

STATEMENT BY
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR
WESTERN HEMISPHERE AFFAIRS
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SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
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Thank you for inviting me to discuss United States policy toward Cuba. I'm delighted to have this opportunity to address this important topic. One point I'd like to make from the start, which relates directly to the challenges to achieving a transition: recent events in Cuba have opened the eyes of many around the world to the true nature of the Castro regime.

That Castro runs a dictatorship which denies Cubans their basic rights was not a surprise to us. But for many, it was a revelation, and one that has helped us all -- Americans, and our allies around the world -- to recognize that we all agree that the Cuban regime has betrayed its people politically and failed them economically. We

recognize that the Cuban people will be best served by an end to the dictatorship, followed by a full transition to democracy characterized by open markets and the respect for human rights. Our commitment to helping Cubans achieve genuine democracy is an important unifying concept, drawing us together on an issue more often marked by disagreements.

The Western Hemisphere Today

While the rest of the hemisphere continues to work on its future by building representative democracy, expanding economic development and increasing regional cooperation, the Castro regime remains a dictatorial anachronism, stuck in a bankrupt Marxist past, suffocating in its own rhetoric.

I recall when working on Latin America in the late 1980s, the State Department produced a map which showed the continent in 1979 versus 1989, with countries ruled by dictatorships marked in red, democracies in blue. Literally dozens of countries had gone from authoritarian rule to democratic governance. Some achieved this feat despite assaults by violent leftist insurgencies. Despite all the challenges that face our region today, the incredible achievements of the 1980s cannot be denied.

The same map today continues to reveal the obstinate and destructive resistance to change by the Cuban regime. The Castro regime has passed up opportunities to reform, because the Castro brothers hope to retain power until they die. In the past 18 months, Fidel Castro has engineered a constitutional amendment declaring "socialism," immutable; indicated his intention to remain in power until forced from office, including by death, explicitly denied that Cuba will move to open markets, and staged the most sweeping crackdown on peaceful advocates of change in the history of Cuba.

Castro is an implacable foe of democracy, reform, and economic progress, and his continued presence as head of a government in our region is offensive in our democratic region. Our hemisphere is the first in the world to agree unanimously that, in the words of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, "the peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy" and that "democracy is essential for the social, political, and economic development of the peoples of the Americas." The Charter indicates the "obligation to protect and defend" democracy.

Our hemisphere will be a safer, happier place when Castro leaves the scene, whether by natural processes or, as is the goal of U.S. policy, as the result of the will of

the Cuban people and the concerted action of advocates of peaceful change in Cuba.

Challenges to Multilateral Consensus

The growing international consensus on the nature of the regime and the need for change plays out in many contexts: many of those who had stood by Castro in those early days have now begun to speak out publicly against the abuses of his regime. Even before the regime's ruthless repression of civil society in March of this year, President Lula of Brazil said in late 2002, "Let's not confuse the passion that my generation has for the Cuban revolution and what it represented then with any approval of the Cuban regime today. I defend religious freedom, freedom for trade unions and political freedom."

Nobel Prize-winning Portuguese novelist Jose Saramago, a dedicated Communist and previously an admirer of the Cuban revolution, put it succinctly reacting to Castro's crackdown: "This is as far as I go ... to dissent is a right."

Noted Chilean author and long-time Castro supporter Carlos Franz announced last July that he was turning down the Jose Marti Journalism Prize, which the regime sought to

award him, as a way of protesting the March crackdown of civil society. He said he could not accept a journalism award purported to support freedom of expression because among the dissidents imprisoned in Cuba, there were a number of authors and some 20 newsmen.

The critical factor in the coalescence of this unprecedented multilateral consensus on Cuba was that egregious act of repression. Rather than detail the injustices of the Cuban regime's repression here, I would direct the Committee to the superb Amnesty International report, "Essential Measures? Human Rights Crackdown in the Name of Security," which is an extremely complete and credible depiction of the mechanism of Castro's brutality. It is important to note that the Cuban regime's actions were not a sign of strength, but of fear -- fear of its own people and fear that it will not survive Castro's demise. As the noted exiled Cuban academic Juan Antonio Blanco recently pointed out, the regime convicted people to lengthy jail sentences for owning a decrepit typewriter to send a simple message: it will treat Cubans who seek their fundamental freedoms peacefully "with same implacable rigor with which it smashed earlier armed opposition to the revolution." The regime knows that it is in a fight for its life.

