhibition about Darnas de Blanco in Washington, DC.

# ARTICLES AND DECLARATIONS OF ICDC: WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT

By Secretary Madeleine Albright

In 1980, the KGB relocated Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov from Moscow to Gorky, then sealed to Westerners. The Nobel Prize winner would spend six years in internal exile. Later he recalled learning through short-wave radio of “protests by writers, public personalities and ... the intervention of U.S. National Academy of Sciences President Philip Handler and other prominent scientists[, that] might have forestalled further steps against me.” I can only wonder what would have happened to Sakharov without strong voices of support in those terrible days.

Statements of solidarity remain vital for oppressed peoples around the world. Cuba presents a particularly compelling case for attention. Despite its status as a destination for foreign tourists, Cuba is in its own way a post-modern Gulag. After 48 years of one-man and one-party rule, the Cuban people deserve the opportunity to decide their future. The nearly three hundred political prisoners now jailed deserve freedom.

One way to encourage change is through public support for the many Sakharovs in Cuba: For brave leaders like Oswaldo Payá, who led the breathtakingly ambitious Varela Project and organized thousands of discussion

groups to develop a proposed transition Program for All Cubans; For the Ladies in White, who remind us each Sunday that the love of a wife or a mother does not waver when her husband or

Statements of solidarity remain vital for oppressed peoples around the world. Despite its status as destination for foreign tourists, Cuba is in its own way a post-modern Gulag.

son becomes a political prisoner. Both have received the Sakharov Prize from the European Parliament, showing that diverse democratic bodies can speak with a clear voice on human rights. They and other activists on the island deserve active and vocal support.

Their democratic message is being echoed on the island, as Cubans pass along words of hope in hushed tones. But outside attention is needed to amplify the voices calling for change

and to help provide the strength to continue in the face of daily repression. Articles and declarations from overseas supporters take on a new life when they enter the island; they transform from words on paper to become a warm embrace of support for a political prisoner, a whisper of encouragement to an activist, or a ray of hope for any Cuban waiting for the day to be able to speak his mind freely.

“I remember vividly what the support of the democratic world meant for me when I was persecuted and imprisoned in Czechoslovakia,” my friend and former Czech president Václav Havel told *The Prague Post*. “I feel obliged to repay this debt to those who are in a similar situation now.” In this vein, I applaud the many declarations from statesmen of the former communist nations encouraging Cuba’s democratic activists.

With each new statement, word spreads across languages and cultures, prompting new actors to join the call for freedom in Cuba. It is the least that we can do to pay tribute to the brave Cubans who risk everything to one day claim their basic human rights. May that day come soon.

April 14, 2007

# THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ICDC'S SOLIDARITY IN CUBA

Miriam Leiva

The members of Cuba's civil society, who strive to promote democracy and respect for human rights despite persecution and strong repression by the totalitarian regime, greatly appreciate the support and encouragement expressed by Václav Havel, the former president of the Czech Republic. The International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC) is a prestigious organization to whom we are thankful for their selfless and respectful contributions on behalf of the Cuban people.

Due to the ICDC's denunciations, international public opinion is informed about the harsh life and work conditions of the opposition's struggle, the cruelty of the prisons where peaceful prisoners of conscience have been incarcerated and of the suffering of these prisoners' families.

The visits to political prisoners of conscience and their families are of great importance. I personally received a visit from Karel Schwarzenberg, a Czech member of the ICDC that provided me with great moral support. The current Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs has backed the efforts by Cuban democrats for several years and for that we owe him our thanks, as well as for his contribu-

tions to raising international awareness about the true situation that prevails in Cuba.

The visit by Edward McMillan-Scott, a Vice-President of the European Parliament, recognized the efforts of Cuba's democratic opposition by meeting with the Ladies in White and other prominent dissidents. We also appreciate the intentions of German MP Markus Meckel to visit Cuba for a second time until he was denied a visa by our government, which resulted in his companion also deciding not to travel to Cuba under such circumstances.

The best way for our supporters to become aware of how the people are actually oppressed by the regime is through personal exposure. These visits provide extremely important moral support for people who are treated by the Cuban government as if they did not exist and who are made to believe that nothing can change in the country. Furthermore, these actions show their community that they struggles are recognized internationally.

In the future, more people living in Cuba should be invited to attend events organized by the ICDC. Usu-

ally Cuban authorities deny requests to travel abroad, but this could be denounced as further evidence of human rights violations. If our people could participate in such events, it would constitute a meaningful experience and a valuable opportunity for them to inform more people about the situation in our country.

We would like to thank the members of the ICDC for their solidarity and we hope that one day we will be able to welcome them in a democratic and prosperous Cuba.

April 10, 2007

*Miriam Leiva is an independent journalist and a charter member of the opposition movement Ladies in White (Damas de Blanco). Her husband Oscar Espinosa Chepe is a political prisoner on probation.*

# THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR DEMOCRACY IN CUBA – OBJECTIVES AND LATEST ACTIVITIES

Kristina Prunerová, Secretary of ICDC

**T**he International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC) is a gathering of prominent politicians and intellectuals founded by former Czech President Václav Havel in reaction to the March 2003 crackdown against the democratic opposition in Cuba. It aims to promote democratic reforms within Cuba, strengthen global support for the Cuban opposition, and alter the approach of European and western hemisphere countries towards Castro's government.

