

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION KEY DOCUMENTS



29 October 2008

UK BORDER AGENCY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION SERVICE

Contents

Page

	PREFACE	
2.	BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT CUBA	
	Recent history 6 Recent events and political developments 7	
	Economy	
	Human rights8	
3.	INDEX TO KEY SOURCE DOCUMENTS	
	Key facts and geography10	
	Maps10	
	HISTORY	
	POLITICS AND RECENT EVENTS11	
	HUMAN RIGHTS – GENERAL11	
	HUMAN RIGHTS – SPECIFIC ISSUES12	
	Children	
	Citizenship and Nationality	
	Corruption	
	Disability	
	Death Penalty	
	Employment Rights	
	Ethnic Groups	
	Foreign Refugees	
	Freedom of Movement/Registration	
	Freedom of Religion	
	Freedom of Speech and the Media15	
	Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)16	
	Judiciary	
	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Persons	
	Medical issues	
	Military 17	
	Prison conditions18	
	Guantanamo Bay US Naval Base18	
	Political activists18	
	Security Forces18	
	Trafficking19	
	Women	
	4. REFERENCES TO SOURCE MATERIAL	

1. Preface

- i This Country of Origin Information Key Documents (COI Key Documents) on Cuba has been produced by COI Service, UK Border Agency (UKBA), for use by officials involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. It provides general background information about the issues most commonly raised in asylum/human rights claims made in the United Kingdom. The COI Key Documents includes information available up to 28 October 2008. It was issued on 29 October 2008
- ii The COI Key Documents is an indexed list of key reports, papers and articles produced by a wide range of recognised external information sources. It does not contain any UKBA opinion or policy.
- iii For UK Border Agency users, the COI Key Documents provides direct electronic access to each source referred to in the document, via a link on the source numbers in the index and list of sources. For the benefit of external users, the relevant web link has also been included, together with the date that the link was accessed.
- iv As noted above, the documents identified concentrate mainly on human rights issues. By way of introduction, brief background information on [country] is also provided. Please note, this background material is not intended to provide a summary of the material contained in the documents listed.
- v This COI Key Documents and the documents listed are publicly disclosable.
- vi Any comments regarding this COI Key Documents or suggestions for additional source material are very welcome and should be submitted to COI Service as below.

Country of Origin Information Service **UK Border Agency** Apollo House 36 Wellesley Road Croydon CR9 3RR United Kingdom

Email: cois@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk Website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html

ADVISORY PANEL ON COUNTRY INFORMATION

vii The independent Advisory Panel on Country Information (APCI) was established in 2003 to make recommendations to the Home Secretary about the content of the UK Border Agency's country of origin information material. The APCI welcomes all feedback on UKBA's COI Key Documents, COI Reports and other country of origin information material. Information about the Panel's work can be found on its website at <u>www.apci.org.uk</u>

- viii In the course of its work, the APCI reviews the content of selected UKBA COI documents and makes recommendations specific to those documents and of a more general nature. The APCI may or may not have reviewed this particular document. At the following link is a list of the COI Key Documents, COI Reports and other documents which have, to date, been reviewed by the APCI: www.apci.org.uk/reviewed-documents.html
- ix Please note: It is not the function of the APCI to endorse any UKBA material or procedures. Some of the material examined by the Panel relates to countries designated or proposed for designation for the Non-Suspensive Appeals (NSA) list. In such cases, the Panel's work should not be taken to imply any endorsement of the decision or proposal to designate a particular country for NSA, nor of the NSA process itself.

Advisory Panel on Country Information:

Email: <u>apci@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk</u> Website: <u>www.apci.org.uk</u>

Return to Contents

2. Background Information about Cuba

Full Country Name: The Republic of Cuba Area: 110,860 sq. km (42,803 sq. miles) Population: 11.2 million **Capital City:** Havana (population 2.2 m) **People:** Ethnically mixed population (white 66%; mixed race 22%; black 12%), Chinese 1% Language: Spanish Religion: The State is secular in Cuba; the main religions are Catholicism, Santeria (an informal mixture of Christianity and African religions brought over by slaves) and Protestantism. Currency: Cuban Peso (Moneda Nacional and Convertible Peso (CUC) **Major Political Parties:** Only party – Cuban Communist Party or PCC Government: Cuba has a one party system of government and is the only country in the Western Hemisphere with a Communist government. Over 47 years after the Cuban revolution. Fidel Castro remains Head of State and leader of the Communist Party. The Vth Party Congress in October 1997 reaffirmed the Revolution's political direction and named Raul Castro as Fidel's chosen successor. First Secretary of the PCC: Fidel Castro President of the Council of State: Raul Castro Ruz First Vice-President of the Council of State: Jose Ramon Machado Ventura **Foreign Minister:** Felipe Perez Roque Membership of international groups/organisations: Cuba's memberships include

