

# Speech by Caleb McCarry

At Berlin Conference, 26 April, 2007

Good afternoon,

Cubans clearly want and expect change. Independent opinion polls support this. One poll conducted by a Spanish NGO revealed that an overwhelming majority of Cubans across the island (and especially young people) want change. They want hope for a real future.

Something changed in Cuba last July. Since then, we have seen two trends in the country. On the one hand, Cuba's independent civil society has become increasingly active across the island, and particularly in the provinces. On the other hand, the regime has responded by stepping up its repression of such independent thought.

Just last week, Reporters without Borders confirmed that independent Cuban journalist Oscar Sánchez Madan was arrested, tried and sentenced to four years in prison -- all in one day and with no defense attorney -- on charges of being a "pre-criminal social danger."

Despite this repression, independent leaders inside Cuba are peacefully speaking up, demanding that fundamental human rights be respected. Most importantly, Cuba's opposition leaders are putting forth their ideas for democratic change.

The annual publication "Steps to Freedom" documents individual acts of independent civic activity and peaceful resistance. Strikingly, this publication recorded a more than 54% increase in such activity in 2005, and noted that 89% of such peaceful independent civic activity takes place outside of Havana, in Cuba's provinces.

Every time a Cuban visits an independent library, holds a prayer vigil, organizes a meeting of a banned political party, or extends kindness and support to the family of a political prisoner, they are opening space for Cubans to define a different, free future for their nation.

Reports filed by independent Cuban journalists, who work under constant threat from the regime's state security apparatus, speak to a resurgent independent Cuban society and a growing internal democratic opposition movement. While the news they have to report may seem like small things, taken together they are significant.

For example, we know from independent journalists that the regime increased violent attacks on Cuba's peaceful, democratic opposition through its so-called "acts of repudiation." Now,

something different is happening. People are starting to speak up and even defend their neighbors from these attacks.

Cuba's civil society is re-knitting itself. The Ladies in White walking together to Mass are an eloquent and dignified reminder of the suffering endured by political prisoners and their families. Across the island, in towns and villages many less visible acts of personal courage are occurring every day.

For our part, as President Bush said, "We are actively working for change in Cuba, not simply waiting for change."

Inside Cuba, opposition leaders and civic organizations are sharing their vision for a democratic future with the Cuban people. It is what Cubans have to say about the need for democratic change that matters most.

The capacity of Cuba's internal opposition to mobilize and communicate a positive, democratic message to their fellow citizens is increasing. We believe it to be vital and indeed our duty as democracies to accompany those Cubans who, at great risk to themselves, are leading the call for democratic change in their country. Accordingly, we are committed to continuing our increased support for outreach to Cubans who peacefully promote democratic change.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said, and I quote: "The United States is... encouraging all democratic nations to join together and call for the release of political prisoners, for the restoration of your fundamental freedoms, and for a transition that quickly leads to multiparty elections in Cuba."

We have increased our efforts here in the United States, in Cuba, and around the world to implement the recommendations of the two reports prepared by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba.

In addition, the Compact with the People of Cuba is a succinct message of hope and a concrete and practical commitment to help the Cuban people as they move away from the Communist totalitarian system that has been imposed upon them towards genuine democracy.

As a government, we have been undertaking planning to ensure we are prepared to meet the promises we have made through the Compact with the Cuban People. To cite just one example, we have been working on a coordinated plan to deliver on our offer of humanitarian assistance in support of a process of democratic change in Cuba. This planning includes being ready to distribute medicine, food, and other urgent humanitarian aid within 48 hours.

These are all part of our commitment to accompany and keep pace with Cubans as they create space in their own country to define a process that will lead to the day when the practice of

holding political prisoners comes to an end, fundamental political and economic rights are restored, and the sovereign people of Cuba can freely elect those who will govern them.

Raúl Rivero, a well known Cuban poet now in exile, wrote the following lines about Cuba's historic leader, Jose Marti, from Havana in 2001, and I quote: "In schools, on the streets, in life, the true Marti knows how to appear and not that little stick figure in a dark suit that even ordered the assault on the Moncada in 1953, according to the Communist press. The true Jose Marti will come with his lucidity to serve all Cubans of all beliefs and ideas."

As we examine the common interest and possibilities for common approaches with regard to Cuba, we should always be mindful that the Cuban people themselves are leading the way.

Cuba's peaceful democratic opposition has issued an important and unprecedented joint message: Unity for Freedom. This clear statement of principles by Cuba's opposition should inform our discussion here today of how we can best accompany the Cuban people in the democratic change they themselves seek.

Thank you for your attention.