

The Pontis Foundation has joined a Day of Solidarity with the Cuban People

To promote peaceful democratic change in Cuba and show support for the Cuban people, May 21 marks the *Day of Solidarity with the Cuban People*. The day is focused on the plight of prisoners of conscience and the lack of civil and political freedoms in Cuba.

On the occasion of the Day of Solidarity with the Cuban People, the Pontis Foundation again reaffirms its call for the Cuban regime to allow its citizens to exercise internationally recognized civil and political rights and freedoms and to allow a legitimate democratic transition to take place in Cuba.

The Cuban regime denies its people the most basic freedoms and opportunities that are enshrined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights. The current regime seeks to legitimize itself both at home and abroad through initiatives which fail to address fundamental economic flaws or promote basic freedoms denied to the Cuban people.

Democracy leaders and non-governmental organizations plan to demonstrate their support for human rights on the island during mid-May when Cubans across the island traditionally commemorate their patriots who have suffered at the hands of the regime for the cause of freedom and human rights, including the anniversary of the death of Pedro Luis Boitel, a poet-activist who died on May 25, 1972 at age 39 while on a hunger strike in Cuba's "Castle of the Prince" prison.

On the occasion of the *Day of Solidarity with the Cuban People*, the Pontis Foundation in cooperation with the Slovak think-tank M.E.S.A.10 and the Swedish organization Christian Democratic International Center, publish its report which marks the current state of civil society in Cuba. The aim of the report *Cuba: Still an Island of Fear* is to support domestic politic debate in Cuba. The report concludes with recommendations, which should mark the elements of the EU position towards Cuba. Among others they include the following:

- Political dialogue with Havana must have clear goals, format and benchmarks, which should be regularly monitored.
- The content of the dialogue with the Cuban government must be strictly based on the values shared by the European Union. This includes also the condition for the release of political prisoners.
- The EU should promote a European model of economic transition that results in a market economy, not in a managed economy.
- The EU has to provide more assistance for Cuba's independent civic initiatives and cultural projects.

The full text of the report can be found on

http://www.nadaciapontis.sk/tmp/asset_cache/link/0000019158/2008_MAY_CUBA_PAPER.pdf.

Internet access remains restricted in Cuba

Cuba's recent social and economic reforms do not include allowing greater access to the Internet, authorities in the Americas' only one-party communist state have said.

"Cuba is not concerned with the individual connection of its citizens to the Internet," said Deputy Minister for Computer Science and Communications, Boris Moreno, on Friday May 16.

"We use the Internet to defend the Revolution and the principles we believe in and have defended all these years," added Moreno, who was quoted by the official Prensa Latina news agency. He said preferential access to the Internet went to medical centers, scientific facilities and schools.

Internet access is available in some hotel lobbies for short periods of time, but paid for in hard currency. The price is astronomical for most Cubans who earn the equivalent of less than 20 dollars a month.

Cuba blames US sanctions for not allowing more abundant and affordable Internet access, claiming it is forced to use costlier satellite access. But potential capacity may get a boost in a few years with a planned connection to an undersea fiber optic cable by ally Venezuela.

In March Raul Castro authorized the sale of personal computers to Cubans and sales began this month, drawing new attention to restrictions on the Internet. Computer sales were banned in 2003 with Cuba blaming a nationwide power shortage.

Sources: AFP, Prensa Latina