

Steps to Freedom



**A Comparative Analysis of
Civic Resistance Actions in Cuba
from February 2003 to January 2004**

First Edition: August 2004

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Cover: The “Ladies in White” carry out a procession through the streets of Havana to protest their husbands’ imprisonment. (Photo: Reuters)

Back cover: The “Ladies in White” leave church, where they attend mass every Sunday to pray for the liberation of their loved ones. (Photo: The Associated Press)

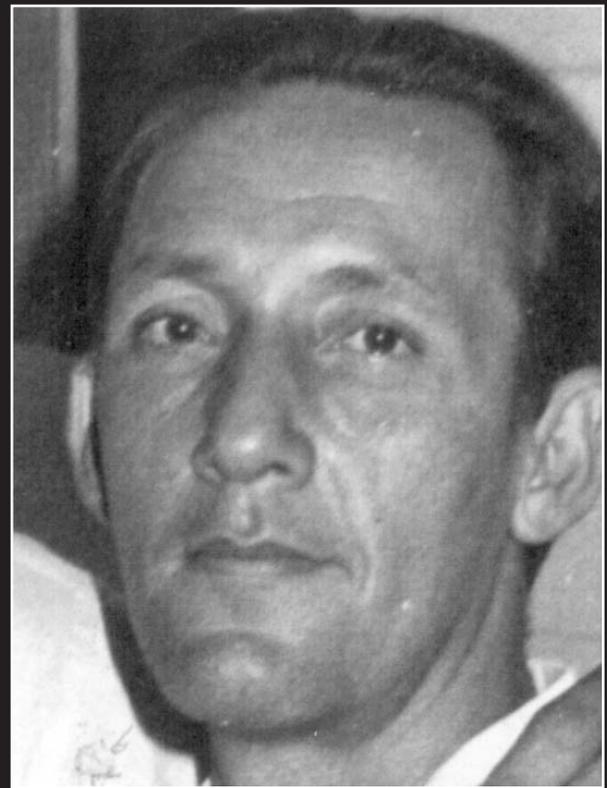


"Unity among the families of political prisoners has favored us greatly and has made us strong. Together, on several occasions, we have accomplished saving the lives of many people we hold dear who are imprisoned."

**Bertha Antúnez
Sister of political prisoner
Jorge Luis García Pérez
("Antúnez")**

"My struggle is to convince all parties of the necessity of withdrawing their support from both those who want to sink the island into the ocean, and those who are fixed on revenge, for what lies above these mean interests is the Cuban nation, which is the community of interests and individual rights of an entire people."

**Political prisoner Francisco
Chaviano González,
Combinado del Este**



Major Accomplishments of the Cuban Civic Resistance in 2003



Carried out 1,328 civic nonviolent actions.

Submitted 14,384 additional signatures in support of the Varela Project to the Cuban state.

Carried out 664 vigils throughout the island as part of the Freedom Without Forced Exile for Political Prisoners campaign.

Mothers, wives and relatives of political prisoners carried out 131 activities in support of their imprisoned loved ones.

The Alternative Disident Club (PEDAL) held 53 public meetings.

Founded 10 independent labor unions to provide counsel and information to workers.

Founded 8 independent libraries.

Published 17 independent publications.

Presented 36 points to rescue the country from its national crisis (presented by *Todos Unidos*)

"We condemn these acts [the crackdown on the opposition] because we consider them an assault on freedom and life. Citizens should denounce injustice and crimes against humanity, regardless of where they may come from or who may commit them," Spanish artists and intellectuals Fernando Trueba, Pedro Almodovar, Pilar and Javier Barden, Joan Manuel Serrat, and several others state in a signed manifesto. The artists affirmed their solidarity with the Cuban people, with those who "survive inside the island and out of the island but not with those who have usurped for too long their representation and have silenced their voices."

— Published by The Associated Press, April 28, 2003.

"What we are seeing in Cuba is the product of years of a lukewarm international attitude toward a governmental system with a long anti-democratic history. It is time to raise our voices and demand the freedom of these journalists who make all of us privileged to be practicing journalism in civilized societies proud." —Andrés García, President of the Inter-American Press Society (SIP).

Steps To Freedom 2003

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Actions in Cuba From
February 2003 to January 2004



Cuban Democratic
Directorate



Center for the Study of a
National Option

This is a publication of the **Cuban Democratic Directorate** (“Directorio”) and the **Center for the Study of a National Option**.

The Cuban Democratic Directorate is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting democratic change in Cuba and respect for human rights. As part of its work, the Directorio sponsors publications and conferences in the United States, Latin America and Europe that contribute to the restoration of values of Cuban national culture and solidarity with the civic opposition in the island.

The Center for the Study of a National Option is a non-profit organization that aims to help rescue and rebuild the values, traditions and fundamental democratic civic concepts of the Republic of Cuba.

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INTRODUCTION

Contrary to the intentions of the Castro regime, the crackdown on human rights activists and independent journalists in March 2003 did not dismantle the dissident movement or stop the initiatives of the incipient independent civil society inside Cuba.

Despite the extraordinarily repressive conditions it faced in 2003, the Cuban opposition achieved the following:

- ➔ Inspired 14,384 more Cubans to sign the Varela Project, a citizen's petition for a constitutional referendum;
- ➔ United hundreds of activists in vigils and other events in support of political prisoners;
- ➔ Founded newsletters and independent publications and continued to publish previously existing independent publications;
- ➔ Resisted, even in horrid prison conditions, the state's relentless oppressive apparatus through hunger strikes, protests, and nonviolent resistance, with the public support of relatives. Together, these prisoners and their relatives have written one of the best chapters in Cuban history.

While it has been difficult to gather the information since many independent journalists, activists, and opposition leaders are now in prison, it has nevertheless been possible.

Had the arrests and summary trials of activists in March and April 2003 - now commonly called the "Cuban Spring" - not occurred, the likely outcome would have been an earlier publication of *Steps to Freedom 2003* with the impressive array of activities and projects that were projected for this year.

Today, we present an investigation that should prove valuable for the study of the social and political phenomena that occur in societies struggling to liberate themselves from oppression - an account, moreover, enriched by the example of hundreds of women who with courage and love have defied fear and have made their voices heard. The familiar names of activists, regional leaders, and national leaders that appeared in previous editions of *Steps to Freedom* will once again make an appearance here, but this time as the names of political prisoners who with dignity and intelligence have not allowed the regime to break their will. This is the case, for example, of the brothers Jose Daniel and Luis Enrique Ferrer Garcia, of young journalist Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta, and of Librado Linares. This is also the case of Miriam Leiva and Dolia Leal Francisco, as well as Claudia Marquez Linares and Bertha Antunez, among others.

This edition of *Steps To Freedom* has special significance. More than the habitual summary of nonviolent civic acts carried out by Cubans on the island throughout a particular year, it is the clear and authentic reply of Cubans who believe in and struggle for freedom

in Cuba to the government's insistent smear campaign. If the opposition in Cuba were a group of individuals disconnected from the aims of the general population, it would have disappeared after March 2003. But not only has it not disappeared, it has also increased its activism, because the unjust conditions that motivate them to struggle continue to afflict the country in an increasingly critical manner.

To say that the brutally enforced repression has not changed the patterns of the opposition's activities would be erroneous. The activities reported for 2003 reflect an overall tendency toward activities associated with political prisoners - acts of solidarity such as vigils, masses, and fasts, of which an important component were the Vigils for the Freedom Without Forced Exile Campaign launched in 2001 and strengthened and expanded in 2003. Another important nucleus of activism inside Cuba's growing civil society was comprised of the mothers, wives, and relatives of political prisoners who carried out processions, masses, meetings, and public statements and whose images and statements circulated throughout the globe.

In terms of activities of direct interaction with the population or that constitute alternative means of communication, the most relevant examples are the publication of the independent magazine *De Cuba* and the collection of more signatures for the Varela Project in the midst of the harsh repression. Other activities and publications anticipated for 2003, however, were not carried out, thus causing a decline in these types of activities as well as in cases of spontaneous and organized noncooperation.

In general, it can be said that the number of civil resistance activities grew, but some kinds of activities were repeated more than others. The number of protests and campaigns organized in homes grew, but the number of activities held in open daylight (in the street, in parks, and in bay fronts) decreased in comparison to the numbers in 2002.

The example of commitment given by the Cuban opposition movement was made evident in the resistance that was offered despite the direct, permanent, and systematic repression to which the activists on the island were subjected. What is surprising about the collected data is not the impact of the repression, or the methods used by the government to carry it out, but rather, the resolve of hundreds, or now thousands, of Cuban men and women to fight for a peaceful change to democracy.

Janisset Rivero
Miami, Florida
July 2004

A Vision of the Pro-Democracy Movement in Cuba

By Joaquin Cabezas de Leon



Joaquin Cabezas de Leon,
Camajuaní, Villa Clara

The pro-democracy movement, as an emerging phenomenon within Cuban society, has its own dynamics, peculiarities, and perspectives that stem from its having to act within a context where the political police tries to silence it with scientific rigor. Upon assessing its true value, we must not limit ourselves to a quantitative analysis, which may cause us to lose sight of its true significance. It is fundamental that we look at its qualitative aspects, as well - its nature and the complexity of the socio-cultural niche it has created in the last several years.

A precise estimation of Cuba's pro-democracy movement at a time of intensifying repression is best taken from the quality, depth, and maturity of its proposals, the diversity of its viewpoints, and the capacity to articulate initiatives from multiple perspectives.