## BACKGROUND

Among the members of ICDC are former presidents **Patricio Aylwin Azócar**, Chile; **Armando Calderon Sól**, El Salvador; **Vinicio Cerezo**, Guatemala; **Violeta Barrios de Chamorro**, Nicaragua; **Eduardo Frei**, Chile; **Arpad Göncz**, Hungary; **Václav Havel**, Czech Republic; **Milan Kuan**, Slovenia; **Vytautas Landsbergis**, Lithuania; **Luis Alberto Lacalle**, Uruguay; **Rexhep Meidani**, Albania; and **Luis Alberto Monge Alvarez**, Costa Rica. Among other politicians are the current President of Estonia **Toomas Hendrik Ilves**; Swedish Minister for European Affairs **Cecilia Malm-**

**ström**; Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs **Karel Schwarzenberg**; European Commissioner **Ján Figel**, Slovakia; Member of House of Lords **Baroness Caroline Cox**, United Kingdom; members of parliament **Urban Ahlin** from Sweden and **Arnold Vaatz** from Germany; former minister of foreign affairs and current member of parliament **Markus Meckel**, Germany; member of the European parliament **José Ribeiro e Castro** from Portugal and Vice-president of the European Parliament **Edward McMillan-Scott** from the United Kingdom. Other distinguished members of ICDC include former prime ministers **José María Aznar**, Spain; **Kim Campbell**, Canada; **Chang Chun-hsiung**, Taiwan; **Philip Dimitrov**, Bulgaria; and **Mart Laar**, Estonia; and former US Secretary of State **Madeleine Albright**. Democratic changes in Cuba are also supported by former dissident and widow of Andrej Sacharov **Elena Bonner** from Russia and former Polish dissident and editor-in-chief of the daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* **Adam Michnik**, as well as, writers **Marcos Aguinis**, Argentina; **Enrique Krauze**, Mexico; **Mario Vargas Llosa**, Peru; philosopher **André Glucksmann**, France; and

**Ferenc Köszeg**, Hungary, president of Hungarian Helsinki Committee.

To promote democracy within the country, the ICDC assists human rights initiatives in Cuba and the initiatives of independent civil society groups. These groups include the independent libraries movement, independent journalists, independent labor activists and opposition political movements. The ICDC secretariat also coordinates an international network of non-governmental organizations that have expressed solidarity with the democratic movement in Cuba.

To build global support for the Cuban peaceful and democratic opposition, the ICDC has organized more than ten public seminars and conferences in various European countries over the past three years. The aim of these conferences has been to bring public and political attention to the issues surrounding Cuba, drawing on the experiences of the democratic transitions in Central and Eastern Europe as well as Latin America. In addition, ICDC members have supported numerous declarations, open

letters and have signed articles published in the world media calling for more attention to the real situation in Cuba.

The secretariat of ICDC is based at the organization People in Need in the Czech Republic. It organizes the Committee's agenda and assists partner organizations in preparing their Cuba-related events. For more information see [www.icdcprague.org](http://www.icdcprague.org).

## LATEST ACTIVITIES

### Open Letter to Raul Castro from ICDC members

In September 2006, ICDC members wrote an open letter to Raul Castro, the temporary President of the Cuban Republic. Entitled "Transition, not Succession," the letter expresses concern about recent changes within the highest power structures in Havana and stresses the Cuban people's right to self determination through genuinely free elections.

The letter can be downloaded from <http://www.icdcprague.org> in the News and Documents section.

### "Cuba: Transition to Democracy Summit" held in Miami

On October 13 in Miami, a conference entitled the "Cuba: Transition to Democracy Summit" brought together current and former politicians from Latin America, Eastern Europe and the USA to express their support for democratic change in Cuba. The ICDC secretariat provided assistance by inviting some of the speakers, including one of its members, Luis Alberto Lacalle, former president of Uruguay.

The event had three key objectives. Firstly, to highlight the recent initiative of Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania and Slovenia in forming "Friends of a

**Democratic Cuba**" to support democratic transition in Cuba. Secondly, to identify specific ways to assist the Cuban pro-democracy movement by drawing on the transition experiences of Central and Eastern Europe. Finally, the summit provided the opportunity to assemble a broad cross-section of Cuban leaders to exchange ideas on points of convergence for accelerating democratic change in Cuba.

Participants in the summit, including Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Kinga Góncz and former Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs Cyril Svoboda, pledged their ongoing support for Cuban political prisoners and activists working toward democratic change on the island. In his speech, ICDC member Luis Alberto Lacalle called for the creation of an economic recovery fund for a democratic Cuba. Recalling the boost given to Europe's ravaged postwar economies by the Marshall Plan, President Lacalle's call for a "Marti Plan" was favorably received by other speakers.

### ICDC member Edward McMillan-Scott travels to Cuba and meets with the Ladies in White

On October 29, Edward McMillan-Scott, Vice-President of the European Parliament, visited Havana and met privately with the Ladies in White movement, an association of mothers, wives and sisters of Cuban political prisoners. In December 2005, the movement received the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Speech from the European Parliament, but the Cuban authorities denied its members exit visas to travel to the ceremony. During his three-day trip Mr. McMillan-Scott also met with opposition leaders Oswaldo Payá and Martha Beatriz Roque and expressed support for their struggle for democratic change and respect for human rights.

Mr. McMillan-Scott spoke about his experiences in Cuba at a press conference held in Brussels in December 2006. For more on this, refer to his article in this issue.

### ICDC Virtual Embassy to Latin America

Two ICDC members, Mr. Rexhep Meidani, former president of Albania and Mr. Arnold Vaatz, German MP, participated in the ICDC Virtual Embassy to Latin America. The ICDC delegation was supported and accompanied by Laszlo Nagy, Slovak MP and the Slovak Parliament Human Rights board Chairman. Between October 31, 2006 and November 11, 2006 the delegation visited Montevideo (Uruguay), Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (Brazil) and Buenos Aires (Argentina). During the trip, the delegation members participated in two conferences (Montevideo and Buenos Aires) and had several important meetings with local authorities, politicians and intellectuals on the current situation in Cuba, support of Cuban democratic opposition and relation between Latin America countries and Cuba. The delegation members also presented their declaration to the Latin-American Summit of Heads of State and the Government in Montevideo. In the declaration they called for more support for Cuban democratic opposition and for respecting the Viña del Mar Declaration signed by Cuban representatives in 1996 (binding the Cuban regime to respect human rights). The activity was organized in cooperation with Argentinean partner organization CADAL.

# CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR SOLIDARITY AND COMMON POLICY ON CUBA

Scott Hudson

**Berlin, May 2007** – On the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of April 2007, Berlin hosted an international conference entitled “*Democracy in Cuba: Seeking Common Initiatives*” that assembled more than 200 participants from over 23 countries. The main theme was finding a common policy for promoting democracy in Cuba between the EU member states, United States and Latin America. The event brought together leading political figures from Europe, representatives from Cuba’s pro-democracy movement, and an assortment of NGOs for two days of presentations and round table discussions.

Two German members of Parliament, Arnold Vaatz and Marcus Meckel held auspices over the conference with the event’s main organizer, the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba. The purpose of the discussions and panels held in Berlin was to distill the different opinions and strategies regarding Cuba taken by various countries and organizations into a unified position that would help foster a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba. As an important reminder, however, Former President of Uruguay, Luis Alberto Lacalle, reminded those present that “we do not want to substitute the decisions of Cubans themselves. We want to give them opportunity to take those decisions.”

The conference stressed the importance of ongoing continued support from the outside world for Cuban dis-

sidents by drawing parallels with the experiences of various pro-democracy dissidents in the former Soviet Bloc. In the words of former Czech president, Václav Havel “everything that serves to support democracy and freedom in the world should be given attention. I would like to stress the importance of solidarity in today’s world. I myself spent five years in prison; if it wasn’t for the solidarity of people abroad, it could have been fifteen.” It was an important reminder that the numerous prisoners of conscience in Cuba not only need support now more than ever, but that they could play a greater role in Cuba’s future once a transition began there. In 1988 few people, if any, would have predicted that dissidents, such as Havel or Lech Walesa, would become executive leaders in their respective countries so soon after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Maria Werlau, executive director of the Cuban Archive, spoke about the need for preparations for the transition to democracy to be made prior to Fidel Castro’s inevitable departure. She reminded those attending her presentation that the transition to democracy couldn’t be taken for granted since outsiders have been predicting that the regime would change for decades. In addition she stressed that there were new developments that are helping to strengthen the current regimes position that need to be taken into consideration: a hemispheric alliance solidified with interna-

tional partnerships with rogue countries with vast energy resources such as Venezuela under Chávez; renewed international legitimacy and influence through humanitarian brigades (doctors, teachers and others), and a re-energized campaign to attract foreign capital and business. Her presentation reminded the audience that Castro and his brother are more prepared than many people think and that they have used advanced means of repression to stay in power for the last 48 years. The obvious questions left after her talk were on what were the best steps to take in the months ahead.

An ongoing discussion during the conference was whether Cuba was more likely to be transformed into a democracy through active economic engagement or by the application of direct political pressure. This conflict has been raised repeatedly within the European parliament, and highlights the lack of clarity within the EU of how to develop a common position on Cuba, which has been suspended since 2005. One of the main reasons for this topic arising was the recent visit to Cuba by the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Miguel Ángel Moratinos. His visit in April has been defended by some based on the fact that some political prisoners were released around the time of his trip. However, Jorge Moragas, an MP for the Spanish Popular Party, has claimed that, in fact, no prisoners had been released as a result of the visit, but that those prisoners were due to



be released anyway under the terms of their sentences.

The conference resulted in a call for unity by the various NGOs who participated in the conference. The European NGOs offered a set of policy suggestions based on their experiences working with Cuban independent civil society and monitoring the situation on the island. The NGO's declaration was signed by 15 different NGOs from 9 different European countries recommended that the EU's strategies should focus on the following specific areas:

- maintaining pressure regarding the release of political prisoners and respect for human rights;
- demanding that new free and fair elections be organized along with the presence of international observers;
- a targeted visa ban for Cuban officials responsible for human rights violations;
- the appointment of an EU Special Envoy for Transition and Democracy as well as others.

More than anything the NGO's declaration stressed the need for a united front for those pushing for Cuba to become a democratic state. "Concerning democracy and human rights in Cuba, all speakers expressed conviction that the EU states and countries in Americas have more things in common, than those that divide them," said Kristina Prunerová, secretary of International Committee for Democracy in Cuba.

The conference served as an important forum where prominent political figures from diverse countries could share their thoughts and strategies on the democratization of Cuba. Former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar sent messages of support for the event. Leading Cuban pro-democracy dissidents Oswaldo Payá, Vladimiro Roca and Martha Beatriz Roque addressed the attendees through video conferences. Other guests included Karel Schwarzenberg, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic;

Rexhep Meidani, the former President of Albania; Gunter Nooke, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the German Federal Government; Caleb McCarry, Coordinator for Assistance to a Free Cuba from the US State Department; Peter Weiss and Daniel Lipsic, Members of Parliament; Julio Borges, the president of the Venezuelan Primero Justicia party and Bernard Vogel, the President of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

In the end, the conference's greatest success was in creating a stronger network of support for Cuban dissidents and to push the EU towards adopting a common position on Cuba that addresses human rights and the desire for greater freedom on the island. As Frederick Douglass famously stated power concedes nothing without a demand. In this case, it seems the demand for democracy in Cuba is growing and that the voices are getting louder.



photo: Lubomir Kotek

Conference participants are watching a video message from Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas

# ICDC MEMBERS KAREL SCHWARZENBERG AND ARNOLD VAATZ REPORT FROM THEIR TRIP TO CUBA

May 14 - 19, 2005

**K**arel Schwarzenberg, the current Czech Foreign Minister and former President of the International Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, and Arnold Vaatz, a German MP and Deputy Chairperson of the CDU/CSU-Parliamentary Group in the fields of Human Rights and Economic Cooperation, traveled to Cuba in 2005 on behalf of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC). Their journey had three main objectives: to hold meetings with Cuban democratic opposition representatives; to meet with former political prisoners and their wives; and to show support for pro-democracy activities on the island. Upon their return, Schwarzenberg and Vaatz were expected to provide reports to other ICDC members about current political and human rights conditions in Cuba. People in Need, which serves as the secretariat of the ICDC, organized this trip.

