

# the interreligious foundation for community organization

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## BUSH'S NEW MEASURES; WASHINGTON AND CUBA – A LEGISLATIVE UPDATE FROM IFCO/PASTORS FOR PEACE 6/14/2004

The Bush administration's policy toward Cuba is best described as *regime change*, pure and simple. This has been official US policy since Helms/Burton passed in 1996; but with Bush's team in power, the threats and provocations have escalated. The Bush administration is about to begin to implement 500 pages of recommendations from the unprecedented 'Presidential Commission For Assistance to a Free Cuba,' designed to "hasten the end of the Cuban dictatorship." Among their plans:

- < **\$36 million** in additional funding to try to organize an internal opposition movement in Cuba – what they call "*strengthening Cuban civil society*" — with special attention to so-called 'dissident' groups, to women, youth, and Afro-Cubans, NGOs, the religious sector, 'independent libraries,' and 'independent labor unions.' It is worth noting that USAID has already spent more than \$26 million for this purpose (\$7 million in the current year alone), and that the US Interests Section in Havana has long been active in supporting and organizing the so-called 'dissidents.'
- < **\$18 million** to acquire and outfit a **C-130** military cargo plane to fly in a continuous loop around Cuba and broadcast US propaganda into Cuba by means of Radio/TV Martí. Not only is this a flagrant violation of international law – we also worry about the day that the C-130 'accidentally' flies a little too close to Cuban airspace and creates a provocation that may start a war.
- < **\$5 million** to 'internationalize' the blockade, through 'public diplomacy' efforts to persuade 3rd country audiences to support US policy on Cuba, raise \$\$ for Cuban opposition groups, etc.
- < **Increased restrictions on travel and remittances to Cuba:** Unlicensed travelers would be subject to increased 'inspection and identification.' Licensed educational travel would be limited to semester-long programs. Exemptions for 'fully hosted travel' would be eliminated. Restrictions on money spent by US visitors in Cuba (for travel expenses, rum, cigars, even overweight luggage) would be tightened. Remittances of money to Cubans would also be further restricted.
- < **New restrictions on Cuban-Americans' travel:** Cuban-Americans would now be permitted to travel to Cuba *only once every three years*; only to visit immediate relatives (parent, grandparent, sibling, child – but not uncle, aunt, or cousin); only to stay for 14 days; only to spend \$50/day; and only by applying for a specific US Treasury license.

**Bush's new measures have been almost universally denounced** as draconian, reckless, wasteful, and offensive to morality and international law. Countless newspapers have editorialized against the plan – and even the best-known Cuban 'dissidents' have denounced Bush's blatant US attempt to interfere in Cuba's internal affairs. But most significant is the loud complaint from one of Bush's supposedly most faithful constituencies: **500 Cuban-Americans attended a press conference in Miami to denounce Bush's new measures.** They complained about Bush's arrogance in trying to redefine the Cuban concept of family, and his utter insensitivity to the needs of their relatives.

Secretary of State Colin Powell chaired the Presidential Commission which formulated this dreadful plan; at the same time their report was being released, Powell's long-time chief of staff was quoted in *GQ (May-June/04)* saying that US policy toward Cuba is the **'dumbest policy on the face of the earth. It's crazy.'** Even Cuban-American Rep. Robert Menendez (D-NJ) complained that the Bush administration was 'playing election-year politics with the lives of the Cuban people.' Members of Congress also responded quickly to Bush's outrageous new measures: On May 20, members of the Senate and House 'Cuba Working Groups' presented a new bill, the 'Cuba Sanctions Reform Act of 2004' (S2449/HR4457), under which sanctions against Cuba would automatically expire – unless the Congress votes to re-approve them every year.

Bush's new measures were supposed to be implemented starting June 1. After the large public outcry – especially from Miami – implementation was postponed, supposedly until July 1. And we suppose it might still be possible that Bush's draconian plan will be further delayed – **if we make a big enough uproar.** That's why we're asking you to organize your local networks to **call your Congressional rep and senators and let them know you're outraged by Bush's dangerous and offensive new measures against Cuba. Ask them to support the bills described below, and to do whatever they can to stop Bush's new measures from being implemented.**