United Nations (UN), Organisation of American States (OAS – excluded from formal participation since 1962), Non-Aligned Movement (current chair), IAEA, WHO, WTO, WO and others. (Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), 10 July 2008) [4a]

Return to Contents Go to sources

Geography

Cuba is the largest and most westerly of the Great Antilles and is located off the coast of Florida, separating the Gulf of Mexico from the Caribbean Sea. Cuba has an area of 110,860 sq km and characterised by low rolling hills and plains, with a number of heavily forested mountain areas. Cuba has a tropical climate where tropical storms and hurricanes are relatively regular occurrences and is subject to some seismic activity, particularly in the southeast, where minor tremors are common. (Jane's International, updated 27 February 2008) [31c] (Geography)

Return to Contents Go to sources

MAPS



Map of Cuba courtesy of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World FactBook: <u>https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cu.html [10a]</u>

RECENT HISTORY

Encarta Encyclopaedia accessed 9 October 2008 noted that:

"In 1959, Fidel Castro and a number of other revolutionaries, including his brother Raul Castro, overthrew the Batista government. From that time until 2008, Fidel Castro was head of state and the ultimate authority on all policy decisions. In the 1960s Castro split with the United States and became an ally of the USSR, then the worlds leading Communist nation. In 1961 Castro formally embraced Marxism-Leninism, the political philosophy that forms the basis for communism." [32a] (Introduction)

"...The Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) defended Cuba in 1961 during the Bay of Pigs invasion, when U.S.-backed Cuban exiles unsuccessfully attempted to invade the island and topple the Castro government. ... From 1960 to 1990 the FAR participated in international revolutionary campaigns in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, most notably in Angola from 1973 to 1990." [32b] (p9 Defence)

"... After the USSR collapsed and a Cuban economic crisis began, active Cuban support for international revolutionary causes ceased. Cuba's leadership turned its attention to redesigning socialism to include some capitalist activity and trade with capitalist nations. To this end, Cuba formed new alliances with Latin American countries with which it previously had no relations. Trade agreements resulted with capitalist nations, such as Canada, France, Spain, Italy, and the Russian Federation..." [32b] (p9 International Relations)

"After 1991 the Cuban government offered compensation for seized property, released political prisoners, permitted U.S. news bureaus ..." in to Cuba. "In 1996 U.S.-Cuban relations once again grew hostile after Cuban fighter planes shot down two civilian

aircraft piloted by U.S.-based Cuban exiles, which convinced U.S. president, Bill Clinton to sign the Helms-Burton Law." [32b] (p9 International Relations)

The Helms-Burton Law is "US legislation to penalise foreign companies with business interests in Cuba". (FCO, 10 July 2008) [4a]

Encarta Encyclopaedia accessed 10 October 2008 continued:

"In 1998 ... President Clinton responded to international condemnation of the U.S. economic blockade by relaxing restrictions on the admittance of food and medicine, and on money sent to Cuban citizens from individuals in the United States..." [32b] (p9 International Relations)

"In 2003 Cuba again made international news when it cracked down on political dissidents. The Cuban government arrested about 80 journalists, activists, and opposition party leaders for supposedly plotting to undermine the government and threaten national security. During closed trials, the dissidents were sentenced to prison terms of varying lengths up to 28 years. This incident represented Cuba's largest crackdown in many years, and the international community reacted strongly. Many people called on Castro to free the dissidents, who wanted to foster democracy in Cuba and pressure Cuba to open its society and improve its human rights record." [32e] (p14 Special Period in a Time of Peace)

RECENT EVENTS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The FCO Country Profile of 10 July 2008 noted that: "Raúl Castro had temporarily assumed power on 31 July 2006 when President Fidel Castro issued a proclamation announcing that he had undergone surgery for a severe intestinal crisis with sustained bleeding." [4a]

The same source further stated:

"On 24 February 2008 the new National Assembly unanimously voted for Raúl Castro, Fidel Castro's younger brother, to become President of the Councils of State and of Ministers (and thus Head of State and Government) and Commander in Chief of the Cuban Armed Forces. Fidel Castro remains First Secretary of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, with Raúl Castro as Second Secretary. José Ramon Machado Ventura (78), became First Vice-President of the Council of State (the post Raul vacated by becoming President)." [4a]