The ICDC delegation first met with Oscar Espinoza Chepe, an independent economist and former political prisoner released on parole and his wife, Miriam Leiva. "Chepe," as he is usually called, was the person directly responsible for economic relations between Cuba and the

former Soviet block countries. In the 80s, he began to criticize Cuban economic policy and its political situation, which led to his expulsion from the Ministry of Economic Affairs in the early 1990s. Miriam Leiva lost her job as an official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs due to her husband's political activities soon after. Since then, Chepe has been active as an independent economist and journalist and Miriam Leiva has been active member of the Ladies in White. Chepe's participation in the Varela Project led to his imprisonment in March 2003. He was released on parole in December 2004 due to his failing health, but he has stayed extremely active in Cuba's pro-democracy opposition.

The next reunion was with Gisela Delgado, the wife of political prisoner Hector Palacio Ruiz, who founded the first liberal party in Cuba and the Independent Center for Social Studies. Gisela Delgado is the province of Havana coordinator of the Independent Libraries (Bibliotecas Independientes) project that attempts to offer books not available in state run Cuban libraries as a means of providing free and independent information. In addition,

the independent libraries have become important meeting places for different opposition in a country where few such spaces exist. Also, the delegates were able to learn more about the conditions in which her husband and other political prisoners are being kept in following the crackdown and the severe consequences for the health of many of them.

Oswaldo Payá Sardinas, a leading figure of the Cuban opposition, met with the ICDC delegation soon after. Payá heads the Christian Liberation Movement (Movimiento Cristiano Liberacion - MCL) founded by democracy activists in 1988 as a means of advocating for change within Cuba's single party state. In 2002, the MCL's Varela Project attempted to challenge Cuba's lack of democracy through Article 88 of the Cuban Constitution of 1976, which allows Cuban citizens to propose laws if they can a minimum of 10,000 signatures. The Varela Project has gathered over 25,000 signatures on their petitions calling for democratic political reforms, which they have used to a call for a constitutional referendum by Cuba's National Assembly. Mr. Payá was able to explain the importance of the

MLC's Varela Project and the National Dialogue (Diálogo Nacional), which started in December 2003 as a follow up to the Varela petitions. The National Dialogue calls for a nationwide discussion about the transition to democracy in Cuba with Cubans on and off the island as a means of helping ensure that Cuba's potential transition to democracy happens as peacefully as possible and includes as many voices as possible.

On May 17<sup>th</sup> the Norwegian Embassy held a reception that brought together representatives from various groups within Cuba's opposition movements. ICDC delegates were able to hold direct discussions with several important leaders: Vladimiro Roca (leader of the Cuban Social Democratic Party), René Gómez and Félix Bonné (two of three main organizers of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society), Oswaldo Payá (the Christian Liberation Movement), Dagoberto Valdéz and others. The delegates met several of the Ladies in White (Damas de Blanco) and some released political prisoners. Cuban representatives expressed how invitations such as this one to national day celebrations were important for several reasons: providing moral support for dissidents, giving democratic activists an opportunity explain and speak about their work with diplomats and a form of recognition for individuals and their organizations.

Following the reception, Dagoberto Valdéz, the director of the Civic and Religious Education Centre of Pinar del Rio Diocese, hosted the delegation in the eastern province of Cuba. The delegation learned more about the centre's work and his particular history. The centre was founded in 1993 with the goals of organizing seminars, workshops and published materials to raise awareness of civil rights and promote democ-

racy, human rights and civil society. The centre publishes Vitral, a magazine about religious and social issues, which has become one of the most widely read magazines that focused on Cuba's social problems.

The ICDC was supposed to attend a gathering on May 20<sup>th</sup> organized by the Assembly to Promote the Civil Society (Asamblea para Promover la Sociedad Civil - APSC). The APSC was organized by three opposition leaders - Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello (independent economist), René Gómez Manzano (lawyer) and Felix Bonné Carcasses (former professor at the university). The assembly brought together over 300 Cuban opposition groups and organizations and turned out to be the biggest gathering of civil society in the last decade in Cuba. Unfortunately, the ICDC delegates were unable to attend and observe this meeting because of the actions taken by the Cuban government.

On May 19<sup>th</sup> the ICDC delegation returned from their visit in Pinar del Rio around 5:30p.m. and went to the Habana Libre hotel as planned. Around 6p.m., representatives from Cuba's Ministry of Interior came into the delegates' rooms in order to seize their passports and air tickets and ordered them to come immediately to the Immigration Office to explain the purpose of their trip. The delegates were not permitted to make any phone calls and denied the right to contact their respective embassies or governmental representatives. In the end, the delegates were not formerly interrogated, but they were taken straight to the airport and ordered to take the earliest flight back to Europe with the airlines they flew with to Cuba. No explanations were given for this immediate expulsion.

### **Conclusions from ICDC members, Karel Schwarzenberg and Arnold Vaatz:**

1. Since the temporary suspension of EU sanctions, no prisoners have been released, despite their unconditional releases being one of the basic requirements of the EU. Based on the testimonies of previously released political prisoners and of family members of those presently incarcerated, it is obvious that political prisoners remain incarcerated under severe conditions and without sufficient nourishment or medical treatment.

2. Based on personal meetings with the leaders of different opposition movements, both political and non-political, we are convinced that there has been no progress made towards democratic pluralism and the respect of human rights in Cuba since the temporarily suspension of EU sanctions against Cuba.

3. The Cuban opposition has developed into a wide network of organizations with different political or non-political opinions, which promote civil society, democracy and human rights among Cubans. We have met with several representatives of these organizations (i.e. Civic and Religious Education Centre in Pinar del Rio, the Independent Libraries project, Ladies in White movement, different political parties) and enthusiastically acknowledge their activities and achievements. Most of these organizations are oppressed by the Cuban government. Nevertheless, their activities are very well targeted and have had surprisingly positive results despite their lack of resources, i.e. financial means, books and independent information materials. In our opinion, EU Embassies should reopen their doors to the opposition representatives as soon as possible.

