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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

January 5, 1999

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

Last March, in the wake of Pope John Paul's historic visit to Cuba, I authorized measures designed to ease the plight of the Cuban people and help them prepare for a democratic future. The restoration of direct passenger flights, resumption of family remittances, expansion of people-to-people contacts, and increases in the sale of medicines since then have had a positive impact. They demonstrate the United States' compassion for the Cuban people, our strong interest in building bonds between the citizens of our nations, and our determination to provide the people of Cuba with hope in their struggle against a system that for four decades has denied them even basic human rights.

Building on the success of the measures I announced last March, I am today authorizing additional steps to reach out to the Cuban people:

- Expansion of remittances by allowing any U.S. resident (not only those with families in Cuba) to send limited funds to individual Cuban families as well as to organizations independent of the government.
- Expansion of people-to-people contact through two-way exchanges among academics, athletes, scientists, and others, including streamlining the approval process for such visits.
- Authorization of the sale of food and agricultural inputs to independent non-governmental entities, including religious groups and Cuba's emerging private sector, such as family restaurants and private farmers.
- Authorization of charter passenger flights to cities in Cuba other than Havana and from some cities in the United States other than Miami in order to facilitate family reunification for persons living outside those cities.
- An effort to establish direct mail service to Cuba, as provided for in the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992.

At the same time, we are taking steps to increase the flow of information to the Cuban people and others around the world, by strengthening Radio and TV Marti and launching new public diplomacy programs in Latin America and Europe to keep international attention focused on the need for change in Cuba. The United States will continue to urge the international community to do more to promote respect for human rights and democratic transition in Cuba.

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I am also pleased to announce that I intend to nominate Mr. Jose "Pepe" Collado and Ms. Avis Lavelle as members of the Advisory Board for Cuba Broadcasting. I further intend to designate Mr. Collado as chairman upon confirmation by the Senate. This important advisory body has been without a chairman since the death of Jorge Mas Canosa more than a year ago. We are processing other nominations and, in cooperation with congressional leaders, will continue to name members of this bipartisan board.

These steps are designed to help the Cuban people without strengthening the Cuban Government. They are consistent with our policy of keeping pressure on the regime for democratic change -- through the embargo and vigorous diplomatic initiatives -- while finding ways to reach out to the Cuban people through humanitarian efforts and help in developing civil society. They are also consistent with the Cuban Democracy Act and the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act. They reflect a strong and growing bipartisan consensus that the United States can and should do more to work with the Cuban people toward a future of democracy and prosperity.

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