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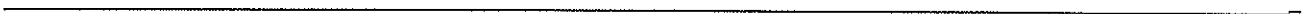


**PEACEFUL TRANSITIONS AND THE  
CUBAN DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM**

**Report of an International Conference**

**June 17-19, 1991**

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## THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) was established in 1983. By working with political parties and other institutions, NDI seeks to promote, maintain, and strengthen democratic institutions in new and emerging democracies. The Institute is chaired by former Vice President Walter F. Mondale and is headquartered in Washington, DC.

NDI has conducted democratic development programs in more than 40 countries. Programs focus on six major areas:

***Election Processes:*** NDI provides technical assistance for political parties and nonpartisan associations to conduct voter and civic education campaigns and to organize election monitoring programs. The Institute has also organized more than 30 international observer programs.

***Legislative Training:*** In Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa, NDI has organized legislative seminars focusing on legislative procedures, staffing, research information, constituent services and committee structures.

***Local Government:*** Technical assistance on models of city management has been provided to national legislatures and municipal governments in Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

***Civil-Military Relations:*** NDI brings together military and political leaders to promote dialogue and establish mechanisms for improving civil-military relations.

***Civic Education:*** NDI supports and advises nonpartisan groups and political parties engaged in civic and voter education programs.

***Political Party Training:*** NDI conducts multipartisan training seminars in political development with a broad spectrum of democratic parties. NDI draws expert trainers from around the world to forums where members of fledgling parties learn first-hand the techniques of organization, communication and constituent contact.



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## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), in cooperation with the Cuban-Venezuelan Democratic Foundation, sponsored a conference titled "Peaceful Transitions and the Cuban Democratic Platform" in Caracas, Venezuela from June 17-19, 1991. NDI organized the conference to enable Cuban democratic groups in exile to acquire practical information on recent transitions in Latin America and Eastern Europe and to help accelerate the development of political institutions and the transition to democracy in Cuba. The two-and-a-half-day conference was attended by more than 70 Cuban exiles affiliated with the Cuban Democratic Platform, a coalition of Cuban exile political parties from across the democratic political spectrum dedicated to a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba.

Democratic activists from Bulgaria, Chile, Costa Rica, Hungary, Nicaragua, Poland, the Russian Republic and Spain, all of whom played leading roles in their countries' transitions to democracy, offered practical information and advice relating to political reform. The international delegates led panel discussions on the following topics:

- **Recent Transitions and the Lessons for Cuba**, in which the delegates spoke of their experiences in democratic transitions and their implications for Cuba;
- **Coalitions for Democracy**, which analyzed the strategies and organization of pro-democracy coalitions in Nicaragua, Chile, Bulgaria and the Soviet Union;
- **Human Rights and Democracy**, which examined successful human rights movements in support of democratic change;
- **Elections and Plebiscites**, which addressed the roles elections and plebiscites played as catalysts in the process of democratic change and explored the various strategies and negotiations that led to the balloting process; and
- **Closed Societies and the Exile Community**, which analyzed the role of exiles in promoting democratic change, extracting lessons from transitions in Nicaragua and Eastern Europe.

The conference enabled the Cuban participants to acquire practical information on democratic transitions and the role of exiles in promoting democratic change. It has also



enabled the Cuban Democratic Platform to more effectively prepare for and promote a transition process in Cuba through the development of political and civic institutions necessary for a successful transition.

The conference also lent international support to the dissidents who are engaged in a nonviolent struggle against the Castro regime. At the conclusion of the conference, the Cuban participants drafted the *Declaration of Caracas*, reaffirming their call for a peaceful democratic transition in Cuba. The Central and Eastern European delegates also drafted a parallel declaration of solidarity with Cuban dissidents. The two declarations as well as other excerpts from the conference were broadcast on the Voice of America Spanish Service and Radio Marti and were distributed to all USIS posts in Latin America for placement in the local press.

## II. INTRODUCTION

During the past two years, unprecedented political change has occurred as nations around the world have embraced democracy. However, Cuba remains an exception. Recent political liberalization in the Soviet Union, Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America have raised expectations inside and outside Cuba for a democratic transition there. The economic and political pressures on the Cuban leadership are acute and likely to intensify. These developments have prompted Cubans to begin thinking seriously about a peaceful democratic transition on the island.