Of course, Bush's new measures are just the latest in a series of provocations. In recent months, the US canceled the immigration talks, which were the only remaining avenue for productive bilateral dialogue. Twenty Cuban diplomats were expelled from their US posts last year without justification. False accusations concerning biological weapons and money laundering have recurred. US support for Radio/TV Martí has increased. Scientific exchanges have been cut. Cuban artists, religious leaders, and others have been denied visas to visit the US. Enforcement of travel restrictions has escalated dramatically. Recently 500 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) personnel were diverted from their other responsibilities in 'the US war on terror' to interrogate 54,000 travelers to Cuba, most of them on US-approved charter flights. And the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control told a Senate committee that at the end of 2003 it had just *four* full-time staff tracking the assets of Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein – and nearly *two dozen* working on Cuba embargo violations. These are just the more visible features of this Foreign Policy Gone Mad: meanwhile Bush's infamous team (Roger Noriega, *et.al.*) is working unchecked behind the scenes to find new ways to destabilize Cuba – and wishing that they could do to Fidel what they were recently able to do to Aristede.

On the positive side, 400 US businesspeople from 115 companies were in Cuba in late April for a trade conference, and signed contracts for \$172 million in new agricultural sales (mostly for corn, soy, rice, chicken, wheat, paper, and eggs). Nearly \$850 million in business has been contracted in two years – and all of it transacted in cash. Companies from 35 states have been involved; shipments have gone out from 50 different US ports. Another positive note: the Congressional majority in favor of lifting travel restrictions to Cuba is still firmly in place.

While it's unlikely that new legislation on Cuba will be enacted in this election year, our task for now is to make sure that our elected officials don't ignore or forget about Cuba – to keep them interested, and to help keep that 'critical mass' majority in place. ***You can help by making sure your reps and senators sign on to co-sponsor the three bills listed on the next page.*** It's urgent that we work on getting new co-sponsors for these bills – in hopes that the legislative climate will change after the election and new progress can be made. Which leads us to our last item:

***"THE KERRY FACTOR."*** We recently had a chance to meet with Sen. John Kerry's foreign policy advisor, who's been working for him on the International Relations Committee for 18 years. What we found most encouraging was her description of Kerry's style in dealing with the foreign policy issue to which Kerry has been

most devoted: normalization of relations with Vietnam. She described Kerry as someone who is inclined always to open doors; to engage in dialogue; to go to visit, and to invite counterparts to visit. She indicated that Kerry views political processes as a dialectic: that he would be unlikely to announce a specific policy goal at the outset, because he would rather see how the process develops, how one party responds to initiatives by the other, etc. For example, they started in Vietnam with a Fulbright scholarship program – something that seemed small at the time, but which opened doors that kept leading to new diplomatic opportunities. With regard to Kerry’s goals for US/Cuba relations, we’re sure they’re not exactly the same as ours – but at least it seems clear that Kerry would initiate a review of current policy, that he would be open to dialogue with Cuba, and that he would not be so aggressive as the current administration. It also seems very likely that Kerry would move to end the travel ban as early as possible. **Here are three things that we need to remind John Kerry:**

**1) Stay consistent on ending the ban on travel to Cuba!** Kerry has consistently voted in favor of lifting travel restrictions, and Bush is hoping to catch him in another ‘flip-flop’: so it’s important to encourage Kerry to stay consistent on this issue. Remind him that a majority of Congress, a majority of Cuban-Americans, a majority of the US people in general favor ending the travel ban.

**2) Iran-Contra revisited.** It has been said that Kerry hasn’t done much on Latin America issues – but some of us remember that he was an important voice in the Iran-Contra hearings. Kerry may need to be reminded that many of the people he was indicting and investigating back then – Negroponte, Poindexter, Eliot Abrams, and that whole crew – are now running US foreign policy again – and we want them out!

**3) Pandering to the right-wing Cuban-American Florida vote will get Kerry NOWHERE.** Analysts agree that the Haitian vote and the non-Cuban Latino vote (mostly Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Central American, mostly near Tampa and Orlando) are the key and growing constituencies in Florida this year; and that the key ‘swing states’ this year will be the midwestern farm states.

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**CURRENT LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS ON CUBA: GET YOUR REPS TO SIGN ON!**

**1) TAKE CONTROL OF CUBA POLICY AWAY FROM BUSH:**

**Ask your senators to co-sponsor S2449:** THE CUBA SANCTIONS REFORM ACT OF 2004, introduced by Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT), which allows all Cuba sanctions to expire one year after enactment unless renewed by a vote of Congress. **Ask your rep to co-sponsor HR4457,** the comparable House bill, introduced by Rep. Butch Otter (R-ID). Co-sponsors are listed below.

