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Cuba Briefs: Summit Support, Castro Arrest Campaign, Cuban Spies in U.S.

by LADB Staff

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Ibero-American Summit gives support to Cuba

Chief executives and heads of state from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain, and Portugal meet in Oporto, Portugal, in mid-October for the Ninth Ibero-American Summit. The delegates signed a final declaration and a separate document expressing concern for the global financial crisis. As in all previous Ibero-American summits, the presence of Cuban President Fidel Castro and what to do about the lack of democratic elections in Cuba received major media attention. Highlighting the issue were statements by Nicaraguan President Arnoldo Aleman. He went to Oporto despite Castro's presence but said he would not attend the next summit, to be held in Havana.

Calling Castro's government "a cruel and bloody dictatorship," Aleman said he would send no delegation in 1999 because Castro had failed to democratize Cuba. Aleman's statement appeared to have no effect on the Declaration of Oporto, which officially named Havana as the site for the tenth summit, condemned the US embargo against Cuba, and agreed with Castro that the central concern at Oporto should be forging a unified stance on the global financial crisis. The delegates focused far more on the global crisis than on Cuba.

In addition to the final declaration, delegates issued a special Declaration on the International Financial Situation, urging Japan, the US, and the European Union (EU) to "take the lead" in maintaining the global free-trade initiative and to take steps to lower interest rates and stop recession in their own countries. The declaration also asks the major economies to stimulate the Latin American economies and create a special International Monetary Fund (IMF) contingency fund to halt the crisis. Multilateral lenders such as the IMF came in for criticism, as delegates called for reforms in their lending practices.

Though not naming the IMF, Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Guterres said international financial institutions should not condition aid on structural adjustment programs that threaten to unleash social upheavals. The Portuguese government will formally present these resolutions to the Group of Seven (G-7) industrialized nations. The delegates broke new ground by setting up a permanent secretariat to monitor compliance with the summit's agreements.

The final declaration condemned intervention and censured the US embargo against Cuba. The declaration "energetically rejects the extraterritorial application of national law and covert operations which violate the laws and ordinances of third countries, as well as coercive unilateral processes that constitute an obstacle to cooperation among states."

Anti-Castro forces begin effort to have Cuban leader arrested

Buffeted by recent setbacks that include the indictment of a prominent exile leader for attempted murder (see NotiCen, 09/03/98), anti-Castro exile organizations are again on the offensive. Following
the arrest in London in October of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet (see NotiSur, 10/23/98), anti-Castro forces in the US began a campaign to have Castro extradited to the US and tried for various alleged crimes including genocide. In mid-October, eight members of Congress petitioned President Bill Clinton to ask the Spanish government to extradite Castro, who stopped in Madrid en route to Portugal for the Ibero-American Summit. Among the crimes he should be tried for is the "assassination of US citizens in the Florida Straits Feb. 24, 1996," said the letter, referring to the downing of two Hermanos al Rescate planes by Cuban jet fighters (see NotiSur, 03/01/96). Signers of the petition include prominent anti-Castro leaders Reps. Lincoln Diaz Balart (R-FL), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), and Robert Menendez (D-NJ).

Exile organizations announced Oct. 21 that lawyers in the US and Spain were working on strategies to have Castro tried on the same charges that are being applied to Pinochet. Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) spokeswoman Ninoska Perez said a petition for Castro's extradition would be based on genocide, because "more than 10,000 persons were shot by Castro's government."

Roberto Rodriguez, president of the Junta Patriótica Cubana, said, "It's the best moment to do away with the international homosexuality practiced by these countries who adulate Castro, who even decorate him with medals." According to a Miami Herald report, Miami businessman Gustavo Villoldo began a campaign to extradite Castro seven months ago and raised US$32,000 to support the effort. He has collected information on alleged human rights violations from Miami-area residents and says 56 of the worst cases might be used in an action against Castro.

Experts in international law pointed out, however, that only nations can bring charges in an international court and neither Cuba nor the countries Castro visits are likely to extradite him to stand trial in the US. The Wall Street Journal also called for Castro's arrest. An editorial argued that Pinochet led a military revolt that saved Chile from becoming a communist beachhead and transformed the country into a model for the free-market economy. The "exaggerated" charges against Pinochet pale alongside Castro's "assassinations and violations of human rights," said the editorial.