This is a fight that the regime will lose. In their superb analysis and call for action published in the Washington Post on September 21, former eastern European Presidents Vaclav Havel, Arpad Goncz And Lech Walesa, each a product of his own country's progress from repression to democracy, said that, even in the wake of the repression, "the voices of free-thinking Cubans are growing louder, and that is precisely what Castro and his government must be worried about."

That repression provoked our European and some Latin American allies to denounce the regime in some of the most dramatic and compelling terms ever. Latin American nations led the effort at 2003 Human Rights Commission to win approval for a resolution on Cuba.

There has been an unrelenting drumbeat of criticism and demands for justice since Castro's brutal acts took place. In March, the European Union (EU) condemned the arrests of the 75. On April 30, the European Commission decided to postpone indefinitely Cuba's bid to join the Cotonou agreement, a preferential trade pact. On June 5 the EU announced its decision to implement the following actions: limit bilateral high-level governmental visits, reduce the profile of member states' participation in

cultural events, and invite Cuban dissidents to national-day celebrations.

In April, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights stated its profound concern about violations of Cubans' rights by the regime, and in May, 17 OAS member states, including 14 of Cuba's Latin American neighbors, issued a declaration citing the arrest and severe sentencing of 75 Cuban citizens who were exercising their fundamental rights. In April, the UNCHR resolution on Cuba passed, calling for a visit to Cuba by a personal representative of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Cuban government refused to allow a visit. Both the Chilean House and Senate passed resolutions opposing the crackdown, as did the Central American Parliament.

There are challenges to the multilateral insistence on change. Predictably, in the wake of the crackdown, the regime tried, but failed, to excuse its repression as a justifiable reaction to the pro-democracy activities of the chief of the U.S. Interests Section, Jim Cason. Mr. Cason has done a superb job to support democratic development and civil society in Cuba. That is our policy in Cuba, and, in fact around the hemisphere. Jim was implementing

bipartisan U.S. policy, and we all have every reason to be very proud of his work there.

Cuba failed miserably in its efforts to blame us, or by extension to "blame the victims" by implying that the opposition got what it deserved for having met with the Interests Section staff. (Indeed, part of the laughable "evidence" against the poet Raul Rivero, condemned to 20 years in Castro's gulag, is that he owned two plastic chairs in which U.S. diplomats had once taken a seat.) Another charge against one of the convicted dissidents was that he met with a U.S. Congressman.

There are other challenges. European countries are the biggest foreign investors in Cuba, and even though Castro has of late denounced European leaders, especially Spanish President Jose Maria Aznar and Italian President Silvio Berlusconi, in the most insulting of terms, we know that some mistakenly argue that the policy of insisting on justice for the 75 prisoners of conscience somehow puts Europe "too much on the side of the United States." Such individuals assert that Europe is most effective in pressing for change by following a distinct policy from the United States, a paradoxical position, since the essence of our policy is to promote democratic change. In any event, we believe that while the coalition within the EU for

justice for the 75 will remain intact, commercial interests and this desire to be distinct from us will continue to serve as motivation for some to seek a return to the previous engagement policy.

Challenges to a multilateral approach in Latin America are complex. Again speaking with total frankness, it would have been extremely gratifying to see more Latin American governments speak up forthrightly for change in Cuba and against the repression. As the Secretary said so eloquently in Santiago in June, after the OAS General Assembly: "how could we, as a Community of Democracies which has seen what we have been able to achieve in this hemisphere over the last fifteen or twenty years, fail to speak out with respect to what Castro is doing to his people?"

It is my profound desire, and I take as a personal mission, to encourage greater involvement by Latin American governments in the quest for democracy and development in Cuba, consistent with our shared commitment as articulated in the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

For the first time in 20 years, the world is not obsessed with the U.S. embargo, but rather the dictatorship that is the object of our policy. There is virtual unanimity in the United States that the Cuban people will

be better off the day the Castro regime slips into history. While we do not all agree on the tactics to hasten that day, I think it is logical to reserve any further concessions to be used to motivate a transitional government to remove the vestiges of the corrupt old dictatorship and commit to the most profound economic and political reforms. We advance none of our goals by making unilateral concessions to a decrepit dictatorship. Moreover, despite some differences of opinion, I hope that we can use our common energies to promote shared objectives, such as finding more creative, more effective ways to help the Cuban people prepare for a happier future without Castro.

