

Cuba: U.S. aggression rising

By Dalia Acosta

Special to Sentinel-Voice

HAVANA (NNPA) - Relations between Cuba and the United States keep heating up as November elections in the northern country approach.

Measures to stiffen the four-decade embargo, official reports accusing Havana of people trafficking and other human rights violations, and other aggressive signals continue to issue from Washington, in what analysts in both countries see as an attempt by President George W. Bush to secure the votes of the powerful Cuban-American constituency in the key election state of Florida.

The socialist government of Fidel Castro, meanwhile, has responded with its own internal economic measures, criticism of the United States, and complaints in whatever international forum is meeting in Latin America or elsewhere.

The U.S. "escalation of aggression" against Cuba is aimed at justifying "the irrational policy of the embargo and unilateral sanctions" and at "creating a list of accusations that would justify a possible military intervention," Granma, the daily newspaper of Cuba's ruling Communist Party, wrote last Thursday. Granma was responding to a U.S. State Department report that ranks Cuba among the nations accused of failing to adequately fight international human trafficking, sex tourism and the exploitation of children.

The report, which was roundly rejected by Cuban authorities, was followed by an announcement of regulations for the implementation of measures presented by Bush last month as part of a plan to foment "a transition to democracy" in Cuba.

Jordan

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Jordan says a variety of debate structures will help to work in the gamut of issues of concern to the Black community, such as jobs, affirmative action, civil rights and justice issues.

"The first debate will be on domestic policy, the second debate will be on foreign policy and the third debate will be sort of a town hall meeting," he says. "What my counterpart on the Republican side and I have to do is to find common cause with the commission and work that out. Once my counterpart on the Republican side is ap-

The regulations, which were published in the U.S. Federal Register, stipulate that Cuban-Americans can only visit their direct family members in Cuba every three years and for a maximum of 14 days.

Visitors can bring in just 44 pounds of baggage each, and on their return to U.S. territory cannot bring back Cuban merchandise or any product purchased or otherwise acquired on the island.

And while the ceiling on cash that can be sent to Cuba was maintained at \$100 a month, the new measure states that remittances can only be sent to spouses, parents, children or grandparents.

The measures, which will mainly affect Cuban families who are divided between the United States and Cuba, have been rejected by the Castro government and the Catholic Church, as well as dissident groups in this Caribbean island nation.

Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, a dissident who returned from exile in the United States and is demanding the right to live in Cuba, said that the Bush administration's new measures are "a rehash of an antiquated, obsolete policy that is bogged down in its own stupidity" and will only contribute to "a further entrenching of the Cuban government."

In a statement distributed to the foreign press, Gutiérrez Menoyo urged Cuban-Americans to back the presumptive Democratic Party candidate John Kerry in the November presidential elections.

The dissident, who spent years in jail in Cuba as a political prisoner before going into exile, said a triumph by Kerry would "be good for the cause of democratization

pointed, then we'll sit down and work all this out. There's nothing that can't be worked out." Considered a major national figure with numerous awards and board appointments, Jordan says he assumed the role as debate negotiator simply because he was asked.

"Kerry asked me to do it and I think when the leader of your party, if you care about your party, if you care about America, if you care about its people, then you say yes and you find the time."

Meanwhile Jordan says his role will go far beyond negotiating with the commis-

in Cuba and for the creation of a policy of neighborly relations between the two countries."

The Cuban government's response to Bush's plan included a decision to raise the prices in the government chain of stores that sell basic products only in dollars, a measure that also drew criticism from the Catholic Church and dissident groups.

A May 24 statement by the Catholic bishops' conference in Cuba rejected the measures announced by the White House, as well as the Cuban government's response.

The bishops said both the U.S. and Cuban measures "hit the poorest families on the island," who are "especially hurt" because "the new hardships" and burdens heighten the "anguish" of their situation and aggravate the separation of families in Cuba from their loved ones in the United States.

Analysts say that instead of strengthening support for Bush in the Cuban exile community, the administration's measures could lose the president votes among many Cuban-Americans who, although opposed to Castro, want to be able to maintain close ties with their families in Cuba.

Representatives of the most radical factions of the Cuban exile community argue that all of the money and goods sent to Cuba from the United States, even those that merely help support families, only sustain Castro's regime.