The endogenous character of the pro-democracy

movement is explained from the fact that it is the consequence, result, and response to a number of problems that Cuban society encounters as well as the regime's own persevering immobility. In qualitative terms, its emergence and growth represent the awakening of alternative sectors within society in search of solutions to the national crisis. It is not an artificial construction made outside the island, disconnected from Cuba's reality, as the official government discourse claims (as if life had not already demonstrated that democracy is impossible to import if its essential values are not an intrinsic part of society). Vital and Promethean are the words that can be used to describe the nature of this movement emerging in a society caught within the labyrinth of its utopias and frustrations. To evaluate the pro-democracy movement means to understand the meaning of its potential. To paraphrase Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset, the pro-democracy movement is itself and its circumstances, and in the most constructive sense, to improve its circumstances is to save the nation.

Joaquin Cabezas de Leon is co-founder of the Cuban Reflection Movement, an independent study group based in Camajuaní, Cuba, and is currently the organization's project coordinator.



From left to right:
A group of human rights activists in Guantanamo; Rene Montes de Oca Martijas and members of the Pro Human Rights Party Affiliated to Andrei Sakharov Foundation meet in Havana.



Above, from left to right: Mothers and wives of political prisoners in Havana; Vladimiro Roca of the Social Democratic Party during a press conference; Alejandrina García de la Riva, wife of political prisoner Diosdado González reads an open letter to the international press.

Development of Nonviolent Civic Action

Cubans have continued to carry out civic resistance actions in Cuba during 2003 and early 2004 even though faced with the most brutal crackdowns on dissent in the last decade. Over 75 civic activists were arrested and incarcerated as a result of this crackdown.

An increase in actions has taken place, from 959 actions in 2002 to 1,328 actions in 2003. However, the number of **protest and persuasion actions** increased, and the number of actions of **intervention and noncooperation** decreased.

Prior editions of *Steps to Freedom* had documented a steady increase in protest and persuasion actions, which constitute the first phase of civic nonviolent struggle. This had been accompanied by a steady increase of intervention and noncooperation actions, which constitute more advanced stages of nonviolent struggle and are vital in eroding the pillars of support for totalitarian power.

During 2003 and early 2004 protest and persuasion actions comprised 88.4% of the total number of actions. The main type of protest and persuasion actions consisted of

Freedom without Forced Exile vigils. These vigils were initiated in 2001 but did not become nationally prominent until 2003, when the increased number of political prisoners motivated people and organizations from across the island to gather at 8 p.m. every Wednesday in demand of freedom for all political prisoners without their being forced to leave the country as exiles. Approximately 664 Freedom Without Forced Exile vigils/actions have taken place. They constitute 50% of all actions and 56% of the protest and persuasion actions.

Another important source of protest and persuasion actions have been the activities carried

out by the wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of the political prisoners. Among them are the masses held in different churches in Havana, the monthly meetings held by all the wives, as well as the prayer circles organized in Santiago de Cuba and Las Tunas. The family members, led by these courageous women, have also sent letters, made statements, and carried out fasts and sit-ins in front of the different prisons. These activities amount to 131 actions, which constitute 11.15% of the total number of protest and persuasion actions, and 9.8% of the sum total of actions carried out during 2003.

In addition to the Freedom Without Forced Exile vigils carried out by human rights activists across the island, other activities have been carried out in demand of freedom for the political prisoners. Some of these include protests during unjust trials, fasts in solidarity with the political prisoners, and sit-ins. These additional actions carried out in defense of the political prisoners amount to 76, which makes up 6.5% of the total number of protest and persuasion actions.



The Alternative Dissident Club (PEDAL) gathers in Havana's Central Park, where met every Monday to discuss topics such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, democracy, civil rights, and other related topics.

Within the prisons themselves political prisoners have carried out different types of protests, sometimes with the support of common prisoners. Among these actions we can find hunger strikes, declarations in protest, and noncooperation strikes. These make up 5.5% (65) of the protest and persuasion actions.

In general terms, the actions that have the release of political prisoners as their main objective, either carried out by activists or family members of political prisoners, amount to 936 actions, or 70.4% of the total number of actions found in *Steps 2003*.

Other important types of action have been the commemoration of anniversary dates,

remembrance of those fallen in the struggle for freedom, and the Alternative Dissident Club, known by its Spanish acronym PEDAL. These activities comprise 12.8% of the total number of actions and 12.7% of the total number of protest and persuasion actions (169 actions). The Alternative Dissident cultural encounters represent a new type of activity in which members of the general population participate and that are carried out on a regular basis.

Within this category we also find the commemoration of the three most important dates for the dissident movement: December 10th, which is International Human Rights Day, in which 34 actions were carried out, February 24th, which is both the anniversary of the start of Cuba's War of Independence and the anniversary of the shoot down of the Brothers to the Rescue airplanes, in which 31 activities were carried out, and July 13th, which commemorates the sinking of the March 13th tugboat, and during which 29 activities were carried out.

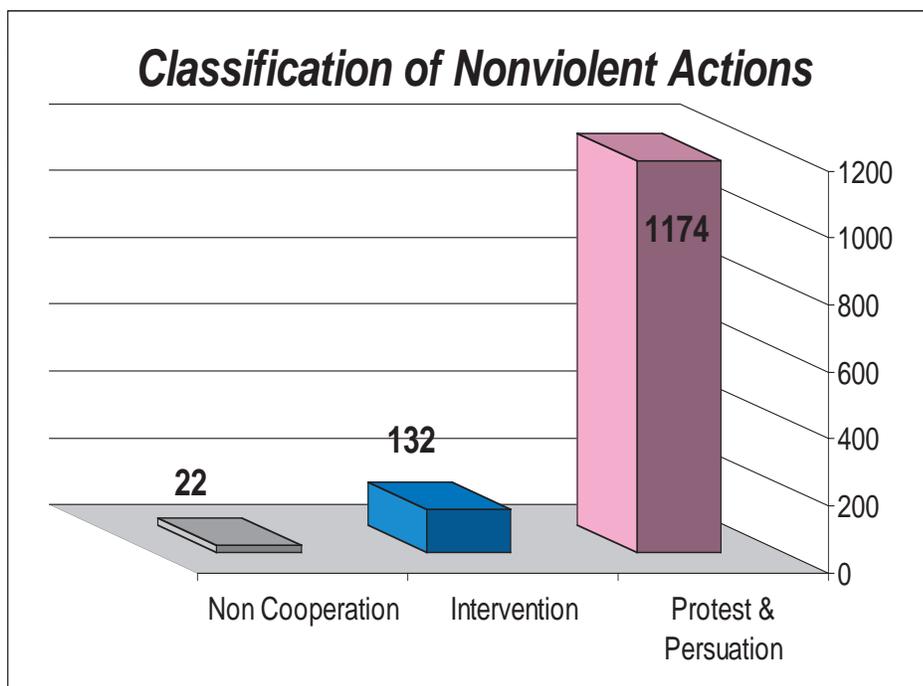
Also included in this year's *Steps to Freedom* is the presentation of the 14,384 signatures for the Varela Project in October 2003. The gathering of signatures for this petition for a national referendum constitutes a classic example of protest and persuasion, through which the general population has seen that it is possible to mobilize citizens in demand of respect for their fundamental human rights. The fact that these signatures were gathered and presented to the National Assembly of Popular Power seven months after the March 18th crackdown, is a further demonstration of how the civic movement has successfully countered the regime's repression.

Those actions that have been classified as **noncooperation** correspond to that phase in the civic struggle in which citizens withdraw their

cooperation from government initiatives and institutions. *Steps 2003* has documented 22 actions of this type during 2003 and early 2004. This constitutes a decrease from 2002, when 37 such actions were documented.

The actions within the category of noncooperation have been mostly organized, that is to say, actions in which one or more persons decide to withdraw cooperation in an organized manner. Thirteen actions were of this type. These 13 cases consist of political noncooperation within the prisons, 12 of which were carried out by political prisoners and one by a common prisoner. Within this same category there were six cases of actions of spontaneous political noncooperation, which

included students who refused to participate in National Defense Day activities and who did not join mandatory political activities in the classroom, or individuals who refused to testify at the trial of a political prisoner. The three remaining cases are those of economic



noncooperation, which consisted of workers who refused to follow government directives as well as the interesting case of doctors who resigned from their positions in protest over the extra long hours of service imposed by the regime due to the lack of available personnel as a result of the large numbers of Cuban doctors being sent to Venezuela.

The full effect of the March 18th crackdown on civic resistance can best be gauged in the category of actions classified as **intervention**. American scholar Gene Sharp has classified this type of action as successfully interrupting the directives of the ruling elite. The actions had increased significantly over the years. In 2001 there were 146 of these actions, which increased to 389 by 2002. They included hunger strikes, fasts, sit ins of family

members outside the prisons and the development of alternative means of printed communications, commonly referred to as samizdat.

That number fell to 132 in 2003. Of this total, 51 or 38.6% were carried out before March 18th. Fifty-one other actions were carried out between October 2003 and January 2004. The number dropped to 30 actions during March and October of 2003, right after the crackdown, with the lowest number taking place in June 2003.

However, it is important to point out that even though the number of actions decreased, they continued to be carried out. The publication of *De Cuba* magazine in September 2003 is an important example. Its publisher and chief editor, Ricardo Gonzalez and Raul Rivero, were each sentenced to 20 years in prison. Independent journalist Claudia Marquez Linares took it upon herself to continue with the publication of the magazine in spite of the pressure placed on her and her family by the State Security police.