In August 1990, Cuban exile political parties representing the Liberal, Christian Democrat and Social Democratic ideologies formed the Cuban Democratic Platform and signed the *Declaration of Madrid*, urging political change in Cuba through elections or a plebiscite. [See Appendix 1]. The declaration notes that "Cuba is the anachronistic exception to the unstoppable wave of democratic transformations," and sets out five conditions for holding elections: 1) amnesty for political prisoners; 2) constitutional changes to permit political parties and the freedom of association; 3) respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; 4) promotion of trade union rights; and 5) discussion among the Cuban government, Cuban exiles and internal dissidents on a

transition to democracy. Recognizing that Fidel Castro is not likely to call a plebiscite or competitive elections, the declaration is designed to lend support to democratic dissidents inside Cuba and to appeal to individuals within the Cuban government who may be more flexible than Castro. The declaration, which was signed by members of human rights organizations in exile and the Church laity, marked the emergence of a coalition of Cuban exiles from across the democratic political spectrum dedicated to peaceful democratic change in Cuba.

In late 1990, leaders of the Cuban Democratic Platform asked NDI to sponsor an international symposium to examine successful strategies of recent democratic transitions to help prepare Cuban democrats for an eventual transition to democracy in Cuba. NDI had never before designed a program with political exiles. The Cuban exile community, however, is particularly active and influential. It has maintained a strong interest in Cuban affairs and has worked diligently to promote democratic change in Cuba. When Gustavo Arcos, Cuba's most prominent internal dissident, called for a dialogue among all Cubans, he included the exiles. While the totalitarian nature of the regime in Cuba makes it extremely difficult to work directly with indigenous democrats, the Platform remains in contact with influential dissidents on the island, many of whom have taken the risk of endorsing the Platform.

In cooperation with the Caracas-based Cuban-Venezuelan Democratic Foundation, NDI sponsored an international conference titled "Peaceful Transitions and the Cuban Democratic Platform," in Caracas, Venezuela, June 17-19, 1991. The two-and-a-half-day conference was attended by more than 70 members from the Liberal, Social Democratic and Christian Democratic parties that comprise the Platform. [See Appendix 2 for Cuban participant list]. Democratic leaders from Bulgaria, Chile, Costa Rica, Hungary, Nicaragua, Poland, the Russian Republic, Spain and Venezuela shared their experiences in fostering democratic transitions. [See Appendix 3 for international delegate list]. These international delegates led workshops providing practical advice and insight into the issues of democratic transitions and the lessons for Cuba. The workshops addressed: coalitions for democracy; human rights and democracy; elections and plebiscites; and closed societies and the exile community. [See Appendix 4 for conference agenda].

The opening remarks were delivered by the international leaders of the Christian Democratic, Social Democratic and Liberal political ideologies: Eduardo Fernandez, president of the Christian Democrat International; Luis Alberto Monge, former president of Costa Rica; and German Febres, vice president of the Federation of Liberal and Centrist Political Parties in Latin America and the Caribbean (FELICA). Nicaraguan Vice President Virgilio Godoy, Executive Secretary of FELICA, also participated in the conference.

The opening plenary session of the conference was covered by the Venezuelan press and television. In addition, a press conference was held at the conclusion of the conference, at which the leaders of the Cuban Democratic Platform released the *Declaration of Caracas* and the East European delegates drafted a similar statement of support for democracy in Cuba. [See Appendices 5 and 6 for Declaration of Caracas and East European declaration respectively].

This report was written by Thomas Carothers, an attorney at Arnold & Porter and author of *In the Name of Democracy: U.S. Policy Toward Latin America in the Reagan Years*. The report was edited by NDI Executive Vice President Kenneth D. Wollack, NDI Program Officer for Latin America Mark Feierstein and Program Assistant Peter Silverman.

### **III. CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS**

#### **A. *Opening Remarks and Presentation of Cuban Democratic Platform***

NDI Executive Vice President Kenneth Wollack and Ramon Guillermo Avelado of the Cuban-Venezuelan Democratic Foundation opened the conference. Avelado outlined the larger political context of the founding of the Cuban Democratic Platform and of the conference itself. Pointing to the consolidation of democracy in Latin America and around the world, Avelado asserted that world attention is focused on Cuba with the expectation of democratic change occurring there as well. He emphasized that the conference would demonstrate that pluralism is desirable and possible in Cuba.

