

Inhuman conditions in Cuban prisons

Recently published (14th July) brief about the inhumane living conditions of Cuba's prisons, to which the penal population is subjected, composed in part by prisoners of conscience shows clearly that Cuban government has to do a lot to prove that real change happens in Cuba.

The brief provides information that shows lack of basic medical care in prisons. Provision of food does not meet any basic standards therefore many prisoners suffers from various stomach infections. Act of violence from official personnel are common. The brief includes also information about health condition of 8 political prisoners.

The whole brief can be found on Pontis web:

http://www.nadaciapontis.sk/tmp/asset_cache/link/0000019883/0807_SummaryConditionsInCubanPrisons_eng.pdf

Source: Oswaldo José Payá Sardiñas, Havana, July 14th, 2008, Christian Liberation Movement

Cuba – Russia: towards closer relations

On August 4, after the visit of the Russian deputy prime minister Igor Sechin in Havana, the Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said that his country should restore its position in countries like Cuba.

The aim of three days visit was to discuss trade and investment issues. As agreed on a priority direction for co-operation, this being energy, the mining industry, agriculture, transport, healthcare and communications. Military issues were not mentioned in the reports. However separately RIA-Novosti quoted an analyst and former top defence official as saying Russia could make a military return to Cuba.

"It is not a secret that the West is creating a 'buffer zone' around Russia, involving countries in central Europe, the Caucasus, the Baltic states and Ukraine," the agency quoted Leonid Ivashov, the head of the Academy of Geopolitical Problems, as saying. "In response, we may expand our military presence abroad, including in Cuba."

Sources: FT, Interfax, AP

Fewer dissidents in Cuban prisons

On August 12, The Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCHRNR) published a report which shows that a number of political prisoners had fallen by 15 to 219 in the first half of 2008. However at the same time the number of short term detentions of dissidents had increased dramatically. In first half of 2008, 640 short detentions were reported (compared to 325 in all 2007). It is a change of tactic which Cuban government uses. Instead of high profile arrests of opponents the police often pick up them before the planned meetings. They are usually released within 24 hours without charge.

Despite the lower number of political prisoners, Elizardo Sanchez, the head of Commission says that any improvements in human rights remain "unlikely" at least in the short-term. He says that most of the released prisoners have served their time or were freed on health grounds.

The report described as positive a decision by Castro in February to commute the death penalty for undisclosed number of prisoners.

Sources: BBC, Reuters