The creation of alternative institutions is another type of action that falls under intervention. A total of 31 institutions, among them ten labor organizations were created. Perhaps the most significant of these was the National Center for Labor

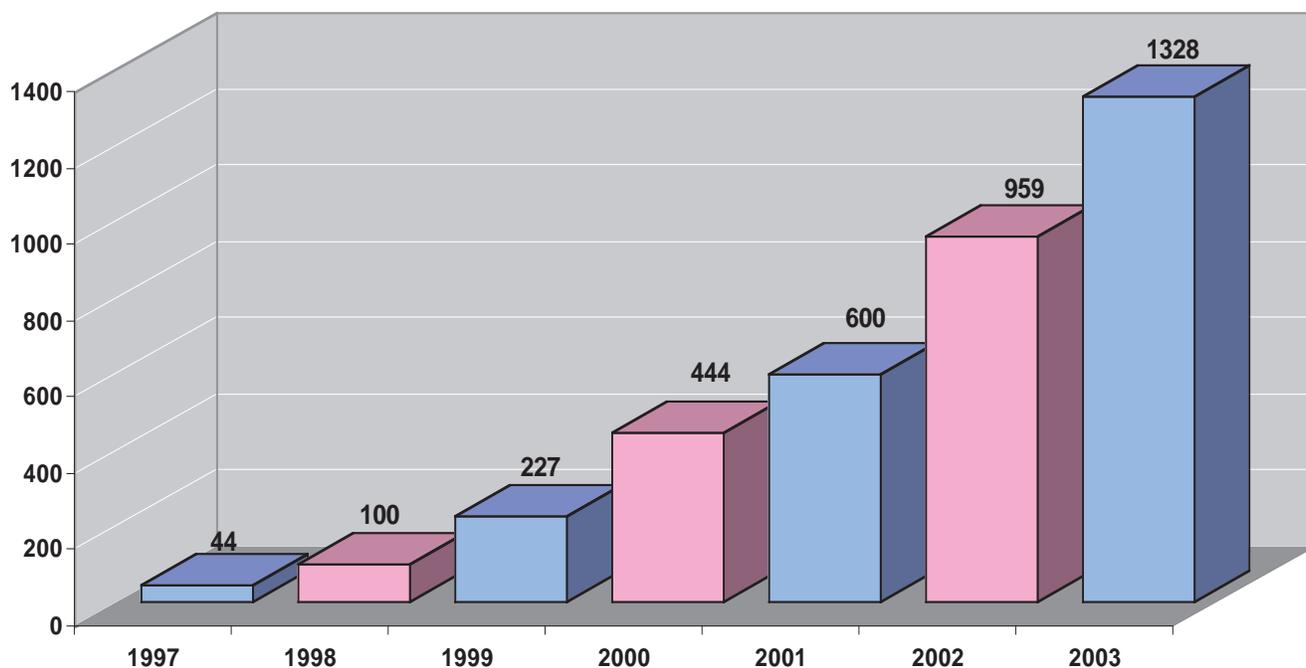
Education in Havana. Eight independent libraries, two social democratic clubs, the *Jóvenes Marginados* (Marginalized Youth) youth sports club, as well as other institutions dedicated to the defense of freedom of expression, as well as support for political prisoners and independent journalists were among the institutions founded during this year.

Dissident newsletters were both founded or continued publication, even within the prisons, such as *La Patria Libre* (The Free Homeland) newsletter in the Combinado del Este prison in Havana, and *Apocalipsis 2003* in the Kilo 8 prison in Camaguey.

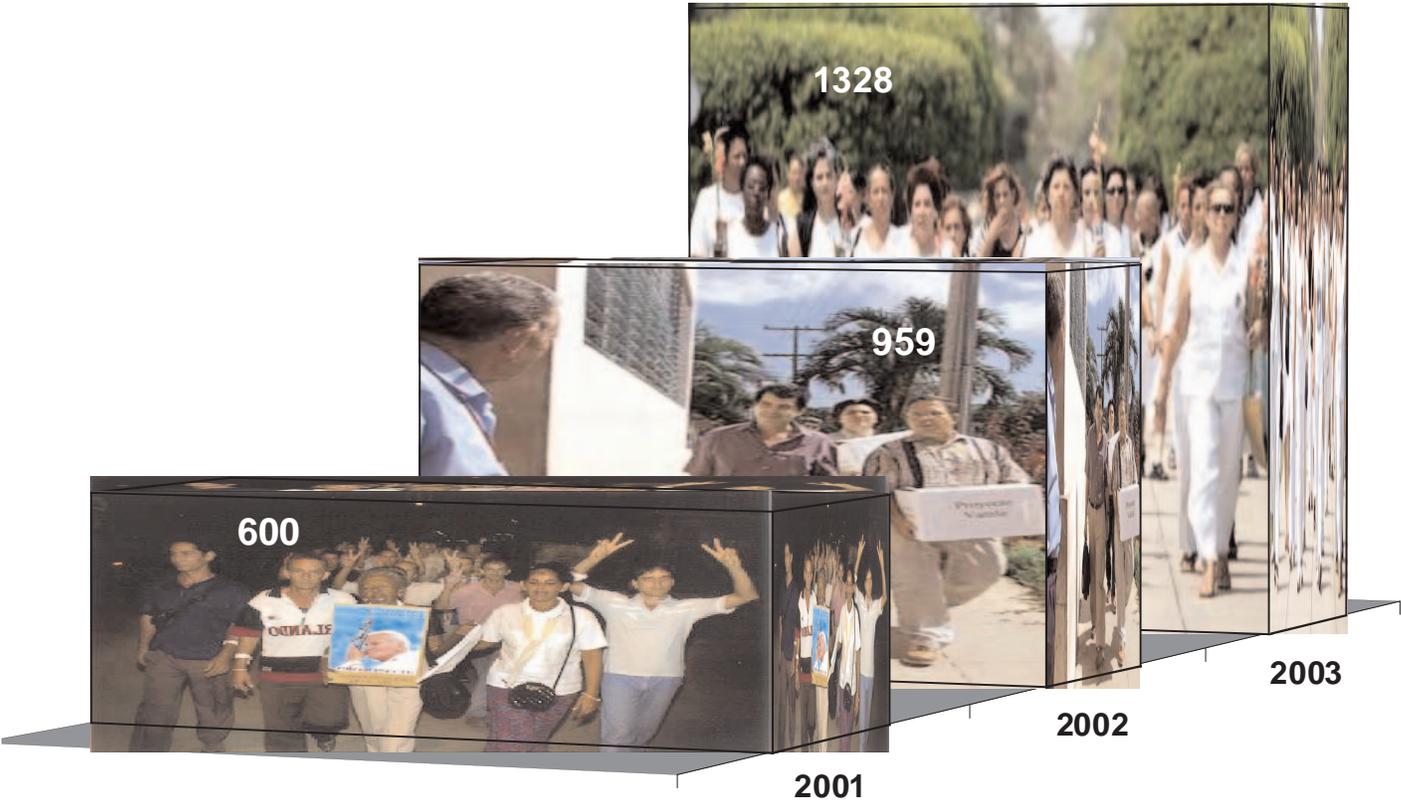
Both the presentation of the 14,384 signatures of the Varela Project and the new edition of *De Cuba* magazine clearly demonstrate that in spite of the harsh repression the pro-democracy movement has continued to both resist and grow.

Note: In this edition, due to a lack of space, we are not including a complete list of the civic actions carried out in Cuba in 2003, but they are available online at www.directorio.org