After providing an overview of NDI programs in support of democracy around the world, Wollack noted that NDI's work with the Cuban Democratic Platform represented a new direction for NDI in that it involves supporting a pro-democracy group that functions outside the country concerned. Nonetheless, Wollack stressed that the Platform does not seek to impose an external solution on Cuba and is clearly based on the principles of pluralism and human rights. He said the purpose of the conference was not to indulge in negative rhetoric or theorizing but to share expertise and experiences in focusing on practical issues concerning the promotion of democratic change in Cuba.

The international political party leaders followed with brief welcoming remarks. German Febres, president of the Venezuelan New Generation Democratic Liberal Party and vice president of the Federation of Liberal and Centrist Political Parties in Central America and the Caribbean (FELICA) stressed the importance of the political party internationals working together on important issues that transcend political affiliation, such as democratic change in Cuba. He proposed that Cubans participating in the conference form a commission that could communicate directly with Cubans inside the country.

Carlos Raul Hernandez, a Venezuelan senator from the Democratic Action Party, described how in the 1960s Fidel Castro represented a dream in Latin America of an independent and just society, and how that vision has now become a nightmare. He stated that all Latin American democrats should work to avoid a violent transition in Cuba following the dictatorship.

Former President of Costa Rica Luis Alberto Monge asserted that all dictatorships must be opposed. He commended the presence of participants from Nicaragua, Chile and Central and Eastern Europe, noting that democracy begins at home, and urged the Cuban exile community to overcome its divisions and work together for democratic change.

Finally, Eduardo Fernandez, president of the Christian Democrat International (IDC), expressed IDC's solidarity with the Cuban Democratic Platform and with democratic activists inside Cuba. He stated that the unity of a people is crucial to democracy and that the spirit of the conference represented the unity of all Cubans. He

advised the Cuban participants to emphasize their common goal of promoting change in Cuba and not to defend or seek privileges for any group, but rather to uphold the principles of human rights and democracy.

Carlos Alberto Montaner of the Cuban Liberal Union, Jose Ignacio Rasco of the Christian Democratic Party and Alfredo Sanchez of the Social Democrats welcomed the participants on behalf of the Cuban Democratic Platform. In discussing the Platform, they emphasized several tenets shared by the parties of the coalition: that solutions to the Cuban crises not be imposed from outside the country, but rather that Cubans be assisted in nurturing a democratic system; that there be respect for human rights in Cuba; and that there must be a peaceful transition from Castro's totalitarian rule.

Carlos Alberto Montaner argued that given the recent decline of communism around the world, Castro's fall is inevitable. Montaner predicted a political transition that will be "supranational" in character, given the active Cuban exile community around the world. The outcome of the transition, Montaner stated, lies with Castro and whether he will submit to legal norms.

Jose Ignacio Rasco and Alfredo Sanchez added that the Platform is seeking the reemergence of democratic principles in Cuba. A democratic popular will is beginning to manifest itself and a majority of Cubans desire a democratic transition through nonviolent means, they said. They urged the exile community to promote a democratic transition by collectively encouraging international pressure on the Cuban regime to create a political opening.

***B. Recent Transitions and Lessons for Cuba: Introductory Remarks by International Delegates***

Genaro Arriagada, vice president of Chile's Christian Democratic Party and executive director of the NO Campaign in the 1988 Chilean presidential plebiscite, presented an overview of Chile's democratic transition. In Chile, while the opposition struggled politically against the incumbent regime during the transition, its efforts to promote democracy significantly strengthened civil society, which the government could

not control despite its hold over the formal institutions of power. The situation in Cuba is very different, Arriagada acknowledged, but nonetheless, central themes from the Chilean experience apply. The exile and the international communities, he said, must encourage the internal activists. Cooperation among opposition groups may be difficult but is essential. The exile community must give up ideal, unattainable schemes and embrace practical approaches supporting internal dissidents' demands.

Raul Morodo, a Spanish member of the European Parliament, characterized the Spanish experience as the first nonviolent democratic transition in modern times. In the early 1970s, Morodo said, Spain arrived at a point similar to the one described by Arriagada with respect to Chile in the mid-1980s: social and civil institutions changed markedly but the formal power structures did not. Within this climate, and perhaps a key element to the transition's success, was the mutual fear that existed between the government and the democratic opposition. This environment encouraged each side to make concessions that ultimately promoted a peaceful transition.