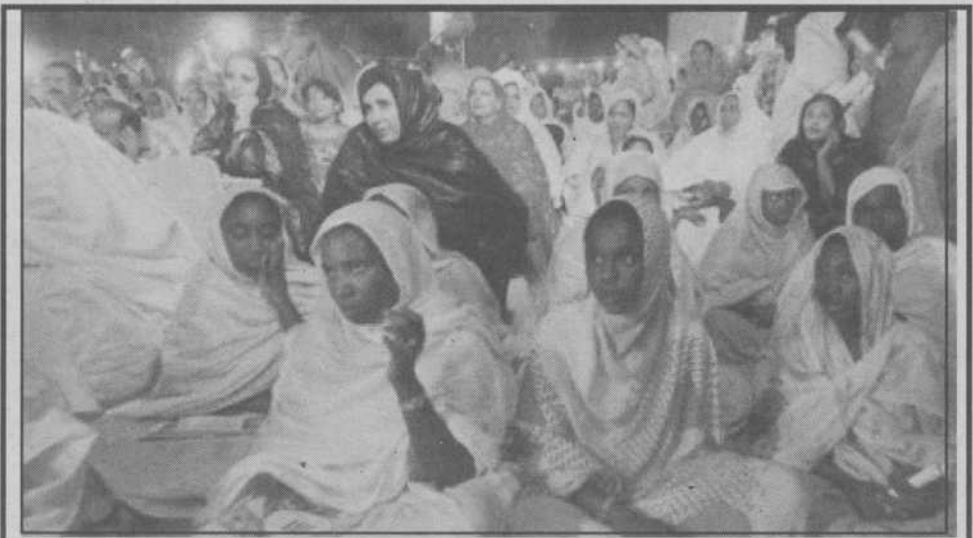
The new U.S. measures go even farther than that, and include actions to discredit Cuba in third party countries to discourage tourism to this Caribbean island nation, as another way of blocking the inflow of hard currency into Cuban state coffers.

sion and his yet un-named counterpart in the campaign of President George Bush.

"This is everything. This is debate arrangement, debate prep, what tie to wear," he chuckles.

Ultimately, he hopes to influence the outcome of the election as Kerry currently leads Bush in a string of political polls.

"I think that John Kerry is going to be a very successful Democratic nominee for the presidency and I think he's going to win," Jordan says. "And I'm going to do everything in my power to help him do that."



FEMALE WAR PAWNS

Arab-African and Black-African women attend a political meeting during the presidential elections in the Mauritanian capital Nouakchott in this Tuesday, Nov. 4, 2003, file photo. Enduring Arab-African slavery along ancient Saharan trade routes, is being played out at its most extreme in Sudan's Darfur, with murderous results: Arab horseman clutching AK-47s razing non-Arab African villages and driving off and killing the villagers.

WHO: Africa on brink of polio crisis

GENEVA (AP) - Africa is on the brink of the biggest polio epidemic in years, with the crippling disease hitting Nigeria hard and re-emerging in Sudan's war-ravaged Darfur region, the World Health Organization said Tuesday.

The number of polio cases globally has reached 333 so far this year, almost double the number for the same period last year. Total cases last year reached 783.

In Nigeria, where Muslim leaders have refused to participate in immunization program, 257 cases have been reported this year.

"There is no question that the virus is spreading at an alarming pace," said Dr. David Heymann, who is overseeing the U.N. health agency's effort to eradicate the disease.

Polio is a water-borne disease that usually infects young children, attacking the nervous system and causing paralysis, muscular atrophy, deformation and sometimes death.

Nearly 1,000 children in 125 countries were being infected daily by polio in 1988 when WHO and other health organizations launched the Global Polio Eradication Initiative.

That number dropped to 483 for the whole of 2001, and health officials declared the disease was eradicated in Europe, the Americas, much of Asia and Australia.

Epidemiologists now fear a major epidemic this fall — the start of the polio "high season." The disease has appeared already in nine sub-Saharan African countries, after being limited to only two at the beginning of last year.

"Right now we're at the end of the low season of polio," Bruce Aylward, who coordinates the polio initiative at WHO, told reporters.

"This is right when polio should be at its lowest level. It suggests that the virus is gathering steam to come roaring out," he said.

WHO confirmed that a child was paralyzed by polio on May 20 in Darfur, the first case in Sudan in more than three years.

Health experts have long warned of epidemics in Darfur, where thousands have been killed and more than 1 million left homeless in a 15-month conflict between government-backed Arab militias and the Black African Muslim population.

The battle against the disease has stalled in the face of

resistance to immunization programs in Nigeria's heavily Muslim Kano state.

Some Islamic leaders claimed that the vaccines were part of a U.S.-led plot to spread infertility and AIDS among African Muslims. Nigerian federal officials and the United Nations deny the claims.

The Sudan case is the latest setback in WHO's campaign to wipe out polio worldwide, as the virus spreads from Nigeria — the epicenter of the African epidemic — and continues to strike in Niger.

The disease has also been found in previously polio-free Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad and Ivory Coast. Botswana reported its first new infection in February.

Four other countries — Egypt, Pakistan, Afghanistan and India — are on schedule to eradicate the disease before the end of the year, WHO said. The U.N. agency said it urgently needs \$25 million to launch a vaccination campaign across 22 African nations in October. Officials said they could meet a Jan. 1 deadline to eradicate the disease if they succeed in immunizing 74 million children this fall.

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