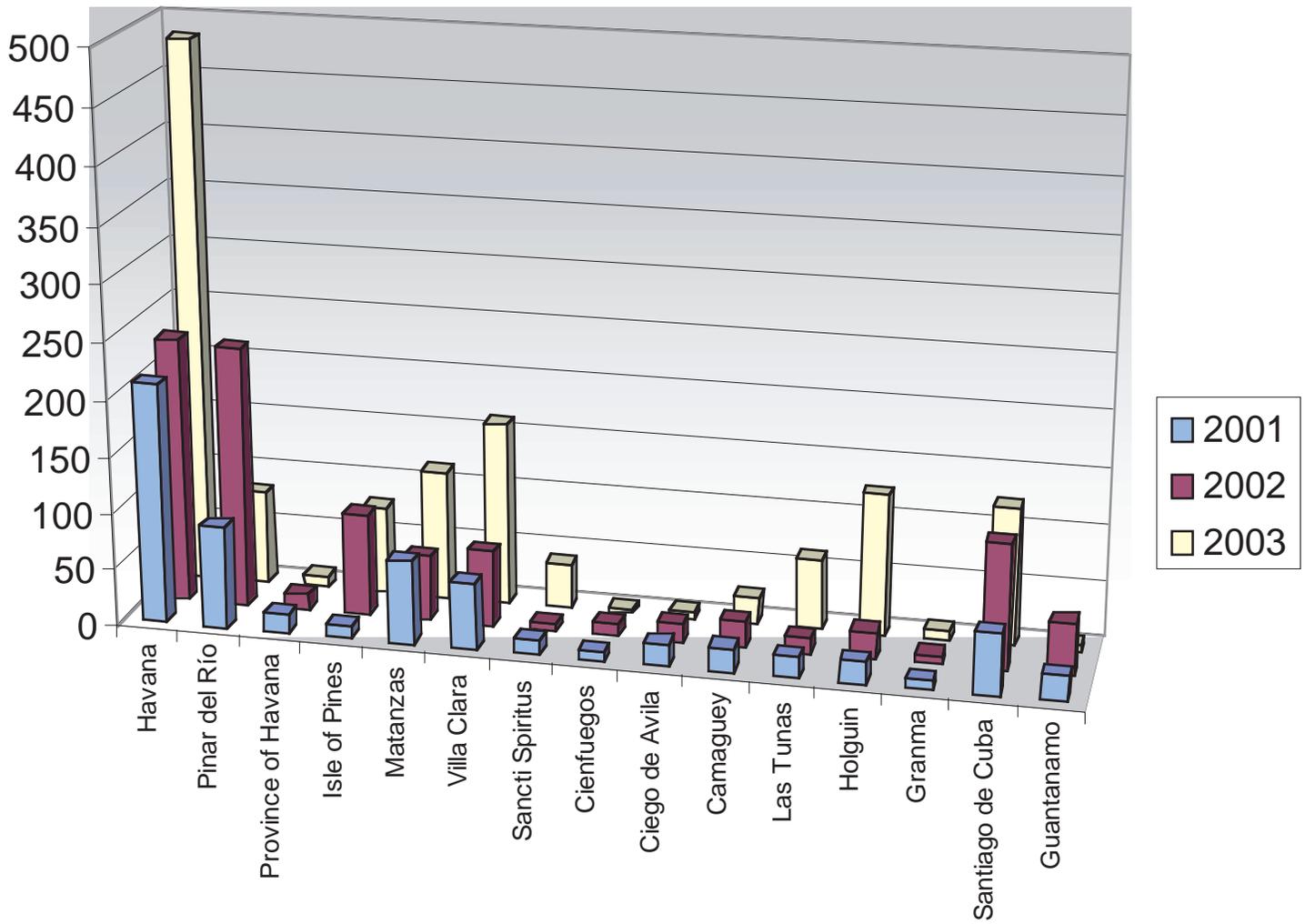
Growth in Civic Actions



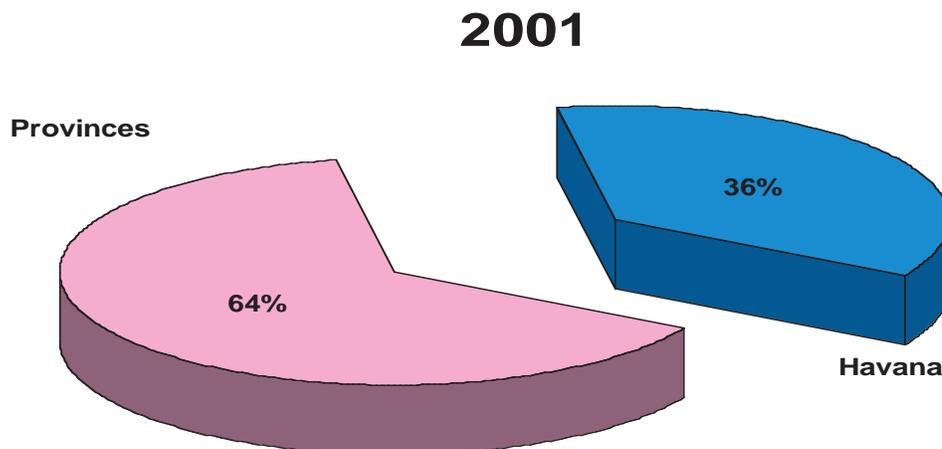
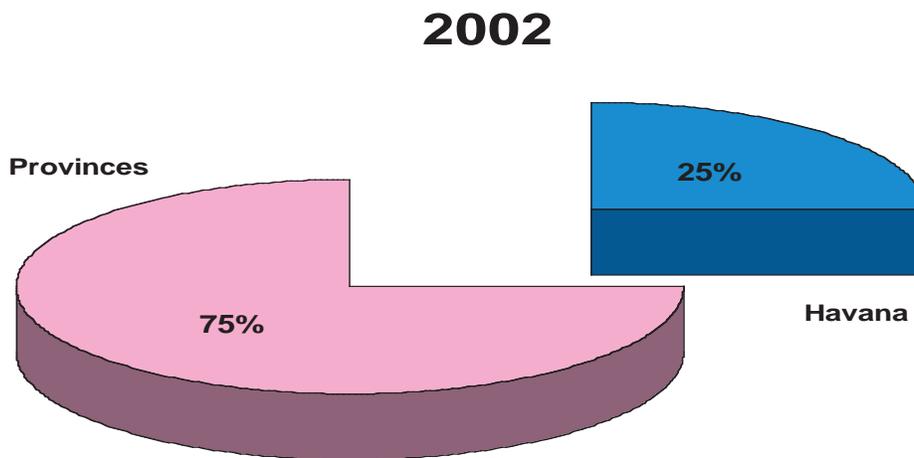
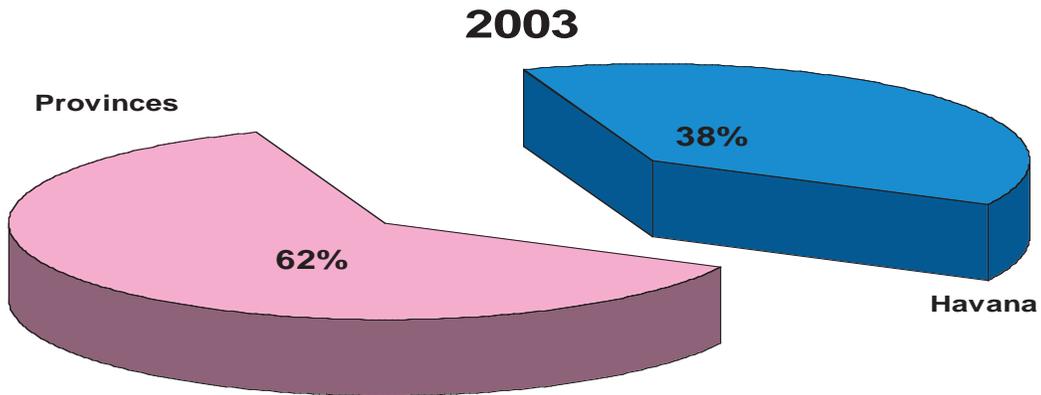
TOTAL GROWTH OF ACTIONS 2001-2003



Comparison of Civic Resistance Actions by Province



Percentage of Action in Havana vs. The Provinces



<i>New Institutions and Communication Systems</i>	<i>Number of New Institutions and Communication Systems</i>
Newsletters/Magazines (8 published in prison)	17
Independent Labor Organizations and Unions	10
Independent Libraries	8
Citizens Committee to Promote the Varela Project	3
Social Democratic Club	2
Freedom of Expression Foundation	1
Center of the Political Prisoner and Prisoner of Conscience	1
Santiago de Cuba Committee of Solidarity with Political Prisoners	1
Naturpaz Affiliate	1
Elena Mederos Foundation	1
<i>Jóvenes Marginados</i> (Youth Sports Club)	1
Association of Independent Journalists in Santiago de Cuba	1
"Carlos Quintela" Socio-political Study Group (Provincial Prison of Guantanamo)	1
"José Maceo" Independent Press Agency (Provincial Prison of Ariza, Cienfuegos)	1

<i>Projects and Symbolic Dates</i>	<i>Number of Projects and Symbolic Dates</i>
Varela Project	14,384 (signatures collected)
PEDAL – Alternative Dissident Club	53
Symbolic Date – December 10th International Day of Human Rights	34
Tribute to Victims – February 24th Shoot-down of Brothers to the Rescue planes	31
Tribute to Victims – July 13th <i>13 de marzo</i> Tug boat sinking	29
Escola Project	12
Tribute to Martyrs – Executed labor activists William Le Santé, Luis Orlirio Méendez, and Julio Casielles Amigo	6
Tribute to Victims – November 27, 1871 Execution of medical students by Spanish government	4
Tribute to Historical Figures – May 19th / January 28th -José Martí	3
Tribute to Historical Figures – December 7th Antonio Maceo	2
Tribute to Victims – September 11th Terrorist Attack on the Twin Towers	2
Tribute to deceased human rights activist Jesús Yánes Pelletier	2
Tribute to deceased human rights activist Sebastián Arcos Bergnes	1
Symbolic Date – May 20th Establishment of the Republic of Cuba	1
Symbolic Date – May 1st International Labor Day	1

A NEW TYPE OF RESISTANCE: *Families united for their loved ones...*

Women have always played an important role in the opposition movement in Cuba. Past editions of *Steps to Freedom* have documented the work of women such as Maritza Lugo, Bertha Antunez, Martha Beatriz Roque, Gisela Delgado and so many others who have not only participated in protests and acts of civic resistance of all kinds, but have also led organizations and worked as independent journalists.

Nevertheless, this year, after the March 2003 crackdown that sent 75 opposition activists and independent journalists to prison, women associated with the opposition have gained heightened visibility. The wives, mothers, sisters, and other relatives of imprisoned activists have banded together to denounce government repression and demand the liberation of their loved ones. In some cases, these women have joined with other women who were already involved with the opposition before the crackdown. Organized and working in coordination, they have demonstrated outstanding leadership throughout the difficult year of 2003, helping to keep the opposition alive as organizations recover from the loss of some of their leaders and members, as well as the confiscation of much of their equipment and material.



The "Ladies in White" attend mass every Sunday in Havana to protest their husbands' imprisonment.

