

THE U.N., AGAIN, BREAKS ITS PROMISE TO THE U.S.

Late last month, United Nations Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar rejected Washington's request that the U.N. issue a report on human rights violations in Cuba. This breaks a promise he made to Washington. The Secretary-General is required by a 1989 U.N. Human Rights Commission resolution to conduct meetings with Cuban officials about human rights violations. The U.S. request was an attempt to get the U.N. to disclose the information gathered from those meetings. Perez de Cuellar's refusal to honor the American request reveals yet again that the U.N. tilts away from the U.S. toward authoritarian Third World regimes. This refutes the contention by the Bush Administration that the U.N. has reformed itself. Apparently believing this, the White House is asking Congress to approve \$204.5 million of this year's \$210 million assessed U.S. contribution to the U.N. as well as a \$39 million installment on U.S. back dues to the organization. Perez de Cuellar's action should prompt the Administration to reconsider.

The U.S. tried unsuccessfully in 1987 to persuade the 43-member U.N. Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) to investigate human rights violations in Cuba. The UNHRC refused to take action despite compelling evidence of the Castro regime's systematic torture and beatings, and involuntary disappearances in Cuba. Finally, in May 1988, the UNHRC appointed a six-member task force to investigate human rights violations in Cuba. This Cuba Working Group, made up of the ambassadors from Bulgaria, Colombia, Ireland, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Senegal went on a fact-finding mission to Cuba in September 1988. Their 400-page report, based on over 1,700 interviews, lists "137 complaints of torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment," executions of 13 political prisoners, 7 disappearances, and many other violations of human rights by the Castro regime. At the annual UNHRC meeting in February and March 1989, Britain, Canada, Morocco, the Netherlands, and the U.S. jointly proposed a balanced resolution requesting that the Group "continue to observe the human rights situation" in Cuba, submit a report on those observations, and to have the UNHRC "consider this question further" at its 1990 session. This resolution, despite its mild wording, was defeated in the UNHRC by a vote of 17 to 17 with 8 abstentions. Voting against the U.S. proposal and in favor of Cuba were: Botswana, Bulgaria, China, Colombia, Cuba, Cyprus, Ethiopia, East Germany, India, Iraq, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Sri Lanka, the Ukraine, U.S.S.R., and Yugoslavia.

No Follow-Through. Panama, at this time under Manuel Noriega's rule, then offered a weak resolution commending Havana for its cooperation with the UNHRC and "welcom[ing] the willingness of the Government of Cuba to co-operate with the Secretary-General in maintaining his direct contacts on the issues and questions contained in the report." It went on to call upon the Secretary-General to take up these contacts and their results "in an appropriate manner." This resolution passed with U.S. acquiescence by a vote of 32 to 1 with 10 abstentions and now serves as the basis for future U.N. action regarding the human rights situation in Cuba.

While Perez de Cuellar has maintained both written and verbal contact with the Cuban government as required by the resolution, he has failed to follow through on these contacts. Since

the September 1983 visit by the Cuban Working Group, the Castro regime has made a mockery of the UNHRC by taking punitive action against those who had made statements to the Group, subjecting over 50 human rights activists to harassment, imprisonment, or physical torture. Castro's efforts to silence those who have spoken out against the abuses have been documented by such prominent human rights monitors as Amnesty International and Americas Watch. Three of Cuba's leading human rights activists, Ricardo Bofil, Tania Diaz, and Elizardo Sanchez have been either imprisoned or exiled. Seven of their colleagues were also arrested and then released.

Explicit Promise. As a result of these events, Vice President Dan Quayle met with Perez de Cuellar last December 11. Quayle was assured that the Secretary-General would submit a written report on Cuban human rights abuses if requested to do so by any U.N. member. Representative Chris Smith, the New Jersey Republican and member of the U.S. delegation to the U.N., received a similar promise from Perez de Cuellar. In a letter of this January 31 to Perez de Cuellar, Smith explicitly notes the U.N. "assurances that a report on human rights in Cuba would be submitted, if one or several governments request it." U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Thomas Pickering formally requested this report on January 9 in a letter to the Secretary-General.

Despite this request, Perez de Cuellar has refused to submit a report. In a January 29 letter to the UNHRC, the Secretary-General merely wrote that he "remain[s] at the disposal of the Commission in this regard." In explanation of why the Secretary-General would not respond to the U.S. request to submit a report, a spokesman said that there must have been a misunderstanding on the part of Quayle. Francois Giuliani, spokesman for the Secretary-General, said in a January 30 briefing at U.N. headquarters in New York, "What the Secretary-General meant was that if a country wanted a report or statement from him in a particular body, then it had to address a request to this effect to that body."

The refusal by Perez de Cuellar to honor a legitimate request from the U.S. — by far the U.N.'s largest donor — sends a strong signal that the U.N. is not yet a reformed institution. Because of this, the Bush Administration immediately should withdraw and revise its request for U.N. funding. The Administration should postpone payment of its scheduled \$39 million installment for arrearages and trim its \$204.5 million request for the current year contribution to last year's level of \$144 million. If the Bush Administration fails to respond forcefully to Perez de Cuellar's insult of the U.S., Congress should do so by limiting the appropriation to \$144 million with no payment on the arrearages. As recent history teaches, only the sting of financial withholding can provide the necessary incentive for the U.N. and its Secretary-General to act responsibly.

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For further information:

Ambassador Armando Valladares, U.S. Representative to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, "Statement...on... the Report of the Mission which Took Place in Cuba...", February 28, 1989.

Mark A. Franz and Robert Winters, "At the United Nations, Reform Has A Long Way to Go," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 678, October 24, 1988.