# EUROPEAN NGO NETWORK AND PEOPLE IN NEED ACTIVITIES

**N**on-Governmental Organizations supporting independent civil society in Cuba can now be found in almost every country in Europe. Within Cuba, their work consists mainly of visiting families of political prisoners and politically persecuted people, disseminating information and supporting independent civil society groups. Outside Cuba, activities focus

on informing the European public and decision makers about the real situation in Cuba and making policy recommendations.

The third anniversary of the Cuban Black Spring (commemorating the crackdown on Cuban opposition of spring 2003) was one of the first major events coordinated by these NGOs. Led

by People in Need, various organizations met in Prague in April 2006 creating an informal NGO network. The network has two main areas of focus: 1) sharing experiences supporting the democratic opposition in Cuba and formulating project recommendations; and 2) coordinating awareness-raising activities in Europe to influence decision makers and politicians.



*Discussion at a workshop during JCDC conference "Democratic Change in Cuba: Who Are the Actors?" in Stockholm, February 2006.*

## NETWORK ACTIVITIES

### Policy papers published by the NGO network

At their first network meeting in April 2006, the NGOs produced their first joint policy paper with recommendations for the European Union Common Position towards Cuba. The network published a second policy paper in September 2006, focusing on current discussions about the EU's mid-term strategy towards Cuba, which should be adopted during the next EU common policy revision.

### The Right to Have a Say: Warsaw appeals to the EU and the governments of EU member states

On the occasion of the Lech Walesa Institute conference, a coalition of European NGOs organized a press conference in which it presented an appeal to assist the Cuban people in their struggle for democracy. The document, *The Right to Have a Say*, has been sent to the 25 Heads of State of the European Union, the European Ambassadors in Cuba, as well as to the heads of the European institutions.

The policy papers and appeals were supported by following organizations:

- » Asociación Española Cuba en Transición, Spain
- » Christian Democratic International Centre (KIC), Sweden
- » Christian Solidarity Worldwide, United Kingdom
- » Cuba Futuro, Netherlands
- » Freedom House Hungary
- » Fundación Hispano Cubana, Spain
- » Iberoamerican Association for Freedom, Spain
- » International Society for Human Rights, Germany
- » Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Germany
- » Lech Walesa Institute, Poland
- » People in Need, Czech Republic
- » People in Peril, Slovakia
- » PONTES, Czech Republic
- » Pontis Foundation, Slovakia

- » Swedish International Liberal Center, Sweden
- » Lech Walesa Institute, Poland
- » Freedom and Democracy Foundation, Poland

## NETWORK MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVITIES

**PEOPLE IN NEED (PIN)** began work supporting the democratic movement in Cuba in 1997. Since that time, PIN has led over eighty missions to Cuba supporting dissidents, independent journalists, political prisoners and their families. Projects focused on Cuba are a cornerstone of PIN human right operations.

### The International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC)

PIN is the secretariat of ICDC. Members of the ICDC are distinguished politicians and cultural figures from around the world. For more information about the ICDC please visit [www.icdcprague.org](http://www.icdcprague.org).

### SOS Cuba: support for the families of political prisoners

The SOS Cuba campaign was established in reaction to the Cuban "Black Spring" in 2003. SOS Cuba appeals to the Czech public for monetary support for humanitarian assistance. Eighty families of political prisoners receive regular help through campaign funds.

### The Transformation Project

PIN has produced a handbook outlining the Czech democratic transition process. The goal of the handbook is to create a tool that builds on the success and failures of Czech transition for those governments experiencing a similar period of dramatic change.

### Christmas or New Year's Greeting campaign

PIN has launched a Christmas or New Year's Greeting campaign to support

those who are unjustly imprisoned in Cuba. Typically, prison guards treat prisoners who receive a lot of mail from abroad much more considerately. Over two thousand postcards were sent during this campaign.

### International Campaigns: Seminars and meetings

PIN has co-organized a number of international conferences, seminars and meetings. PIN has also supported visits to Cuba by both Czech and foreign members of parliament.

### Nobel Peace Prize Nominations

Since 2003, PIN has led an initiative to nominate a Cuban dissident for the Nobel Peace Prize. Oswaldo Payá, Raúl Rivero and Elías Biscet received the support of hundreds of parliamentarians and other respected figures at the time of their nominations.

### It Is Our Problem Too: The Women of the Cuban Spring

Photographer Alexander Polo, in cooperation with People in Need and the Center for Free Cuba, has created a photo-documentary that examines the lives of the wives and mothers of seventy-five Cuban dissidents, activists, writers and librarians sentenced by the Castro regime in the spring of 2003.

### Witness Accounts from the Island – Documentary Film

PIN has been involved in the filming and production of two secretly-filmed documentaries on the situation of human rights and democracy in Cuba. In 2003, PIN was involved in the filming of *The Cuban Spring*. The film has been successfully shown in 15 countries.

### Visit to Prague

On the invitation of PIN, a number of Cuban activists have visited the Czech Republic. Guests have included the leading Cuban dissident and human

rights defender Elizardo Sánchez, Alina Fernández, the daughter of Fidel Castro, writer and political activist Carlos Franqui, Oswaldo Payá Sardinas, Raúl Rivero and Cuban writer living in exile, Zoe Valdés.

### **Symbolic Jail Cell in Wenceslas Square**

To mark the first anniversary of the imprisonment of the 75 Cuban prisoners of conscience, PIN organized a symbolic jail cell in Wenceslas Square in Prague.

### **EXAMPLE OF OTHER MEMBERS' ACTIVITIES**

The Cuban program of the **Slovak Pontis Foundation** seeks to raise public awareness regarding Cuba both in Slovakia and other central European countries. Pontis organized a series of discussions with students on the topic of human rights in Cuba. Pontis has helped establish a Bulgarian NGO that will work on Cuban issues.