Of the 1,328 total civic resistance actions which took place this year, 131 were carried out by the relatives of political prisoners, most often their wives, mothers, or sisters demanding a right, denouncing an abuse, or calling for their liberation. This number does not include the weekly vigils held as part of the Freedom Without Forced Exile campaign for political prisoners (664 vigils in total), which were also frequently carried out by the wives and mothers of the imprisoned activists. For example, **Bertha Antunez in Placetas, Villa Clara; Milka Peña in Puerto Padre, Las Tunas; Maria Caridad Noa in Caibarien, Villa Clara; Soledad ("Iraida") Rivas in Havana, and Belkis Cantillo in Palmarito de Cauto, Santiago de Cuba** are only some of the many examples of female relatives of political prisoners who held the Freedom Without Forced Exile vigils after their loved ones had been imprisoned. They have continued to work to defend human and civil rights even though their loved ones are in prison.

'Ladies in White'

One group in particular that stands out for its leadership is the Leonor Perez Committee of



Members of the Leonor Perez Committee and other relatives of political prisoners carry out a fast.

(Photo: Reuters)

Mothers (*Comité de Madres Leonor Perez*). This group began its work before the crackdown, in 2002, when mothers and wives of political prisoners decided to meet to pray for their relatives. The women established a custom of attending mass every Sunday at the Church of St. Rita in Havana dressed in white. They also began working in an organized manner to demand a general amnesty and advise the families of political prisoners on how to file complaints with the government when any abuses or violations had taken place in the prisons.

Since the crackdown, the women of the Leonor Perez Committee have been joined by other relatives of political prisoners, all of whom have come to be called the "Ladies in White." In 2003, the committee began to attend mass at different churches throughout Havana as a way of spreading their petition for a general amnesty and also sharing their pain with different parishes. Some women whose relatives have served their sentences and are now free continue to participate with the committee. They have maintained the tradition of dressing in white, with black scarves (to symbolize mourning) and they carry out a procession before and after the ceremony, walking down Fifth Avenue as a group. The result has been much press coverage and international sympathy.

Overall, women in the Cuban opposition have made it customary to dress in white when carrying out any kind of demonstration. Thus, they have managed to give a strong impression of unity as well as a clear message of the essentially civic and nonviolent work that both they and their imprisoned relatives represent.



Bárbara Elisa, wife of political prisoner Miguel Valdés Tamayo, shows a picture of her husband to Reuters.

Women Take Up the Torch

The Leonor Perez Committee of Mothers and the "Ladies in White" were not the only women who became key players in the opposition in 2003. Other women throughout the island also led important protests and civic resistance acts.

Just days before the crackdown, in Havana, Martha Beatriz Roque and five other prominent opposition leaders began an indefinite fast to demand



Elsa Morejón, wife of political prisoner Oscar Elías Biscet González, shows her husband's sentence to the foreign press in Havana. (Photo: The Associated Press)

the liberation of imprisoned physician and human rights activist Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet, as well as all other political prisoners. The fast received ample press coverage and support from several other organizations, which also began fasts in different cities throughout the

country to support it. On March 13th, Martha Beatriz also took part in an effort, along with Vladimiro Roca and Elizardo Sanchez, asking Cuba to be excluded from the Cotonou agreement with the European Union. She was arrested a week later during the crackdown.

As Dr. Biscet was confined underground repeatedly with no external communication or even access to sunlight, his wife Elsa Morejón, became his courageous champion, loudly denouncing the Cuban government's treatment to the international media. Morejón also became an active representative of the Lawton Foundation of Human Rights, the organization Biscet had founded and led.

In Santiago de Cuba, the wives and relatives of Jose Daniel Ferrer and Luis Enrique Ferrer (two brothers who were coordinators of the Varela Project and were given harsh sentences during the March 2003 crackdown), gathered a crowd of roughly 50 activists and relatives of other political prisoners from the eastern region of the country and carried out a procession to the shrine of Cuba's patron saint,



Belkis Bárzaga Lugo, sister of political prisoner Mijail Bárzaga Lugo, reads a letter from prison.

Our Lady of Charity, in C o b r e , Santiago de Cuba, on Sept. 8, 2003.

In addition, women in different parts of the country took up the 18th of every month as a significant, sym-

bolic date to carry out acts of protest. Beginning in April, in Puerto Padre, Las Tunas, activists and family members began to gather in the home of Luis Enrique Ferrer, on the 18th of every month to pray for him. In Palma Soriano, Santiago de Cuba, more than 20 relatives and fellow activists of Jose Daniel Ferrer - Varela Project coordinator in Santiago de Cuba who received a sentence of 25 years in prison - began attending the Church of the *Virgen del Rosario* (Church of Our Lady of the Rosary) on April 18th and continued this public form of prayer on the 18th of every month.

Also, in May, the wives of various political prisoners began meeting in the home of political prisoner Hector Maseda in Havana for a monthly gathering on the 18th they called the *Té Literario* (or Literary Tea). They discussed their experiences in coping with the absence of their imprisoned relatives, read letters from them, and exchanged information about the situation of different prisoners.

Oftentimes, the wives and relatives of political prisoners carried out actions in direct support of the acts of resistance being carried out within the prisons, engaging in activity of great risk to themselves. On Sept. 28, 2003, Milka María Peña, wife of political prisoner Luis Enrique Ferrer, placed a large sign on the front door of her house in the city of Puerto Padre demanding freedom for Cuban political prisoners. She placed a similar sign inside her house and did not remove either sign, despite a visit from State Security officers threatening her with reprisals. A group of women - mostly the wives and mothers of political prisoners - submitted a letter to the Council of State on

April 16, 2003, addressed to dictator Fidel Castro demanding an end to the death sentence and the elimination of the excessive sentences imposed on the activists and journalists imprisoned during the crackdown. Among the signatories were Gisela Delgado, Blanca Reyes, Claudia Marquez, and Dolia Leal. In August, a group of women sent a letter addressed to the Minister of the Interior General Abelardo Colomé Ibarra mentioning the hunger strikes being carried out in the Provincial Prison of Holguin and the Boniato Prison of Santiago de Cuba and denouncing the subhuman conditions in which the prisoners were kept.

Similarly, on Oct. 30, 2003, a group of mothers and wives of seven political prisoners on hunger strike at the Holguin Provincial Prison submitted a letter to the Council of State addressed to Fidel Castro informing him of the situation and holding the government responsible for anything that could happen to the prisoners. After receiving no response, they followed the letter with a sit-in at the Provincial Prison of Holguin on November 6, 2003. They demanded information and a satisfactory explanation about their relatives' situation. Officials told them they would speak to each woman separately, but they refused and demanded to be seen as a group. When the authorities did not accept their terms, they stayed outside the prison overnight until the prison director saw them. Ultimately, they were not allowed to see the prisoners and were only told that the hunger strike had already ended.

At the Combinado del Este Prison in Havana, Magalys Broche de la Cruz, wife of imprisoned activist Librado Linares Garcia, undertook a similar demonstration. Magalys arrived at the Combinado del Este on Nov. 27, 2003, and began a protest in a waiting room at the prison, demanding to see her husband or to be allowed to deliver food to him. After being refused, she visited the Office of Jails and Prisons the next day. Only then was she allowed to deliver the food supplies she had brought for him.

One of the pioneers of this form of protest at the prisons is Bertha Antunez, president of the Pedro Luis Boitel National Civic

Resistance Movement and sister of Jorge Luis Garcia Perez ("Antunez"), one of the longest-serving political prisoners in Cuba. For several years, Bertha Antunez has been carrying out sit-ins and protests in front of the prisons to demand better treatment for political prisoners. In February 2003, Bertha played a central role in organizing a protest that was carried in front of the Nieves Morejon Prison in Sancti Spiritus. Political prisoner Mario Alberto Perez Aguilera was on hunger strike, and several activists, along with his wife and sister, assembled outside of the prison in solidarity with his strike.

The women also showed political astuteness and coordination in requesting meetings with important international figures that visited the island throughout the year, such as Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the Archbishop Demetrios of the Greek Orthodox Church, the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches USA, and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. They coordinated and sent similar group petitions for moral solidarity to the Vatican, International Red Cross, and Nobel laureates for peace.

Other significant actions by the female relatives of political prisoners were the protests carried out on Dec. 10th, the International Human Rights Day. On this day, several events were held across the island, many of which were led or organized by women. Beginning at 6 a.m., a group of about 10 wives of political prisoners, dressed in white, met at the home of Gisela Delgado Sablon, director of the Project of Independent Libraries of Cuba, to carry out a 12-hour fast with prayers at 6 am, 12 pm, and 6 pm. Similar acts were held in the home of Ana Aguililla, wife of prisoner of conscience Francisco Chaviano, in Havana; Milka Maria Peña, activist and wife of Luis Enrique Ferrer in Puerto Padre, Las Tunas; and in the home of activist Julia Cecilia Delgado in El Cerro, Havana, which is also where the Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda Independent Library is based.

Other Important Actions by Women

It is interesting to note that one of the most

important acts of civic resistance in 2003 was carried out under the direction of two female activists. The publication of the third issue of the magazine *De Cuba* (Of Cuba), was not only highly significant and symbolic given the strong blow the independent journalism movement had received when 26 independent journalists were arrested during the crackdown; it was also an immense technical, logistical, and moral accomplishment. Houses had been raided, computers and fax machines confiscated. Journalists had lost the tools of their trade. Also, their colleagues were being sentenced to extremely high sentences for attempting to practice and express themselves freely. Despite these daunting circumstances, two journalists of the Manuel Marquez Sterling Society of Journalists, Claudia Marquez and Tania Quintero, coordinated the magazine's work and published a third issue only six months after the crackdown. The 52-page issue, which reproduced the Varela Project in its entirety as well as the 36 recommendations for reform drafted by the opposition coalition Todos Unidos (or "All United"), contains sections on economic, cultural, legal issues, and more.

