

Press release

Meeting of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba with Lady in White Blanca Reyes in the European Parliament in Strasbourg

Strasbourg, December 14, 2005 - Members of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC) from the European Parliament have met with Blanca Reyes, the representative of Cuban movement of mothers and wives of political prisoners Damas de blanco (Ladies in White). Originally five ladies from this movement were supposed to come to the European Parliament in Strasbourg to receive the Sakharov prize they were given by the European Parliament this year but they were not given permission to leave the country by the Castro regime and Blanca Reyes is their representative who resides in Spain.

Members of the European parliament present at the meeting - José Ribeiro e Castro, Edward McMillan-Scott, Ignacio Salafranca, Vytautas Landsbergis and Cecilia Malmström - have agreed that the Parliament should keep on demanding that the Cuban regime allows Sakharov prize winners come to Europe to receive the prize. If not then delegation from the European Parliament will ask for official visit to Cuba to give the prize to its winners.

At the meeting a letter from Vaclav Havel was presented to Blanca Reyes thanking for the struggle of Ladies in White for amnesty of their husbands and sons - human rights activists and independent journalists imprisoned during crackdown on democratic opposition in spring 2003. "I believe that the Sakharov Prize will encourage you and your brave husbands in the same way as the interest of the free world encouraged me in the darkest times of my imprisonment" says Havel's letter.

To mark the last brutal crackdown on the opposition by the oppressive regime of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro in March 2003, the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC) was founded in September 2003 by prominent international statesmen and intellectuals to assist those struggling for democracy in Cuba. The ICDC seeks to show political solidarity with fellow democracy activists in Cuba and channel economic support to Cuba's democratic opposition.

At the *Towards Democracy in Cuba* conference held in July 2003 in Madrid, Vaclav Havel encouraged nations to reach out to those working to bring freedom to Cuba. In response, the ICDC plans to assist human rights initiatives in Cuba and to alter the approach of European and western hemisphere countries towards Castro's government.

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