The Info Please website accessed 8 October 2008 stated:

"At the United Nations in February 2008, Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. The Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ensures citizens political and civil freedom, and the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights gaurantee the right to work, fair wages, social security, education, and high standards of physical and mental health. Roque also announced that in 2009 the United Nations Human Rights Council will be allowed to examine Cuba at will." [33a]

> Return to Contents Go to sources

ECONOMY

Nominal GDP US\$45.5 billion (2007 est) Nominal GDP per head (US\$ 4,051 (2007 actual) Inflation rate: 2.8% (2007 est) Main industries: tourism, sugar, nickel, tobacco, and agriculture and rum. (FCO, updated 10 July 2008) [4a]

The FCO Country Profile updated 10 July 2008 reported:

"The Cuban economy has experienced a gradual recovery since its 'freefall' in the early 1990s... These included the legalisation of the use of hard currency (US\$) and of some private enterprises, as well as reform of agricultural production and land tenure to permit more private ownership. Nonetheless private enterprise is still heavily restricted...Shortages of basic foodstuffs and medicines, and poor public transport are all still regular features of daily life for ordinary Cubans, although transport is improving in the capital. The national average wage is roughly \$10-15 a month at real market prices. The state provides basic rations of food; education and health are free and universal; utilities are subsidised heavily and most, if they do not 'own' their houses, pay little or no rent." [4a]

The Executive Summary (Sentinel Country Risk Assessment, Jane's Information Group), updated 14 April 2008, noted:

"The withdrawal of Soviet aid following the collapse of the Soviet Union forced Cuba to fall back on its own resources. ... The sugar industry was in collapse owing to falling world prices, cost increases in supplies, inefficient mills and poor harvests. This led the government to initiate a re-structuring of the sector in 2002 ... sugar has been superseded by nickel, tourism and service provision as the mainstays of the economy. The Cuban economy has also benefited from its trade arrangements with Venezuela, particularly in terms of its import of discounted oil supplies. The discovery of deep water oil reserves in the Gulf of Mexico off Cuba's northwestern coast will constitute a major economic boost, once drilling operations get fully underway." [31a]

The same source noted that:

"Cuba instituted market reforms in the 1990's, but ... the government heavily regulated them. Most entrepreneurial initiatives are either under state control or have closed after heavy taxation and fines. The only sector to have genuinely benefited from liberalisation is tourism, which became a government priority after a series of failed sugar harvests in the 1990s. It has become the major source of foreign investment...Remittances from Cubans living and working abroad ... has become significant in supporting the domestic economy. ... At least 1000,000 Cuban exiles visit Cuba each year bringing around USD1 billion with them. ..." [31a]

Return to Contents Go to sources

HUMAN RIGHTS

The FCO country profile for Cuba, updated 10 July 2008, stated: "Cuba's record on civil and political rights falls well below accepted international standards. Freedom of expression, information and association are denied. All opposition parties are prohibited." [4a]

In their Annual Report on Human Rights 2007, published March 2008, the FCO stated: "No opposition to the government is tolerated and citizens are denied basic civil, political and economic rights. The Cuban government claims that restrictions on individual liberties are necessary to counter internal complicity with a perceived threat of invasion by the US... On 10 December 2007 Foreign Minister Perez Roque announced that Cuba would sign the international covenants on civil and political rights and on economic and social and cultural rights in early 2008." [4b] (p142)

The US State Department (USSD) Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2007, Cuba, released 11 March 2008, noted that:

"The law prohibits abusive treatment of detainees and prisoners; however, members of the security forces sometimes beat and otherwise abused human rights and prodemocracy advocates, detainees, and prisoners, and did so with impunity. Although physical torture was rare, authorities beat, harassed, and made death threats against dissidents, both inside and outside of prison. Many were interrogated and pressured to sign incriminating statements or to collaborate with authorities. Some detainees and prisoners endured physical abuse, sometimes by other inmates with the acquiescence of guards, or long periods in isolation or punishment cells. Political prisoners who refused to wear the prison uniform or take part in 'reeducation' activities were targeted for mistreatment." [2a] (section 1c)

The Amnesty International (AI) Report 2007, released 23 May 2007, noted that: "The government continued to deny the UN Special Rappoteur on the human rights situation in Cuba access to the country. AI and other independent human rights organizations were not also allowed to visit." [11e]