Additionally, the Elena Mederos Foundation was founded in Pinar del Rio to support dissident activity in this province, particularly in the areas of Viñales, the city of Pinar del Rio, and Guane. The organization's directors at the time of its creation were all women.



From left to right: Claudia Márquez, wife of political prisoner Osvaldo Alfonso Valdes; Miriam Leiva, wife of political prisoner Oscar Espinosa Chepe; and Gisela Delgado, wife of political prisoner Hector Palacios Ruiz.

SOLIDARITY AND RESISTANCE: *The Call for a General Amnesty Brings Together Activists and Political Prisoners*

The female relatives of political prisoners were not the only ones consistently carrying out acts of civic resistance on behalf of imprisoned activists and dissidents. Organizations around the country centered many of their demonstrations on the liberation of political prisoners. In addition to the Freedom Without Forced Exile vigils for political prisoners performed on a weekly basis (664 vigils in total), organizations in different towns and cities throughout the island

also carried out an additional 76 activities for prisoners. These actions most often consisted of fasts, hunger strikes, religious ceremonies, group prayer, signed declarations of support, meetings, or other expressions intended to show solidarity, inform the population, and influence public opinion in

favor of political prisoners. One kind of action that cropped up repeatedly were protests or meetings carried out in conjunction with protests taking place in prison. Even when activities were not being carried out specifically for political prisoners, the prisoners were often mentioned or remembered, becoming a recurring theme of many if not most of the actions carried out by the opposition.

Two new organizations were created specifically with the purpose of helping political prisoners - the **Committee of Solidarity With Political Prisoners in the city of Santiago de Cuba** and the **Center of the Political Prisoner**

and Prisoner of Conscience (*Casa del Preso Político y de Conciencia*) in the municipality of Arroyo Naranjo, in Havana. The former was created by the Culture and Democracy Independent Institute and the latter by the Martí Civic League, the Movement for a Democratic Transition in Cuba, and the Pro Human Rights Party of Cuba. Both organizations were established to provide humanitarian support to political prisoners and their families.



The Peace, Love, and Freedom Party meets in Perico, Matanzas, and members make the "v" sign for victory. A sign on the wall in the back calls for the freedom of political prisoners.

Two protests stand out as significant activities that the opposition carried out in 2003 for political prisoners. In early March, members of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society, led by activist Martha Beatriz Roque, carried out a fast demanding the liberation of human rights activist **Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet** and

all other Cuban political prisoners. This demonstration elicited the support of organizations in different parts of the country that also began fasting to back the demonstration being held in Havana. Another protest for Dr. Biscet was also held on March 16th in front of the *Hijas de Galicia* Hospital in Havana, where Dr. Biscet once practiced as a doctor. Members of the 30th of November Frank Pais Democratic Party, "A Helping Hand" Project, and the Center of Activities for Democracy participated in the event, where they spoke about Biscet's activism and the fast that was taking place in Havana to demand his release.

Dozens of activists and citizens participated.

Also important were the demonstrations of support that members of the opposition carried out outside the courthouses where fellow activists were being tried. This was the case of members of the Pedro Luis Boitel National Civic Resistance Movement and other activists who attended the trials in March 2003 in Moa, Holguin, of **Arnaldo Nicot Roche** and **Angel Ramon Eireos**. They shouted in favor of human rights and openly protested their incarcerations.

Of the 1,328 total actions of civic resistance that were carried out in 2003, as many as 936 were carried out for or by political prisoners. This is an astonishing 70.4 % of all the actions. Clearly, after the crackdown, the opposition closed ranks behind their fellow activists in prison and felt an urgency to denounce the violations of fundamental rights that take place in Cuba.

Vigils for Freedom Without Forced Exile

One type of demonstration on behalf of political prisoners that saw astronomical growth in the year 2003 was the Freedom Without Forced Exile vigils. This initiative was launched in 2001 under the coordination of opposition groups inside Cuba and a Miami-based organization of former Cuban political prisoners, *Plantados Until Freedom and Democracy in Cuba*. It is a campaign that consists of candle-light vigils held every Wednesday evening in Cuba and in exile to call for the unconditional release of all Cuban political prisoners. It was called *Libertad sin destierro* (Freedom Without Banishment, or Forced Exile) to emphasize the right of prisoners to unconditional liberation, without having to

accept leaving the country in exchange for their freedom. In 2001, *Steps to Freedom* documented 39 vigils that were reported as part of the Freedom Without Forced Exile campaign. In 2002, this number grew to 179 vigils and an additional 22 fasts carried out as part of the campaign, totaling 201 actions of this kind. In 2003, the number grew to 664 vigils. What resulted, therefore, was an unexpected positive turn: protest actions continued and in fact, grew, despite the atmosphere of fear and the opposition's reduced physical possibilities of coordinating work. But



The Association of Independent Teachers held a vigil for the Freedom Without Forced Exile for Political Prisoners Campaign every Wednesday.

perhaps this is not so surprising considering that because of the crackdown, many organizations were directly affected, losing some of their members or their collaborators and colleagues from other organizations. Most likely, these circumstances have led to a renewed consciousness of the difficulties faced by political prisoners and their families and a subsequent refocusing of activities on helping or expressing support for them. It is also possible that because many organizations lost their leaders or equipment (or both) in the raids, their capacity to carry out actions of greater sophistication, increased public exposure, and a more direct challenge to the Castro

government - the kinds of acts that American nonviolent resistance expert Gene Sharp has classified as "intervention" or "noncooperation" - has been affected, while performing the vigils continues to be within their reach. Without a doubt, the fact that the protests continue signals a determination to keep working and the opposition's strength to recover and regenerate.

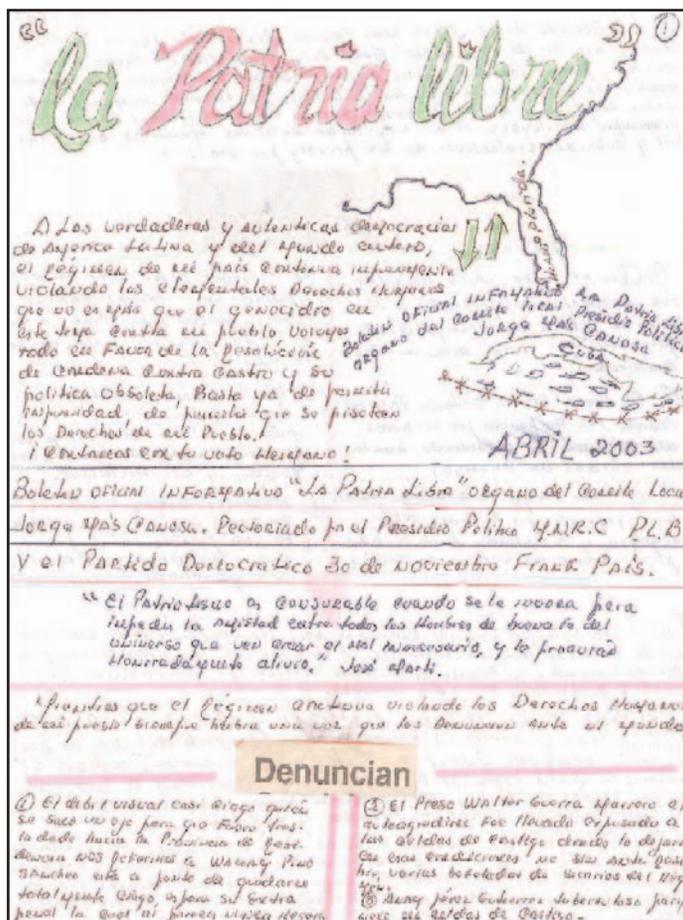
In the Prisons

Political prisoners themselves were also very active within the prisons, despite all the difficulties and dangers involved in openly opposing the government and attempting to express nonconformity or noncooperation in this environment. At times, common prisoners who had grown sympathetic to their situation joined these political prisoners in their protests. Two of the more common forms of protest were fasts and hunger strikes. With little in their possession to use as a way of showing their discontent, the political prisoners often-times abstained from solid food for long periods of time or skipped meals. In total, they carried out 28 hunger strikes or fasts in the prisons, on more than one occasion organizing groups of strikers, which received significant coverage in the press. They also carried out 11 acts of political noncooperation or refusal to comply with orders (there was also one additional instance of a common prisoner who assumed a stance of noncooperation); 12 protests (signed declarations, shouts, written slogans, etc.); and founded two new organizations within the prisons, the **Carlos Quintela Socio-Political Study Group** and the **Jose Maceo Independent Press Agency**. Political prisoners of the Combinado del Este in Havana managed to create at least 7 issues of the hand-made newsletter, *La Patria Libre* and the Sebastian Arcos Bergnes Association of Political Prisoners drafted a newsletter titled *Apocalypse 2003*, which reported prison conditions in the Kilo 8 Prison in Camagüey. There was also an incident reported where a bed sheet painted over with anti-governmental messages was exhibited outside a

window. In total, 65 acts of nonviolent resistance were carried out within the prisons.