**2) LIFT TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS TO CUBA:**

**Ask your senators to co-sponsor S950:** THE FREEDOM TO TRAVEL TO CUBA ACT OF 2003, which would end restrictions on travel to Cuba. Ask them to call Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY) to sign on to the bill, which currently has 35 co-sponsors (listed below). **Ask your representative to co-sponsor HR2071,** the corresponding House bill, THE ‘EXPORT FREEDOM TO CUBA’ ACT OF 2003, which also would end restrictions on travel to Cuba. (We don’t like the title of this bill: but the text of the bill is ok...) Ask your rep to call Rep Jeff Flake (R-AZ) to sign on to the bill, which currently has 87 co-sponsors (listed below).

**3) THE ‘BRIDGES’ BILL:**

THE BRIDGES TO THE CUBAN PEOPLE ACT OF 2003 (**HR3422**) was reintroduced by Rep. José Serrano (D-NY), and currently has 60 House cosponsors (listed below). The bill has not yet been reintroduced in the Senate. The strategy behind the Bridges bill is to include a number of elements which represent positive and nonthreatening bilateral relations, and to get as many co-sponsors as possible, in order to build a broad-based House coalition in favor of normalized relations with Cuba. Right now, the Bridges bill has only half as many co-sponsors as it did in the last Congressional session: please ask your rep to sign on! The Bridges bill would:

end prohibitions on exports of any agricultural commodity, farm equipment, medicine, medical device, assistive technology device (for the disabled), personal care products, or products for use by children; eliminate the

Torricelli shipping penalties; call for a study to remove credit restrictions and improve trade; repeal the codification of the trade embargo into law, which was instituted in Helms/Burton; allow the President to waive *any* title of Helms/Burton, not just the infamous Title III; allow importation to the US of Cuban medicines or medical devices not available in the US; prohibit the Treasury Department from limiting remittances to Cuba; repeal Section 211, which prohibits financial transactions for intellectual property; require expedited security checks for visa requests by Cuban professional musicians, artists, religious leaders, scientists, scholars, educators, and persons requiring health care or with a demonstrated humanitarian need; allow Cuban nationals to enter the US to play professional sports and receive their pay normally (without having to defect or renounce their Cuban citizenship).

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**CO-SPONSORS OF CUBA-RELATED BILLS IN CONGRESS (as of June 14, 2004):  
GET YOUR REP AND SENATORS TO SIGN ON! *Call the Congressional switchboard: 202/225-3121***

**S2449: THE CUBA SANCTIONS REFORM ACT OF 2004**

*Introduced by Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT); co-sponsored by Sens. Craig (R-ID), Dorgan (D-ND), Enzi (R-WY), Murray (D-WA), Nelson (D-NE), Roberts (R-KS), Sununu (R-NH) (8 co-sponsors as of 6/14/04)*

**HR4457: THE CUBA SANCTIONS REFORM ACT OF 2004**

*Introduced by Rep. Butch Otter (R-ID); co-sponsored by Reps. Berman (D-CA), Delahunt (D-MA), Emerson (R-MO), Farr (D-CA), Flake (R-AZ), Lee (D-CA), McGovern (D-MA), Nethercutt (R-WA), Schakowsky (D-IL) (10 co-sponsors as of 6/14/04)*

**S950: FREEDOM TO TRAVEL TO CUBA ACT OF 2003**

*Introduced by Sen. Enzi (R-WY); co-sponsored by Sens. Akaka (D-HI); Baucus (D-MT); Bingaman (D-NM), Bond (R-MO); Boxer (D-CA), Cantwell (D-WA), Chafee (R-RJ), Collins (R-ME), Craig (R-ID), Crapo (R-ID), Daschle (D-SD), Dayton (D-MN), Dodd (D-CT), Dorgan (D-ND), Durbin (D-IL), Feingold (D-WI), Feinstein (D-CA), Hagel (R-NE), Harkin (D-IA), Inouye (D-HI), Jeffords (I-VT), Johnson (D-SD), Kennedy (D-MA), Kerry (D-MA), Leahy (D-VT), Levin (D-MI), Lincoln (D-AR), Murray (D-WA), Nelson (D-NE), Pryor (D-AR), Reed (D-RI), Stabenow (D-MI), Sununu (R-NH), Talent (R-MO) (35 co-sponsors as of 6/14/04)*