Stefan Tafrov, foreign policy advisor to President Zhelyu Zhelev of Bulgaria, said that civil society was not completely destroyed in Bulgaria when the communist regime took power in Bulgaria in the mid-1940s. However, it was not until the Bulgarian government undertook modest economic and cultural reforms in the 1970s that a visible opposition, albeit limited, to the government emerged, consisting mostly of intellectuals. Democratic change in the latter half of the 1980s was prompted by two events: Soviet *perestroika* and the persecution of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria. In 1988, a deepening economic crisis prompted growing opposition to the government and the formation of groups -- led primarily by ecological activists -- with an anti-regime focus. In addition, reformist forces emerged within the Communist Party that would later play a crucial role in the transition.

Luis Humberto Guzman, a leader of the Nicaraguan UNO coalition and a member of the National Assembly, compared the political situations in Nicaragua and Cuba, identifying four similarities: 1) the Sandinistas and Castro assumed power through armed rebellion; 2) in the beginning of their rules, the Sandinistas and Castro enjoyed broad international sympathy, which gradually eroded; 3) the governments of Nicaragua and

Cuba were led by vanguard parties; and 4) the U.S. was an intervening actor in the affairs of both nations.

Guzman then identified significant differences between the two nations: the Sandinistas accepted the notion of pluralism, if only in principle, whereas Castro continues to oppose it; the Sandinista government lacked a single charismatic leader; during Sandinista rule, limited political space existed in which opposition groups could operate, whereas in Cuba no such opening exists; and Nicaragua supported a strong, active Catholic Church, which is not the case in Cuba.

Guzman indicated several factors that led the Sandinistas to agree to the 1990 elections: the decline of communism in Central and Eastern Europe weakened the credibility of the Sandinista government; the civil war prevented the Sandinistas from consolidating their power; and the Sandinista government underestimated the opposition's ability to unify sufficiently to field a single candidate for president and win the elections.

Jan Litynski, vice president of the Polish Democratic Union Parliamentary Caucus and former co-chair of the Solidarity underground movement, reflected on political change in Poland in the 1980s. He pointed out that Poles had become relatively accustomed to communist rule. When martial law was declared in December 1981, the tanks on the streets were Polish, not Soviet. While many Poles rejected the system, many were still connected with it in several respects, thus making more difficult any political transition. Solidarity was formed as a trade union, which meant that it was concerned with the rights of workers and so opposed the entire communist system in Poland and not just its political nature. Solidarity was also closely aligned with the religious aspirations of Poles. In fact, the Pope's visit to Poland in 1979 was critical in consolidating the opposition.

Balint Magyar, a member of Hungary's National Assembly from the Alliance of Free Democrats, asserted that Hungary in the 1960s was already experimenting with economic reform. A human rights movement comprising intellectuals and members of small environmental and peace movements took root in the late 1970s. However, it was not until 1987 that significant change occurred. The struggle over the secession of

President Janos Kadar led to a split within the Communist Party, resulting in the creation of two factions, reformist and the old guard. When Kadar was ousted in 1988, new political parties emerged. These parties formed a temporary coalition, the opposition roundtable, to negotiate with the government about political reforms that would lead to democratic elections. From negotiations between the government and the nine groups and political parties that composed the roundtable emerged an agreement that only six of the nine opposition coalition members ultimately signed. The three non-signatories wanted greater reform than was outlined in the agreement and collected the necessary signatures around the country to hold a national referendum on the agreement. In a national referendum, Hungarians voted overwhelmingly in favor of greater reforms as favored by the three parties, setting the scene for the historic March 1990 multiparty elections.

Oleg Rummyantsev, a member of the Russian parliament and secretary of the Constitutional Commission of the Russian Republic, explained that in the Soviet Union during the past four years, opposition groups formed civic organizations that represent the base of an emerging civil society and serve as a training ground for the opposition. The opposition, Rummyantsev said, has taken the initiative, trying to push through constitutional reform rather than simply criticizing the government. The opposition emphasized national consensus in place of directly confronting the *nomenklatura*. In this sense, it has sought to make use of the expertise of technical experts. Despite efforts to keep open lines of communication with Soviets outside the country, the exile community, he believes, has forgotten about the internal opposition. Few exiled opposition members have returned to become politically active.