Another Slovakian NGO, the **People in Peril Association**, and the Pontis Foundation organized a meeting with supporters and donors to raise funds for families of Cuban political prisoners. Held under the auspices of Jan Figel of the European Commission, the event was also the occasion to present *Prisoners of the Island of Freedom*, a publication depicting the stories of 15 supported families.

The **International Society for Human Rights (ISHR)**, based in Frankfurt, Germany, has been working for human rights in Cuba since 1977. Via press information leaflets and the quarterly magazine "Cuba Report," the ISHR informs the public, especially media and politicians, about human rights in Cuba. The organization has also developed a regularly updated database of information on political prisoners and their families in Cuba.

The Swedish **Christian Democratic International Center (KIC)** has pub-

lished the bulletin *La Primavera de Cuba*, a bi-monthly newspaper about Cuba, for Cubans. KIC and the **Swedish International Liberal Centre (SILC)** seek financial support for the Fund for Cuba's Political Prisoners, a fund co-run by KIC and SILC that supports 15 of the political prisoners from the spring of 2003. KIC has also published a book, *690 Vivencias de terribles pesadillas*, written from jail by the political prisoner Antonio Díaz Sánchez, in which he tells his story.

The Spanish **Asociación Española Cuba en Transición (AECT)** has tried to improve ties between people in Cuba who are fighting for freedom and Spanish people who support their activities. AECT publishes articles and interviews of many dissidents in Spanish newspapers and the internet. They also selected Spanish articles about Cuba that could be of interest to Cubans and published them in a book about Cuba.



ICCC delegation's meeting in Rio de Janeiro: Rekhap Meidani, Laszlo Nagy, Jiri Knitl, Prof. Augusto Cottani, Rio de Janeiro's Deputy-Prefect Octavio Leite.

# ICDC'S VIRTUAL EMBASSY TO LATIN AMERICA

by Jiří Knitl

The main objectives of the ICDC delegation was to exchange opinions regarding the foreign policy of American and EU countries towards Cuba; to apply participants' experience with détente policies to current relations with Cuba; to strengthen the cooperation of organizations, parliamentarians, representatives of the Church, and intellectuals working with Cuban opposition; and to create a certain degree of sympathy and sensitivity amongst political, intellectual and opinion leaders from Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina.

Two ICDC members, Mr. Rexhep Meidani, former president of Albania and Mr. Arnold Vaatz, German MP, participated in what is called the ICDC Virtual Embassy to Latin America. The ICDC delegation was supported and accompanied by Laszlo Nagy, Slovak MP and the Slovak Parliament Human Rights board Chairman. Jiri Knitl, representative of the Czech NGO People in Need and Hernán Alberro, representative of Argentinean NGO CADAL, also accompanied the delegation.

In November 2006, the delegation visited Montevideo (Uruguay), Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo (Brazil) and Buenos Aires (Argentina). During the trip, the delegation members participated in two conferences and

had important meetings with local authorities, politicians, and intellectuals on the current situation in Cuba in support of Cuban democratic opposition and relations between Latin American countries and Cuba. The delegation members also presented their declaration to the Latin-American Summit of Heads of State and Government in Montevideo. In the declaration they called for more support for Cuban democratic opposition and respect for the Viña del Mar Declaration signed by Cuban representatives in 1996, which urges all Organization of American States members to respect human rights.

The delegation participated in a Forum of Freedom and Democracy in Latin America, a decade after the Viña del Mar declaration on Governance and Democracy was passed. During the event the following topics were discussed: what Cubans do for freedom and democracy in Cuba; pluralistic participation as an instrument of democracy in the Viña del Mar Declaration; the defeat of communism in Europe and its example for Cuba; and political actions in support of freedom and democracy in Latin America from the parliamentary view. Many important figures took part in the panels and discussions, including several former presi-

dents. Those present were: Armando Calderón Sol (El Salvador), Luis Alberto Monge (Costa Rica), Julio María Sanguinetti (Uruguay) and Luis Alberto Lacalle Herrera (Uruguay), Manuel Espino (PAN – México), Otto Guevara Arreche (Movimiento Libertario – Costa Rica), Facundo Guardado (Former member of Frente Martí para la Liberación Nacional – El Salvador), Representative Cristian Castaño (PAN – México), Representative José Amorín (Partido Colorado – Uruguay), Representative Patricio Walker (Partido Demócrata Cristiano – Chile) and Representative Jaime Trobo (Partido Nacional – Uruguay).

One of the most interesting meetings in Montevideo was a meeting with the National Representative Sandra Etcheverry, during which the possibility of stronger cooperation from Uruguay's politicians and leaders was discussed. Both Rexhep Meidani and Arnold Vaatz expressed the necessity for higher concern about democracy in Cuba from Latin American countries.

From Montevideo the delegation moved to Brazil. For ICDC representatives it was their first chance to meet and speak with partners from Brazil. Here the delegation had meetings with politicians, intellectuals, media

representatives and scientists such as Rio de Janeiro's Deputy-Prefect Octavio Leite (PSDB), his advisor Gilberto Braga and Professor Augusto Cattoni (advisor on international affairs). In addition, there was a meeting with journalist Lucila Soares (Veja – Brazilian magazine), a meeting at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) with program coordinator Gustavo Santos, a meeting with a political columnist, Merval Pereira (Newspaper *O Globo*) and a meeting in the Instituto Liberal with its vice-president Roberto Fendt.

The delegation also met with Marcel Solimeo, Amaury de Souza at the Trade Association of São Paulo. The delegation first introduced the aim of the meeting and of the ICDC Virtual Embassy. Then political analyst

Amaury de Souza gave an overview of Brazilian foreign policy, explaining the preoccupation with Venezuela and discussing Hugo Chávez's role in the region.