The AI Report 2008, State of the World's Human Rights, Cuba, released 28 May 2008, observed that: "Restrictions on freedom of expression, association and movement remained severe. ...political dissidents, independent journalists and human rights activists continued to be harassed, intimidated and detained. However, four prisoners of conscience and other political dissidents were released and the government decided to discuss its human rights record with other governments and to ratify human rights treaties. Cubans continued to feel the negative impact of the US embargo." [11a]

The Human Rights Watch (HRW) World Report 2008, Cuba, released in January 2008, stated:

"Refusing to recognize human rights monitoring as a legitimate activity, the government denies legal status to local human rights groups. Individuals who belong to these groups face systematic harassment, with the government impeding their efforts to document human rights conditions. In addition, international human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International are barred from sending fact-finding missions to Cuba. Cuba remains one of the few countries in the world to deny the International Committee of the Red Cross access to its prisons." [5c]

Return to Contents Go to sources

3. Index to key source documents

(KB users - click source number to access document directly)

KEY FACTS AND GEOGRAPHY	[2a]	USSD, Report on Human Rights Practices 2007: Cuba, 11 March 2008 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100635.htm
	[2c]	USSD, Background Note: Cuba, last updated August 2008 http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2886.htm
	[4a]	FCO, Country Profile: Cuba, last updated on 10 July 2008 http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-the-fco/country- profiles1/north-central-america/cuba
	[7a]	BBC, Country Profile: Cuba, last updated on 12 July 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/country_profiles/1 203299.stm
	[10a]	CIA, The World Factbook, Cuba, last updated 23 October 2008 <u>https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-</u> <u>factbook/geos/cu.html</u>
	[10b]	CIA, Chiefs of State and Cabinet Members of Foreign Governments, CubaNDE, last updated 12 March 2008 <u>https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/world-leaders-</u> <u>1/world-leaders-c/cuba-nde.html</u>
MAPS	[10a] [30]	CIA, The World Factbook, Cuba, last updated 21 August 2008 <u>https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cu.html</u> Perry-Castaneda Library – Cuba Map <u>http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia07/cuba_sm_2007.gif</u>
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	[2c]	USSD, Background Note: Cuba, last updated August 2008 http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2886.htm
	[4a]	FCO, Country Profile: Cuba, last updated on 10 July 2008 http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-the-fco/country- profiles1/north-central-america/cuba
	[7a]	BBC, Country Profile: Cuba, last updated on 12 July 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/country_profiles/1 203299.stm

