

New Databases on Cuban History, Legal System and Foreign Investments

The University of Miami's Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies (ICCAS) has established three databases to help academics, students, Cuba followers and the general public research the history, economics and business opportunities in Cuba.

As part of their Cuba Transition Project, the three new databases seek to provide valuable information to several members of the community, lawyers, business people and Cuba followers, as well as expand the outreach of the Institute. All databases can be accessed free by logging onto <http://ctp.iccas.miami.edu>.

The Legal Database contains all the principal laws enacted by the Castro government during the past 49 years, including the current constitution. It is intended as a resource for the study of Cuba's legal system and laws. Cuba-On-Line, another database, provides general information on the history of the island, including relevant statistics.

A third database is devoted to Foreign Investment in the island and could be helpful to corporations looking to do business in a post-Castro, post-embargo Cuba. This site groups all foreign investments in Cuba by category, amount of capital invested, as well as providing relevant statistics.

The Cuba Transition Project was established in 2002 as an important and timely project to study and make recommendations for the reconstruction of Cuba once the post-Castro transition begins in earnest.

Source: Cuba Transition Project

Cuba Detains and Releases Six Dissidents

Cuban authorities have released six dissidents who were briefly detained just hours after the European Union had totally lifted its sanctions on the island, saying there had been signs of improvements in Cuba's human rights.

The dissidents were detained Friday morning (June 20th) as they staged a protest near an office of the Ministry of Interior, in charge of domestic security, in the city of Matanzas.

All had been released by early Saturday June 21st.

News reports from Havana identified the six as Jorge Luis "Antúnez" García Pérez; his wife, Iraida Pérez; Idania Yanes; Yesmielena Surbano; Benito Ortega; and Blas Fortún.

Ortega said that security agents had told the group that they were under investigation for disobedience, resisting and causing damage.

Cuban authorities often detain dissidents briefly, usually to prevent planned gatherings or warn the government critics to stop their activities or face tougher sanctions.

The group's detention came a day after the European Union officially lifted sanctions put on Cuba after a harsh 2003 crackdown that sentenced 75 dissidents to up to 28 years in prison after quick, usually one-day trials.

The EU sanctions, which included a ban on meetings between high-ranking EU and Cuban officials, were suspended several years ago but remained on the books until Thursday (June 19th).

EU officials said they have seen improvements in Cuba's human rights situation, but along with lifting the sanctions the European body was expected to issue a statement next week urging Havana to release all political prisoners and take other steps.

"Antúnez" was released last year after serving a 17-year sentence for "enemy propaganda" and sabotage. Of the 75 convicted in 2003, 20 have been released on parole for health reasons.

He said the protest Friday in Matanzas was designed to spotlight the earlier detention of his wife's brother, Mario Alberto Pérez, for investigation on unspecified charges.

Source: El Nuevo Herald

Cuba Welcomes End of EU Sanctions

According to the AFP, Cuba welcomed the European Union's lifting of sanctions against the communist-ruled island, saying "truth" and "reason" had defeated the punitive measures.

"We never surrendered in this confrontation, because we were convinced that reason would prevail," Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said during an official visit to Angola, according to the state-run agency Prensa Latina.

The EU "had no other choice but to abandon its strong-armed policy," Perez Roque said. "The truth opened the way for the recent decision of the EU to lift its sanctions."

The measure was a largely symbolic political step as the EU sanctions have been suspended since 2005. It was championed by Spain, which normalised relations with Cuba last year.

Fidel Castro, 81, who officially handed power to his brother Raul in February due to illness, described the EU's decision to end the sanctions "enormous hypocrisy."

Castro criticised the EU for demanding that human rights be respected in Cuba, while it approved a "brutal" immigration law and kept quiet about abuses committed by US President George W. Bush's administration.

Cuban dissidents had said that Fidel Castro's decision to voice his criticism of the EU while the government remained silent hinted at a disagreement between the Castro brothers and within the Communist Party.

Source: AFP, Prensa Latina, Granma