Meanwhile, Castro said from Madrid that Pinochet's arrest was legally questionable but "morally just." Politically, "I worry that the action in London could make him a martyr for the armed forces and divide the progressive forces." Cuban funds frozen in US cannot be used to settle lawsuit In December 1997, Miami federal district Judge James Lawrence King ordered the Cuban government to pay families of three men killed in the 1996 Hermanos al Rescate incident US$187.6 million in damages.

The Cuban government, which was not represented at the trial, said the court did not have jurisdiction in the matter. Lawyers for the families then successfully petitioned the same court to recover the judgement from Cuban funds frozen in the US. They based their argument on a provision in a congressional appropriations bill that permits complainants to collect judgements against certain countries from assets frozen by the Treasury Department in US banks. Though he signed the bill, Clinton issued an order preventing access to such funds on grounds of national security. Responding to Judge King's ruling, Michael Ranneberger, coordinator of the State
Department's Office for Cuban Affairs, said the funds could not be used for settling lawsuits. One of the lawyers for the families said the decision "gives the impression that the US government is protecting the interests of the regime in Havana."

But Ranneberger defended the State Department decision, noting that Clinton's order preventing access to the frozen funds went beyond Cuban policy. Awarding funds to families in the Miami case could have repercussions on US policy involving other countries whose US bank accounts are also frozen, such as Syria, Iran, and Libya. He said the US government was disappointed in statements by the families criticizing the decision and reminded them that Clinton took strong action against Cuba after the Hermanos incident, signing the Helms-Burton Act and authorizing US$1.2 million in humanitarian assistance to the families.

Castro admits Cuba sends spies to US

On Oct. 2, a Miami grand jury indicted the 10 Cuban nationals arrested in September on espionage charges (see NotiCen, 09/24/98). Three of the defendants were indicted for conspiracy to deliver national defense secrets to Cuba. Seven others were indicted on the lesser charge of acting as agents of a foreign power without notifying the US government. Five of the 10 have accepted plea-bargain arrangements under which they are to testify against the other five in exchange for leniency. US prosecutors have asked the court to keep some records pertinent to the case secret for national security reasons.

Defense attorneys have complained that the secrecy, court-ordered background checks of all attorneys in the case, and slow pace with which the government is turning its evidence over to the defense are causing unacceptable delays. Cuba's reaction to the arrests was initially ambiguous. Without exactly denying the charges, Foreign Relations Minister Roberto Robaina dismissed the US accusations against the 10 Cuban nationals during a session at the UN. In remarks before the General Assembly, he said, "The most ridiculous and laughable thing that has happened recently in [the US]...is that the biggest spy in the world the US accuses Cuba the most spied upon country in the world of spying."

However, in a televised interview Oct. 20, Castro dispensed with the ambiguity and told CNN that Cuba had placed spies in the US. He denied, however, that Cuban spies were after US military secrets. "Yes, we have sometimes dispatched Cuban citizens to the US to infiltrate counterrevolutionary organizations, to inform us about activities that are of great interest to us." Castro said Cuba was not interested in strategic matters or military bases and said that the US sent spies to Cuba in "industrial quantities." He accused the US of permitting terrorists to launch attacks against Cuba from US territory a charge that State Department spokesman James Rubin called "ridiculous."

Castro's admission was soon followed by a statement from Foreign Ministry spokesman Alejandro Gonzalez, who said that as long as US policy remains hostile toward Cuba, the Cuban government has the right to take "preventive measures" such as intelligence-gathering operations. Fernando Rojas, a spokesman for the CANF, said the interview was an admission that Castro exports violence to the US and is therefore a threat to national security. [Sources: Inter Press Service, 12/18/97; Spanish news service EFE, 10/14/98, 10/16/98; La Prensa (Nicaragua), CNN, 10/18/98; The Wall Street
Journal (New York), 10/20/98; Granma International (Cuba), 10/21/98; El Nuevo Herald (Miami), Reuters, 10/22/98; Notimex, 10/10/98, 10/15/98, 10/22/98; El Nuevo Herald (Miami), 10/11/98, 10/18/98, 10/22/98; The Miami Herald, 10/22/98, 10/27/98; Spanish news service EFE, 10/16/98, 10/20/87, 10/29/98]

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