HISTORY CONT'D	[7b] [26a]	BBC, Timeline: Cuba, last updated 19 July 2008 <u>http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/country_profiles/1</u> 203355.stm Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2008: Cuba <u>http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=</u> 2008&country=7378
	[33a]	Info Please (accessed 8 September 2008) Cuba: History, Geography, Government, and Culture. http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0107443.htm
POLITICS AND RECENT EVENTS	[2c]	USSD, Background Note: Cuba, last updated August 2008 http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2886.htm
	[4a]	FCO, Country Profile: Cuba, last updated on 10 July 2008 http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-the-fco/country- profiles1/north-central-america/cuba
	[7a]	BBC, Country Profile: Cuba, last updated on 12 July 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/country_profiles/1 203299.stm
	[7b]	BBC, Timeline: Cuba, last updated 19 July 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/country_profiles/1 203355.stm
	[26a]	Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2008: Cuba http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year= 2008&country=7378
HUMAN RIGHTS - GENERAL:	[2a]	USSD, Report on Human Rights Practices 2007: Cuba, 11 March 2008 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100635.htm
	[3a]	Constitution of the Republic of Cuba,1992 http://www.cubanet.org/ref/dis/const_92_e.htm
	[4a]	FCO, Country Profile: Cuba, last updated on 10 July 2008 http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-the-fco/country- profiles1/north-central-america/cuba
	[5a]	Human Rights Watch, World Report 2007: Cuba January 2008 <u>http://hrw.org/wr2k8/pdfs/cuba.pdf</u>
	[5c]	Human Rights Watch; Essential Background – Cuba (accessed 1 September 2008) http://hrw.org/englishwr2k8/docs/2008/01/31/cuba17767.htm
	[11a]	Amnesty International, Annual Report 2008: Republic of Cuba, published 28 May 2008 <u>http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/regions/americas/cuba</u>
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	[11c]	Cuba: Amnesty International's human rights concerns: 29 January 2007 <u>http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR250032007?o</u> pen&of=ENG-CUB			
	[11e]	Amnesty International, Annual Report 2007 – Republic of Cuba (published 23 May 2007) http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/cuba/report-2007			
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HUMAN RIGHTS – S					
(IN ADDITION TO GE	HUMAN RIGHTS – SPECIFIC ISSUES: (IN ADDITION TO GENERAL REPORTS ABOVE, INFORMATION ON THE FOLLOWING ISSUES IS PROVIDED IN THE DOCUMENTS LISTED BELOW)				
CHILDREN	[2a]	USSD, Report on Human Rights Practices 2007: Cuba, 11 March 2008 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100635.htm			
	[2d]	USSD, Trafficking in Persons Report 2008, 4 June 2008 http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2008			
	[2f]	USSD, International Adoption – Cuba November 2006 http://www.travel.state.gov/family/adoption/country/country_ 3092.html			
	[15a]	Child Soldiers, Global Report 2008: Cuba http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/content/cuba			
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	[3a]	Constitution of the Republic of Cuba,1992 http://www.cubanet.org/ref/dis/const_92_e.htm
	[3b]	Citizenship Law (2002 as amended 2006)
	[21a]	United States Office of Personnel Management Investigations Service, Citizenships laws of the World, published March 2001, Cuba http://www.multiplecitizenship.com/wscl/ws_CUBA.html
CORRUPTION	[1a]	Library of Congress, Country Profiles: Cuba, updated September 2006 http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Cuba.pdf
	[2a]	USSD, Report on Human Rights Practices 2007: Cuba, 11 March 2008 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100635.htm
	[17]	Transparency International, Corruption Perception Index 2008 (released 23 September 2008) http://www.transparency.org/news_room/in_focus/2008/cpi2 008/cpi 2008 table
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DEATH PENALTY	[6a]	Hands off Cain, International Treaties on the Death Penalty and Human Rights-Cuba <u>http://www.handsoffcain.info/bancadati/schedastato.php?idc</u> <u>ontinente=24&nome=cuba</u>
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EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS	[2a]	USSD, Report on Human Rights Practices 2007: Cuba, 11 March 2008 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100635.htm

ETHNIC GROUPS	[1a]	Library of Congress, Country Profiles: Cuba, updated September 2006 http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Cuba.pdf
	[2a]	USSD, Report on Human Rights Practices 2007: Cuba, 11 March 2008 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100635.htm
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	[10a]	CIA, The World Factbook, Cuba, last updated 23 October 2008 <u>https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-</u> <u>factbook/geos/cu.html</u>
EXIT – ENTRY PROCEDURES	[4c]	FCO Consular Travel Advise, (still current at 27 October 2008) <u>http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-</u> <u>overseas/travel-advice-by-country/north-central-</u> <u>america/cuba</u>
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FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT/REGI STRATION	[2a]	USSD, Report on Human Rights Practices 2007: Cuba, 11 March 2008 <u>http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100635.htm</u>
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FREEDOM OF RELIGION	[2a]	USSD, Report on Human Rights Practices 2007: Cuba, 11 March 2008 <u>http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100635.htm</u>

FREEDOM OF RELIGION CONT'D	[2b]	USSD International Religious Freedom Report 2008, 19 September 2008 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108521.htm
	[9]	Christian Solidarity Worldwide – Religious Liberty in Cuba 1 April 2008 <u>http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=report&id=93</u>
	[10a]	CIA, The World Factbook, Cuba, last updated 23 October 2008 <u>https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-</u> factbook/geos/cu.html
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FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND THE MEDIA	[2a]	USSD, Report on Human Rights Practices 2007: Cuba, 11 March 2008 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100635.htm
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16

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPS)	[2a]	USSD, Report on Human Rights Practices 2007: Cuba, 11 March 2008 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100635.htm
	[5a]	Human Rights Watch, World Report 2008: Cuba January
		2008 http://hrw.org/wr2k8/pdfs/cuba.pdf
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	[19a]	US Committee for Refugees, World Refugee Survey 2004 Country Report, Cuba (accessed 3 April 2007) <u>http://www.refugees.org/countryreports.aspx?subm=&ssm=</u> <u>&cid=88</u>
	[22a]	Relief Web, Cuba (accessed on 4 April 2007) http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/dbc.nsf/doc104?OpenForm&rc=2 &cc=cub
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Return to Contents