Another interesting development of the actions carried out inside the prisons this year was the pronounced activism of "the 75," or the activists who were arrested during the March crackdown. Many of these prisoners continued their activism, at times capturing the attention from the media and international NGOs. On May 15, six political prisoners at the Provincial Prison of Holguin who were sentenced during the April 2003 trials began a hunger strike to demand medical attention for independent journalist Mario Enrique Mayo. Suffering from high blood pressure and other illnesses, Mayo had been denied his family visit, and the prisoners began the strike as a protest in his defense. The seven striking prisoners were **Adolfo Fernandez Sainz, Angel Moya Acosta, Antonio Diaz Sanchez, Arnaldo Ramos Lauzerique, Ivan Hernandez Carrillo, Alfredo Domingez, and Mario Enrique Mayo**. Also, in June, they sent letters to the prison director to denounce prison conditions and to a journalist of the national daily *Granma* urging her to write a story on prison conditions in Cuba. In August, at least four of these prisoners underwent another hunger strike to demand medical treatment for fellow inmates who were ill and protest prison authorities' refusal to allow Mario Enrique Mayo to receive the food brought to him by his wife. The strike ended after 10 days, when prison authorities agreed to give Mayo more adequate nutrition.

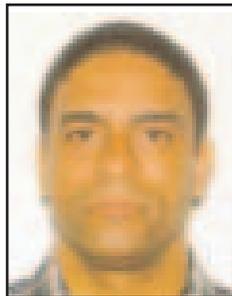
Similar group protests by imprisoned activists of "the 75" were also held at the Boniato



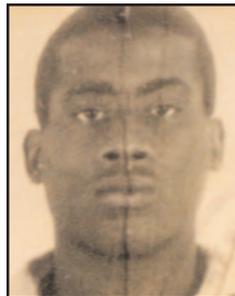
Political prisoners in the Combinado del Este prison in Havana have created several issues of *La Patria Libre* (The Free Homeland), which they distribute inside and out side the prisons.



Arnaldo Ramos
Lauzerique



Oscar Elías Biscet



Jorge Luis García
Pérez "Antúnez"



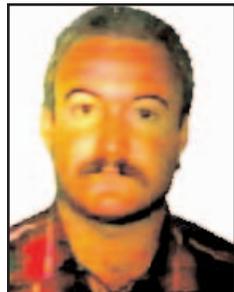
Angel Moya Acosta



Librado Linares
García



Adolfo Fernández
Saínez



Camilo Pérez
Villanueva



Antonio Villarreal
Acosta



Alfredo Domínguez
Batista

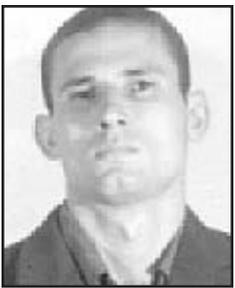


Normando
Hernández González

Prison in Santiago de Cuba. In August, six political prisoners addressed a letter to the prison director demanding better food and humane treatment (some prisoners were being kept in solitary confinement and were receiving rotten food). When their letter did not receive a response, they began a hunger strike. Organizations such as Reporters Without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists

issued statements condemning the authorities' treatment. Ultimately, the prisoners were separated and transferred to different prisons. The strikers included **Manuel Vazquez Portal**, **Normando Hernandez Gonzalez**, **Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta**, **Prospero Gainza Agüero**, **Nelson Aguiar**, and **Antonio Villareal**.

Other political prisoners from the crackdown also maintained a stance of cooperation in



José Daniel Ferrer
García



Jesus Mustafá Felipe



Víctor Rolando Arroyo
Carmona



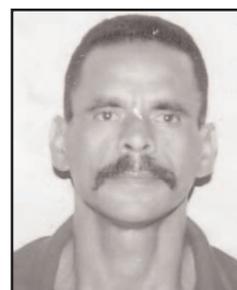
Iván Hernández
Carrillo



Mario Enrique Mayo



Luis Enrique Ferrer
García



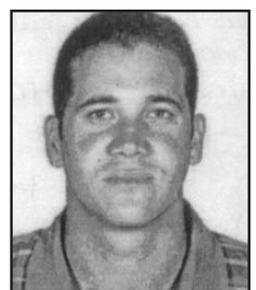
Próspero Gáinza
Agüero



Diosdado González
Marrero



Antonio Díaz
Sánchez



Leonel Grave De
Peralta

the Prison of Agüica, in Matanzas. Likewise, at the Kilo 5 ½ Prison in Pinar del Rio, **Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet** and six other political prisoners assumed an indefinite stance of noncooperation, refusing, among other things, to wear the uniform of the common prisoner. This protest took place after the officers at the prison cancelled political prisoner **Jose Daniel Ferrer's** family visit and mistreated his wife and family. The prisoners declared themselves *plantados*, which is an attitude within the prisons of noncooperation and refusal to comply with orders, particularly orders of a political nature. Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet was punished severely for his leadership and was confined for weeks in an underground cell with no access to sunlight, having to share his cell with a dangerous convict while deprived of his personal belongings and communication with his family.

Similar group protests were also carried out by other political prisoners who were not part of the "group of 75." In the Prison 1580 of Havana, a group of political prisoners carried out several demonstrations and refused to cooperate with authorities to protest the beating of **Iosvany Aguilar Camejo** and other political prisoners.

In total, activists who had been imprisoned during the March crackdown carried out at least 24 of the reported actions. Some of these acts of nonviolent resistance included letters to prison directors; fasts and hunger strikes; demonstrations where anti-government slogans were shouted; and refusing to cooperate with

authorities. The prisoners who carried out these demonstrations included, among others, **Librado Linares Garcia, Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta, Luis Enrique Ferrer Garcia, Jesus Mustafá Felipe, Ivan Hernandez Carrillo, Ricardo Gonzalez Alfonso, Jose Gabriel Ramon Castillo, Margarito Broche Espinosa, and Angel Moya Acosta.**

The other two thirds of actions carried out in the prisons were undertaken by other political prisoners, in some cases with the assistance or participation of common prisoners. One political prisoner in particular who stood out for his constant leadership was **Jorge Luis Garcia Perez ("Antunez")**, who carried out at least four protests. **Leonardo Bruzon Avila**, an activist who was being held indefinitely since February 2002 without receiving trial, also carried out several hunger strikes, despite his failing health and the fact that he suffers from Parkinson's disease.

When the Cuban government targeted leaders of the opposition across the country and began to try them summarily, condemning them to disproportionate prison sentences, they meant to incapacitate the opposition. Instead, the pro-democracy movement has generated new leaders and has continued the fight from within the prisons. Not only have acts of resistance continued, they have also grown, in some cases in astounding numbers. The crackdown has undoubtedly been a setback, but if anything has been proven, it is that Cuba's pro-democracy movement is an unstoppable force.

Resistance Actions for Political Prisoners	Number of Actions
Vigils for the Freedom Without Forced Exile Campaign	664
Resistance actions by mothers and family members of political prisoners	131
Resistance actions for political prisoners	76
Resistance actions within prisons	65
Total	936

THE CALL FOR A NATIONAL DIALOGUE

Announced in mid December 2003, the call for a National Dialogue on a Transition Program is the latest civic challenge to the Castro regime posited by internal opposition leader Oswaldo Payá.

"The most important thing is that in this process, we Cubans ourselves design a transition program and start experiencing responsible democratic participation in defining and readying the future of our society," Payá said in a statement delivered to Agence France Presse on May 25, 2004.

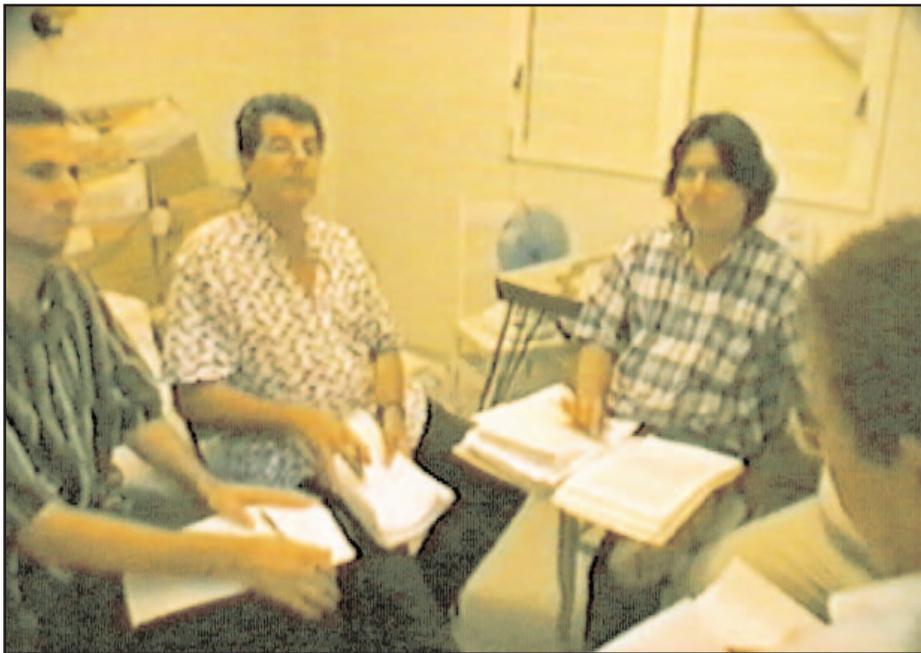
The occasion for the official international launching of the National Dialogue on May 25, 2004, was the anniversary of the death of pro-democracy student leader Pedro Luis Boitel, who died in a hunger strike in Castro's political prisons in 1972. Boitel has become one of the symbolic figures of the civic resistance movement in the island.

The central idea is that groups of Cuban citizens gather inside and outside the island to discuss the contents of a first draft of a transition plan under which Cubans would work to build a new democracy.

The document, which lays out, among other things, a plan for the dismantling of the Castro regime, the abolishment of the 1976 Constitution, and the illegalization of the Communist Party, seeks to unify the civic movement in terms of a very specific proposal for a

transition to democracy in Cuba.