From São Paulo the delegation moved to Buenos Aires, its final destination. In Buenos Aires, it took part in a commemorative event, the Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall organized by CADAL. Mr. Meidani and Mr. Nagy gave speeches on their experience with totalitarian regimes and the transformation to democracy. During the event, the delegation met and spoke with local notable persons: Gabriel C. Salvia, the chairman of CADAL, Ricardo López Götting, Ph.D. in History (Karlova University, Prague), researcher of Friedrich A. Von Hayek Foundation and Associ-

ated Researcher of CADAL, Fernando J. Ruiz, professor at Communications College of Austral University, Fernando A. Iglesias, a journalist and Christoph Korneli, the representative in Argentina of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

*Jiri Knitl is a Senior Program Officer at People in Need organization.*



*Marianna Aylwin speaking at the conference of International Committee of Women for Democracy in Cuba in Buenos Aires.*



# THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE FOR DEMOCRACY IN CUBA

Maria Lima

In 2003 a group of prominent leaders and thinkers gathered in Prague and called on all supporters of democracy in Cuba. The Prague Memorandum led to the establishment of various groups and networks of supporters. One of them – the International Women's Committee for Democracy in Cuba – is of great importance and builds upon the Latin American experience that women are often the driving force behind peaceful transitions towards open and tolerant society.

On August 5 and 6, 2005 women representing Latin American and European countries gathered in Buenos Aires. Their purpose was to support the claims for freedom for all Cuban prisoners of conscience and for the democratic opening on the island. The event brought together former and current government employees, leaders of regional and international organizations, intellectuals, academicians, journalists, human rights activists, members of non-government organizations, parliamentarians and the representatives of Cuba's civic movement which formed the International Women's Committee for Democracy in Cuba (IWDC).

The objective of the meeting was to appeal to democratic countries to become true defenders of human

rights. As for Cuba, the participants stressed the following points: 1) the governments of our countries should be asked to demand freedom for political prisoners in Cuba; 2) the embassies of our countries in Cuba should open themselves to the family members of the political prisoners and human rights activists, and especially to the Ladies in White thus establishing a relationship with them; and 3) free women of the world should listen to and support the Ladies in White and all human rights activists in Cuba are invited to our international forums.

## SUPPORTING THE LADIES IN WHITE

After this event, the main focus of the activities of the IWDC was to support the Ladies in White and to ask for freedom for political prisoners. This has been carried out using the press to spread information, arranging meetings that explain the current situation in Cuba and making phone calls to women related to political prisoners in Cuba to give them encouragement and show our sympathy.

When the European Parliament recognized the work of the Ladies in White with the highest possible award, The Andrej Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought for 2005, the Castro dictator-

ship forbid them to travel to Strasbourg, France to receive the Prize on December 14, 2005. The IWDC then organized a chain of international protests.

The former president of the Czech Republic and the current President of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba, Vaclav Havel, was the first to raise protest by writing an official letter of concern which was read by Radio Prague and published by the press around the world. He was followed by other prominent Czech women. Subsequently, more activists joined from Slovakia, Uruguay (deputies Sandra Etcheverry and Soledad Murgan), Mexico (deputies Maria Guadalupe Suárez and Adriana González), Italy (Ana Maria Cervone, the human rights representative for the International Christian Democratic Party to the United Nations), Costa Rica (human rights activist María Milagros Méndez, deputy Elvia Navarro), and Argentina (national deputy Alicia Comelli).

On April 25, 2006 the human rights activist Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello was attacked in her house by a pro-regime mob. The Committee stood up in protest and issued a press release published in the Costa Rican, Argentinean and Uruguayan press. The

Committee also made a phone call to Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello to support her and tell her about the press release.

In November 2006, the Forum "Freedom and Democracy in Latin America: Ten years after the Declaration of Viña del Mar about Government and Democracy" took place in Montevideo (Uruguay). The women from the IWDCD participated in one of the panels reading a declaration reaffirming their commitment to keep working to achieve the freedom of political prisoners in Cuba and to unconditionally support the Ladies in White.

#### **FOUR YEARS SINCE THE BLACK SPRING**

Events commemorating the fourth anniversary of Cuba's Black Spring of 2003 have culminated in a conference organized by the Women's committee. It took place on the International Women's Day 2007 at

a General Assembly of Montevideo (Uruguay). The Committee arranged the event in cooperation with the department's commission for women and family.

At this event the International Women's Committee for Democracy in Cuba presented a book entitled Ladies in White, from Chilean writer and journalist Erika Luters, who also attended the meeting. Luters stressed the importance of complaints and requests made by the relatives of political prisoners in Cuba.

On March 8, International Women's Day, The Center for Opening and Development of Latin America (CADAL) organized, in its office in Buenos Aires, a presentation on "the current situation concerning human rights and women in Cuba." The presentation was lead by Maria A. Lima from the Cuban Democratic Directorate who again showed the members of the Committee in Argentina videos

of Cuban women and called Dr. Hilda Molina, who was prohibited by the Castro regime to leave Cuba and visit her son who lives in Buenos Aires. She is being virtually held prisoner in her house in Havana.

In San José (Costa Rica) on March 14, Blanca González, mother of an independent journalist and political prisoner Normando Hernández González, and Laida Carro from the Coalition of Cuban-American Women, made a presentation about the Cuban political presidency of the Legislative Assembly of the country. They were accompanied by women from the Committee in Costa Rica, who were dressed in white, showing their sympathy with the Ladies in White.

The Committee actively communicates with all its members and spreads information about what is happening in Cuba and about the future activities in all of the countries where it operates.



Photo by Helena Houdava

Ladies in White (Damas de Blanco) marching in Havana.

# ICYDC: A NEW GENERATION OF DEMOCRATS IN LATIN AMERICA

Fernando Gril

The Prague Memorandum, signed by distinguished political leaders and thinkers and members of ICDC, called on supporters of democracy in Cuba to react to the massive arrests of the 2003 Black Spring. Various groups of democrats around the world have established solidarity networks. Among these is an important group of the new generation policy makers in Latin America.