U.S. Programs to Promote Democracy and Human Rights

It is clear that with Castro there can be no reform in Cuba. President Bush's Initiative for a New Cuba challenged the Castro government to undertake political and economic reforms. The President made clear that his response to such concrete reforms would be to work with the U.S. Congress to ease the restrictions on trade and travel between the United States and Cuba. For the first time since the Castro regime came to power, the United States

offered to match steps toward freedom and more open markets by the Government of Cuba with steps to ease the embargo and travel restrictions. Not surprisingly, the Castro regime rejected this opportunity to help move his country toward a soft landing.

The Administration will not wait for Fidel Castro to show that he is interested in change, because sadly for him and for Cuba, we don't believe that day will come. What we will continue to do is focus on actions designed to accelerate and shape the democratic changes the Cuban people seek. Toward that end, we are:

- Maintaining and augmenting our support for Cuba's growing civil society. Much has been done; we need to redouble our efforts in this climate of increased repression, bringing in new Cuban and international actors.
- Increasing efforts to break the information blockade Castro has on the Cuban people. Steps have already been taken to improve the effectiveness of the Martis through innovative new technical measures.
- Maintaining multilateral and international momentum against the regime's abuses and for fundamental change which will increase pressure on the regime itself. The international consensus which Castro created by revealing

the true, oppressive nature of his government is the single most important new factor in the quest to encourage democratic development in Cuba. We will work with foreign governments, with regional parliaments, with political party internationals, and in all available international organizations to make clear the international community's insistence on real reform.

- Maintaining our pressure on human rights issues generally, including by working with like-minded governments to achieve a UN Human Rights Commission resolution on Cuba which reflects the international consensus on Cuba today.
- Raising our profile in the public diplomacy and public affairs arenas, particularly to transmit our message of support for the Cuban people for rapid and effective change in Cuba.
- I believe it is critical to augment our outreach to Congress on developments in Cuba and with respect to our policy, and I'm committed to regular discussions with the relevant committees to accomplish this.
- We will continue to work to make sure that travel by Americans to Cuba is consistently supportive of our policy goals. We have begun this process by eliminating and refining license categories. Working with Treasury's

OFAC and other involved agencies, we will also seek enforcement actions against those who travel in violation of the law.

- We have taken a number of actions to confront the challenges of Cuban espionage against the United States by insisting that Cuba's representatives here are authentic diplomats and not spies.
- We continue to demand reciprocal treatment for Cuban Interests Section staff, compared to treatment by Cuba of our diplomats in Havana.
- The Administration remains committed to taking concrete steps, using the legal tools available to us, to confront trafficking by foreign corporations in properties confiscated by the regime from Americans.

CONCLUSION

We are in the end game of the Cuban people's long travail with dictatorship. When Pope John Paul II made his triumphant 1996 journey back to a free Nicaragua, he called that country's decade of oppression by a small and unrepresentative clique a "long dark night." Cuba's night has been longer and darker - but we believe we have an

opportunity to help the Cuban people bring it to an end and the right policy in place to help them do so.

There is a glimmer of real hope on the horizon. Our allies, especially in Europe are insisting with us on a systematic and unprecedented way for real change. Even more encouraging is that Cubans of conscience and with a commitment to democracy and reform are working day by day for change. The crackdown did not crush the opposition, but rather has imbued remaining activists with a new sense of urgency and mission. Oswaldo Paya has said that he is reconstructing his network of civil society activists, and stories of regime abuses of ill political prisoners like Raul Rivero and Marta Beatriz Roque provide additional motivation for these Cubans of conscience. To quote again from Havel, Walesa, and Goncz, "the internal opposition is getting stronger, it has not been brought to its knees by the police round-up last March, times are changing, the revolution is getting old and the regime is getting nervous." I couldn't agree more.

Since we are in the end game, there is nothing more important than for us to stay the course. Now is not the time to experiment with perhaps well-meaning, but fundamentally misguided new tactics in Cuba which we believe would strengthen the regime, not move forward the

day of fundamental reform. Instead, we need to continue building on the multilateral coalition for change, and to reach out our hand to the courageous men and women in Cuba who will one day see their efforts come to fruition. Thank you.