In its introduction, the document states that everything within it can be changed by the participants in the process. A commission is to be established once the national dialogue has finished to draft the final version of the document, which would then become the country's fundamental law. If approved in a general referendum, it would guide Cubans during a two-year transition period



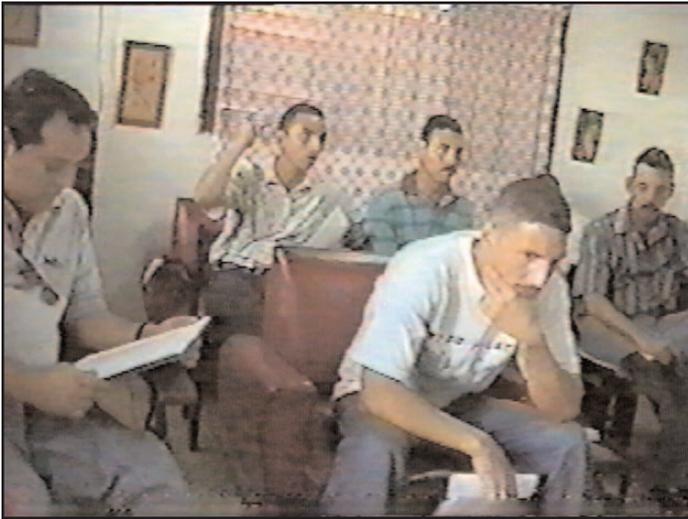
Members of the Christian Liberation Movement meet to coordinate the collection of signatures for the Varela Project in Havana.

Many view the call for a national dialogue as a way to focus the Cuban opposition on the common objective of transition and continue the mobilization of Cuban citizens that was initiated by the Varela Project.

In an article titled

"The National Dialogue and the Dirty War of State Security Against the Varela Project" issued on June 13, 2004, Payá, referring to the citizen mobilization initiated by the Varela Project, stated the following: "It already constitutes a true citizens' movement that can and will achieve those changes. For the first time we have demonstrated that the key to change lies in the peaceful and civic actions of Cubans and not in the actions of other countries..."

In the same article, Payá denounces a systematic campaign by the Castro regime against the citizen's movement promoting the Varela Project and the National Dialogue, a campaign



that has consisted of the arrests of dozens of members of the Citizen Committees and the confiscation of thousands of letters and documents from the Varela Project and the National Dialogue; the round up of all the family members of activists in order to further intimidate them; and the use of State Security agents posing as Citizen Committee members in order to visit homes and confuse people about the true objectives of the movement.

At the end of the article Payá calls on the international community to "express its solidarity with the people of Cuba in these difficult times so that on their own they may be able to implement a transition without violence or exclusions."

In terms of what this new initiative represents for the development of nonviolent civic action within Cuba, Payá's call for a national dialogue constitutes a new step in the pursuit of citizen empowerment. First of all, by calling on Cubans to envision the construction of a democratic future, Payá is combating the inactivity that emanates from the widely disseminated belief that change will only come once Castro dies and that the most citizens can do is sit and wait for this to happen. Additionally, precisely by laying out a proposal for transition, he seeks

to demonstrate that the opposition can envision and implement a coherent program aimed at the construction of a democratic future so that chaos will not follow in the wake of Castro's fall from power. The role of the citizen groups that will gather inside and outside Cuba to discuss the transition plan offers the possibility of broadening popular support for the movement by further engaging citizens in an inclusive effort aimed at political defiance and democratic institution building.

All of these are the strengths of the proposed National Dialogue. Payá's major challenge will perhaps lie in being able to persuade the existing political leadership of the internal opposition in Cuba to join in the effort. He must avoid at all costs, as he has repeatedly stated as his

intention in his defense of the National Dialogue, that the project be identified solely with his own Christian Democratic ideology, and he must do so by reaching out to other leaders, political parties, and ideological

currents in the island so that the basis of a national democratic unity can be firmly established from the project's onset.

"The most important thing is that in this process, we Cubans ourselves design a transition program and start experiencing responsible democratic participation in defining and readying the future of our society."



WORLDWIDE SOLIDARITY FOR THE CUBAN OPPOSITION

Outrage was the overwhelming response of governments, organizations, artists, and journalists worldwide after the Cuban regime cracked down on its internal opposition in 2003, summarily trying and sentencing 75 peaceful dissidents. The European Union strongly criticized the government's action and excluded Cuba from the Cotonou agreement, which was intended to give the country preferred trade status. The International Labor Organization issued a resolution unequivocally denouncing the arrests of several labor activists and called on the Cuban government to guarantee international labor standards. In Geneva, the United Nations Human Rights Commission voted once more to send a human rights rapporteur to Cuba to investigate the human rights situation on the island. Added to this were countless artists and intellectuals, such as Jose Saramago, Pedro Almodovar, and Susan Sontag, who issued statements condemning the crackdown and supporting the right to peaceful dissent.

Increasingly around the world, recognition has been extended to the Cuban opposition as a legitimate alternative to Castro's monolithic, 45-year rule. This recognition has come not only in demonstrations of support and solidarity after the crackdown, but also in awards and honors bestowed upon members of the opposition to acknowledge their courage and work, as well as invitations to international forums for discussions on their country's present and future.

One of the most outstanding instances of international support was the creation of the **International Committee for Democracy in Cuba**, an association based in Prague with the participation of numerous prominent political leaders to coordinate international efforts in support of a democratic transition in Cuba. The committee includes former **Czech President Vaclav Havel**, former **Prime Ministers Philip Dimitrov and Mart Laar of Bulgaria and Estonia**, respectively, Peruvian writer **Mario**

Vargas Llosa, former American **Secretary of State Madeline Albright**, Argentine writer **Marcos Aguinis**, and many others.

The following is a summary of only some of the international distinctions and acknowledgments given to Cuba's pro-democracy opposition in 2003.

→ The **International Republican Institute** honored Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet with the Democracy's People Award in a private ceremony presided by Senator John McCain.

→ Six months after the crackdown, the **International Committee for Democracy in Cuba** was created by the initiative of former Czech President Vaclav Havel.

→ The **Hispano-Cuban Foundation** in Madrid awarded its annual International Prize of Human Rights to three imprisoned opposition leaders: Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva, Jorge Luis Garcia Perez ("Antunez"), and Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet. The keynote speaker at the event was Enrique Múgica, Defensor del Pueblo ("Ombudsman of the People" in Spain).

→ **Columbia University** gave a special mention at the 65th annual ceremony of the **Maria Moors Cabot Prize** to the Manuel Marquez Sterling Society of Journalists, an independent journalists' association that publishes the general-interest magazine *De Cuba*. Many of the magazine's contributors were arrested during the March 2003 crackdown.

→ The **French embassy in Havana** invited members of the opposition to its Bastille Day celebrations. This was the first time the French government had extended this official recognition to the opposition, and it was a product of the regime's crackdown on dissidents.

➔ **Former Prime Minister of Bulgaria Philip Dimitrov** awarded imprisoned teacher Roberto de Miranda, president of the Association of Independent Teachers, with the Pedro Luis Boitel Freedom Award.

➔ Oswaldo Payá was recognized with the Manuel Carrasco i Formiguera medal given by the **Democratic Union of Catalonia (UDC)**, a regional Catalan party. Payá was not allowed to leave the island to receive it.

➔ **German members of parliament** from the Bundestag met with Cuban opposition activists during a trip to Cuba. The meeting took place only hours after the European Union had reaffirmed its condemnation of the March crackdown and the subsequent maltreatment of the prisoners.

➔ The **Spanish daily *El Mundo*** conceded its Annual Columnists Prize to imprisoned Cuban journalist and writer Raul Rivero. The winner was chosen by a panel of newspaper editors and prominent writers.

➔ The **Committee to Protect Journalists**, a nongovernmental organization based in New York, recognized imprisoned poet and independent journalist Manuel Vazquez Portal with one of the four international press freedom awards it gives annually.

➔ The **Human Rights Commission of the German parliament, or Bundestag**, invited Oswaldo Payá to travel to Germany to participate in a discussion on human rights. The Castro government did not allow him to leave the country.

➔ Oswaldo Payá was nominated to **Spain's Prince of Asturias de la Concordia Prize**, an award given annually by the foundation of the same name.

➔ In January 2004, the **International Committee for Democracy in Cuba** nominated Oswaldo Payá to the Nobel Peace Prize 2004.

Statements of condemnation of the Cuban government's crackdown and support for the opposition were issued by the following (among others):

Human Rights Watch
Amnesty International
International Labor Organization
Organization of American States
The Vatican
World Press Freedom Commission
Inter-American Press Association
International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
Latin American Central of Workers
World Confederation of Labour
General Labor Union of Guatemala
Reporters Without Borders
European Union Council
Foreign Relations Committee of the European Union
Democratic Union of Catalonia
Human Rights Commission of the United Nations
Security Council of the United Nations
International Federation of Journalists
International Press Institute
International Association for the Promotion of Human Rights
Mexican Commission on Human Rights
The International Federation for Human Rights
PEN International
The American Society of Newspaper Editors
AFL-CIO
International Association of Broadcasting

Former Presidents Nicolas Ardito Barletta and Guillermo Endara

Singers Ana Belen, Victor Manuel, Joaquín Sabina, Joan Manuel Serrat

Writers Mario Vargas Llosa, Jorge Edwards, Cristina Lopez Schlichting, Jon Juaristi, Rosa Montero, Jose Saramago, Susan Sontag, Fernando Savater

Filmmakers Pedro Almodovar and Fernando Trueba



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