Unlike the previous generation, we, the young generation, have been born into a world that puts forth democratic values as a symbol. Because of this, the youth of the world have decided to abandon false dialectics, confirming that there is no difference between left-wing and right-wing dictatorships. This belief is growing stronger all over the world, especially in Latin America. The need to protect and defend human rights has become a unanimous manifesto of this new generation.

In July 2005 five young Latin-American political leaders secretly traveled to Havana. They visited dissidents, made a video of declarations supporting democracy, organized a workshop and founded the International Committee of Youth for Democracy in Cuba (el Comité Internacional de Jóvenes por la Democracia en Cuba). They also signed the Havana Memorandum (el Memorando de la Habana), which appears at the end of this document.

The current movement is comprised of youth leaders from more than twenty countries.

The idea to create the International Committee of Youth for Democracy in Cuba grew out of the Prague meeting of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba. The ICDC's members include former presidents and prime ministers as well as deputies from a range of countries, including Václav Havel from the Czech Republic.

## OUR ACTIVITIES

We aim to offer solidarity to members of the civil, non-violent dissident groups that promote a democratic transition in Cuba. Accordingly, we carry out our activities by:

- a) Providing moral and spiritual support to young members of the civil, non-violent dissident groups.
- b) Showing sympathy with political prisoners and denouncing their imprisonment.
- c) Informing young people all over the world about the situation in Cuba.

## ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT

ICYDC has organized campaigns that demand the liberation of young Cubans illegally arrested on the island. It has arranged press conferences in more

than twenty countries, conferences at universities and demonstrations at Cuban embassies in Latin America.

## THE HAVANA MEMORANDUM

FIRST DOCUMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF YOUTH FOR DEMOCRACY IN CUBA  
HAVANA CITY, THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA, JULY 28, 2005

In accordance with the appeal made by the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba in the Memorandum of Prague, signed in September 2004, the youth from different parts of the world, summoned by the Secretariat of the ICDC, have met in Havana City, Cuba. The aim was to form the International Committee of Youth for Democracy in Cuba.

We, the young people, have decided that the founding document of the committee will be signed on the island in order to reaffirm our commitment with the present state of our Cuban brothers, and to do so in front of the world, without any fear and with strong conviction that all nations of the world have a mission to work together for that most precious common good, freedom.

We, who come from nations whose sovereignty has one time been stolen, who live in the countries which not so long ago suffered under dictatorships, dem-

onstrate with this document that we have not forgotten the fight of many men and women that, supported by the international community, gave us a democratic, free homeland where we can now enjoy conditions which permit us to choose the direction our own countries will follow.

We, who are here today, and the youth we represent, have been in touch with the youth of Cuba who tirelessly fight to bring freedom back to their nation. These days we consider it outrageous for the regime to persecute persons who peacefully disagree with it and to degrade the human rights of the young Cubans by stealing their natural and inherent right to express their ideas. It is intolerable for the Cuban nation to remain imprisoned in its own country.

We believe the right to think differently is something the regime can not steal from them, although they might not always be allowed to express their ideas. Therefore, our commitment is to be their voice and their pen. We commit ourselves to offer support in solidarity to the noble work of promoting their fight for human rights through ethical and non-violent means until the moment comes when Cuba will achieve freedom and the Cuban nation will be independent and will determine its future.

SIGNED IN HAVANA BY:

*Fernando Grif, Argentina*

*Jorge Canas, Chile*

*José Luis Garza, Mexico*

*Ricardo Lavín, Mexico*

*Jorge Villena, Peru*

*Hipólito Ramírez, Dominican Republic*

LAST WORD:

## CUBA IS NOT ...

Manuel Vázquez Portal

Cuba is not the government by which it is represented. It is not a picture of Che Guevara on a T-shirt or a photo of Fidel Castro hanging on the wall of the embassies around the world. Cuba is not a Cohiba cigar and neither is it a band playing salsa. Cuba is millions of suffering people, thousands of dissidents struggling daily to achieve the rights they are denied, hundreds of political prisoners languishing in filthy prisons and many people that are desperate to emigrate.

Cuba is not the solitude to which it has been plunged to by a brutal dictatorship which does not pay its debts to other countries, which forms alliances with strange and fierce fundamentalists, which rails against those who do not share the same political opinions, and which blames an external enemy for all the calamities it causes its own people. Cuba is thousands of voices which are crying on the island and outside of it, claiming liberty and justice.

A cursory glance is enough to see that it is not the dissidents who are suffocating and feeling cornered. It is a reactionary and obsolete government who is kicking, growling and choking, since it is well received neither by its people, nor by the international community.

While the government of Cuba is receding more and more from the global tendency of heading towards peaceful and democratic future, the opposition both within and outside the island is achieving more and more understanding and

sympathy from individuals and institutions from all around the world.

Those who have experience combating totalitarian regimes have closed ranks around the Cuban dissidents, providing moral support and sharing their knowledge with them, so that the dissidents do not feel alone.

At every international forum, at every NGO conference, at every act promoting human and civil rights we could hear the unfading voices of Václav Havel, Lech Walesa or José María Aznar standing up for Cuba as it really is.

Nowadays, the Cuban dissidents already enjoy international recognition, solidarity and alliance and it's precisely thanks to many years of joint effort by personalities who know the hardship suffered by a society subjected to a totalitarian regime.

The echo of defense pronounced by these people could be heard from Prague, Warsaw, Berlin, Madrid and Paris. The fact that nowadays, the dissidents in Cuba are highly esteemed and enjoy the recognition and respect of international institutions and local governments is to a large extent due to the selfless support by women and men who dream of a world where democracy is the most valuable jewel of all.

*Manuel Vázquez Portal worked as an independent journalist in Cuba until arrested in 2003. He has received several awards for defense of free speech and currently lives in exile.*