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## Reactions To Execution Of Diaz Betancourt Ordered By Cuban Government

by Erika Harding

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[On Jan. 20, Eduardo Diaz Betancourt a Cuban exile residing in the United States was executed by firing squad in Cuba, after being convicted of terrorism and other crimes against the government. See NotiSur 01/22/92 for coverage of the capture of Diaz Betancourt, Daniel Santovenia Fernandez and Pedro de la Caridad Alvarez Pedroso by Cuban security forces and subsequent developments.]

Jan. 21: US State Department spokesperson Richard Boucher said, "We condemn the Cuban government's execution of Eduardo Diaz Betancourt without a full and fair trial. We note that two other Cuban exiles similarly accused had their sentence reduced. However, in none of the three cases was there serious due process." Panamanian Foreign Minister Julio Linares also condemned the execution, calling it "totally unjust." About 100 Cuban exiles in Miami demonstrated in protest of the execution.

Jan. 22: At a press conference in Miami, Tony Cuesta, leader of the Comandos L Cuban exile group, said the three exiles arrested Dec. 29 on the island by Cuban security forces were part of a larger operation to overthrow President Fidel Castro. Cuesta, a veteran of the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, was detained in 1966 in another infiltration attempt and subsequently sentenced to 30 years in prison. After serving 12 years, he was released by the Cuban government. Cuesta said Comandos L and the 19 de Abril organization "have the responsibility, glory and sadness of having sent these men to Cuba." The exile leader said he had waited a long time to make the announcement so that certain people could go into hiding. According to Cuesta, several other persons successfully infiltrated the island and have begun their clandestine work. In confessions broadcast on Cuban television, and retransmitted by Miami stations, Diaz Betancourt, Santovenia and Alvarez admitted to membership in the Comando L. They said Cuesta was the organization's top leader, and Felipe Gonzalez, Comando L's military chief. Spokespersons for US Attorney General's offices in Miami and Washington said they could not comment at the moment on Cuesta's statements. Jose Antonio Arbesu, leader of the Cuban Interest Section in Washington, told the Agence France-Presse that the mitigating factor in the cases of Santovenia and Alvarez was that they were raised in Miami, in the midst of exile sentiments. In contrast, Diaz Betancourt was the leader of the three, and had resided in Cuba until April 1991. Arbesu added that as soon as Diaz Betancourt arrived in Miami, he "established contact with the counterrevolutionaries." A joint statement issued in San Juan, Puerto Rico, by about a dozen exile organizations said the firing squad execution of Diaz Betancourt "confirms once again the impossibility of negotiating with the Castro government." A sampling of signatories follows: Humberto Perez of the Christian Democrat Party; Ruben Calzadilla, of the former Cuban Political Prisoners Union in Puerto Rico; Alberto Melero, Cuba Independiente y Democratica; Maria L. Correa, Union de Cubanas en el Exilio; and, Raul Marrero, Fundacion Cubano Americano. Brazilian Workers Party (PT) leader Jose Inacio (Lula) da Silva and writer Jorge Amado described the execution as a "political error." Oscar Niemeyer, main architect of Brasilia (capital of Brazil), said, "I am against the death penalty, but this was a necessary example." Italian orthodox communists requested that Castro immediately suspend the death penalty. Raul Bargaza Navas, Cuban Ambassador in Bonn, received a protest letter from Otto Graf Lambsdorff, president of the Liberal International. Maurice Gourdault-

Montagne, spokesperson for the French Foreign Ministry, said his government could only "deplore" the implacable nature of Cuban justice in the case of Diaz Betancourt. According to the Japanese government, the legal process against Diaz Betancourt was insufficient and unjust. European Community spokesperson Joao Vale de Almeida told reporters that because of the execution, an "exploratory EC mission" charged with exploring future cooperation potential with Havana had been cancelled. In a communique released in Brussels, Abel Matutes, EC commissioner for Latin America, said, "The communist regime in Cuba is ending its days as it began in bloodshed... This event shows the fragility of Fidel Castro's regime and will merely isolate Cuba in the international community." Cuba established full diplomatic relations with the EC in 1988. Havana was hoping to conclude a full-fledged cooperation agreement with the EC this year, which would among other things, facilitate greater access to the EC market for Cuban exports. Jan. 23: An editorial published by the Cuban Communist Party's official newspaper, Granma, said the Cuban people have been victimized by a "giant slander campaign," while hypocrisy is the order of the day. Jan. 25: State Department spokesperson Margaret Tutwiler said the US law "formally prohibits all individuals from participating in any type of military or naval action launched against a foreign country from US territory." After stating that the legislation "also applies to Cuba," Tutwiler said anyone violating neutrality laws "will be prosecuted." Jan. 24: The Miami Herald reported that the Bush administration has cooperated with the Cuban government to prevent terrorist assaults against the island originating from the US. The article quoted an unidentified State Department official who said the White House "warns the government in Havana if it has information on such actions, which are in violation of US law." Ariel Ricardo, spokesperson for the Cuban Interest Section in Washington, said such cooperation was hardly the "norm." According to Ricardo, cooperation of this type has occurred in exceptional circumstances, such as the aborted "terrorist plan" during the Pan-American Games in Havana last August. He added that Washington justified cooperation in this case on the ground of protecting US athletes and spectators. Jan. 25: Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez condemned the execution, emphasizing his government's strong opposition to the death penalty, particularly for political motives. In New York, about 15,000 Cuban exiles congregated to protest against the Castro regime in Times Square, and later marched down 11th Avenue to the Javits Convention Center where several leftist organizations were participating in a meeting titled "Paz para Cuba." An estimated 3,000 persons attended the meeting. Thousands of police officers were dispatched along 11th Avenue, and around the Javits Center. No major incidents were reported. The Paz para Cuba organizers were denied access to the convention center at the last minute. They obtained access only after accepting extraordinary security measures. The three major speakers calling for an end to the US economic embargo against Cuba were former US attorney general Ramsey Clark, attorney William Kunstler, and British Labor Party MP Tony Benn. (Sources: Notimex, Inter Press Service, 01/22/92; Agence France-Presse, 01/21/92, 01/24/92, 01/25/92; Spanish news service EFE, 01/22/92, 01/25/92)

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