**HR2071: EXPORT FREEDOM TO CUBA ACT OF 2003**

*Introduced by Rep. Flake (R-AZ); co-sponsored by Reps. Abercrombie (D-HI), Baird (D-WA), Baldwin (D-WI), Bell (D-TX), Berman (D-CA), Berry (D-AR), Biggert (R-IL), Boozman (R-AR), Brady (R-TX), Camp (R-MI), Carson (D-IN), Clay (D-MO), Costello (D-IL), Davis (D-IL), DeFazio (D-OR), Delahunt (D-MA), DeLauro (D-CT), Dooley (D-CA), Doyle (D-PA), Emerson (R-MO), Esboo (D-CA), Evans (D-IL), Farr (D-CA), Filner (D-CA), Frank (D-MA), Graves (R-MO), Gonzalez (D-TX), Greenwood (R-PA), Grijalva (D-AZ), Herger (R-CA), Hinchey (D-NY), Houghton (R-NY), Jackson Lee (D-TX), Johnson (R-IL), Kilpatrick (D-MI), Kind (D-WI), Kleczka (D-WI), LaHood (R-IL), Lampson (D-TX), Leach (R-LA), Lee (D-CA), Lynch (D-MA), Manzullo (R-IL), McCollum (D-MN), McDermott (D-WA), McGovern (D-MA), McNulty (D-NY), Moore (D-KS), Moran (R-KS), Nadler (D-NY), Nethercutt (R-WA), Norton (D-DC), Oberstar (D-MN), Olver (D-MA), Osborne (R-NE), Otter (R-ID), Pastor (D-AZ), Paul (R-TX), Payne (D-NJ), Peterson (D-MN), Price (D-NC), Ramstad (R-MN), Rangel (D-NY), Rehberg (R-MT), Ross (D-AR), Rush (D-IL), Ryan (R-WI), Sabo (D-WI), Sanders (I-VT), Schakowsky (D-IL), Shays (R-CT), Shimkus (R-IL), Smith (R-MI), Snyder (D-AR), Solis (D-CA), Stark (D-CA), Stenholm (D-TX), Tanner (D-TN), Terry (R-NE), Thompson (D-CA), Tiberi (R-OH), Tomns (D-NY), Udall (D-NM), VanHollen (D-MD), Whitfield (R-KY), Woolsey (D-CA) (87 co-sponsors as of 6/14/04)*

**HR3422: THE BRIDGES TO THE CUBAN PEOPLE ACT OF 2003**

*Introduced by Rep. Serrano (D-NY); co-sponsored by Reps. Abercrombie (D-HI), Allen (D-ME), Baird (D-WA), Baldwin (D-WI), Bishop (D-GA), Capuano (D-MA), Carson (D-OK), Carson (D-IN), Christensen (D-VI), Chyburn (D-SC), Conyers (D-MI), Crowley (D-NY), Davis (D-IL), Delahunt (D-MA), Esboo (D-CA), Evans (D-IL), Farr (D-CA), Frank (D-MA), Gonzalez (D-TX), Grijalva (D-AZ), Hinchey (D-NY), Jackson (D-IL), Johnson (D-TX), Jones (D-OH), Kilpatrick (D-MI), Kleczka (D-WI), Kucinich (D-OH), LaHood (R-IL), Lampson (D-TX), Leach (R-LA), Lee (D-CA), Matsui (D-CA), McCarthy (D-MO), McCollum (D-MN), McDermott (D-WA), McGovern (D-MA), McNulty (D-NY), Meeke (D-NY), Miller (D-CA), Moran (D-VA), Napolitano (D-CA), Oberstar (D-MN), Olver (D-MA), Owens (D-NY), Rangel (D-NY), Sabo (D-MN), Sanders (I-VT), Schakowsky (D-IL), Shays (R-CT), Stark (D-CA), Thompson (D-CA), Tomns (D-NY), Turner (D-TX), Van Hollen (D-MD), Velazquez (D-NY), Waters (D-CA), Watson (D-CA), Waxman (D-CA), Woolsey (D-CA) (60 co-sponsors as of 6/14/04)*

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***We hope you will use these legislative updates as an organizing tool to get your network involved in public advocacy. We also hope you'll keep your elected representatives informed on the Cuba issue. Let them know you expect them to work for continued progress on travel and trade; that Cuba needs to be taken off the list of so-called 'state sponsors of terrorism'; that Cuba is not an enemy or a threat! We'll do our best to keep you posted as new developments arise.***