### *C. Human Rights and Democracy*

The panel on human rights and democracy was led by Balint Magyar, Oleg Rummyantsev, Andres Dominguez, secretary of the Board of the Chilean Commission on Human Rights, and Ricardo Bofill, founder and president of the Cuban Committee for Human Rights. Harriet Babbitt, the panel's moderator and member of NDI's Board of Directors, had recently returned from Cuba where she met with human rights activists. Babbitt emphasized that the struggle for human rights in Cuba is about individuals making



the difficult decision to take serious risks for the attainment of what may turn out to be small gains. These individuals value the support of those outside Cuba, she said.

Bofill described the influence of the Soviet Helsinki Watch groups on the incipient human rights movement in Cuba in the 1980s. He noted, however, that the human rights movement has not attracted prominent members of Cuban society nor extensive international support as had the Soviet and Central and Eastern European movements in the 1980s. Gustavo Arcos Bergnes, secretary general of the Cuban Committee for Human Rights, was the first prominent Cuban to be identified with the movement.

Magyar noted that the human rights movements in Central and Eastern Europe were the principal locus of political activity before political parties were allowed to form and served as a springboard for democratic activism. Although significant differences existed among human rights groups in the region, Magyar contended, there were certain conditions present in those countries with strong human rights movements that could be viewed as prerequisites for the emergence of successful movements anywhere. First, it is advantageous to be dealing with a nondemocratic regime that nonetheless tries to display a democratic image. By attempting to keep up a democratic front, the government might demonstrate concern for its external reputation by subscribing to international human rights standards and agreements. Within this context, government repression may be less severe and thus may not suffocate struggling human rights movements. A second condition to the growth of a human rights movement is the presence of at least some contact with the international community, particularly with democratic nations, either through tourism, trade or cultural exchanges.

Andres Dominguez briefly described the Chilean Commission for Human Rights. The Commission was established mainly through the influence of three groups: the Catholic Church, Chilean lawyers who resisted the repression of the Pinochet regime and families of persecuted individuals. The Commission is organized around the belief that all sectors in Chilean society have a role to play in a human rights movement. The Commission's mission is not simply to monitor human rights violations, but to educate society so that by being aware of its rights, it may defend itself. The Commission,

Dominguez said, is currently working with the democratic government of Chile on human rights issues and is also an active member of the international human rights community.

In discussions following the presentations, Cuban participants agreed that the Platform should pressure Latin American democracies to demonstrate the same concern for democracy in Cuba as they did toward other dictatorships throughout the 1980s.

Andres Dominguez was asked to comment on the forms of cooperation that existed during the Chilean transition between human rights groups and political parties. He said the human rights groups positioned themselves as a civic rather than political movement. Following the elections, the commission has offered its services at the request of political parties.

#### *D. Coalitions for Democracy*

The panel on coalitions was led by Genaro Arriagada, Luis Humberto Guzman, Oleg Rummyantsev and Stefan Tafrov and was moderated by Anibal Romero of the Cuban-Venezuelan Democratic Foundation.

Arriagada discussed the relation between external pro-democracy movements and their internal counterparts, cautioning that the relationship is often delicate. When Pinochet's international reputation was in decline, the internal pro-democracy movement suffered as he tried to silence his opponents in Chile. It is necessary, therefore, to coordinate external and internal efforts. Hardline statements by foreign groups can make life more difficult for those struggling inside the country. It is essential, Arriagada said, to match the message of both forces. In a situation such as exists in Cuba where the exile community is strong and its counterparts on the island are weak, he argued, it is particularly important for the exile community to unite around fundamental principles and methods. Only then can it effectively promote a unified pro-democracy movement in Cuba.

Guzman said Cuban exiles should not assume that a transition after Castro will necessarily be democratic. Certain initiatives by the exile community can increase the

probability of a democratic transition, such as garnering international support for a transition and supporting internal democratic efforts as much as possible. He stressed that the exile community must subordinate itself to the methods of those democrats on the island.

Rumyantsev discussed the recent process of democratic coalition building in Russia. Two approaches were available in Russia, he stated, forming the democratic opposition either as independent groups or as a single organ with a single leadership. Fortunately, in Rumyantsev's view, the first option prevailed; otherwise, the opposition would have been run like an oligarchy. The opposition has successfully utilized a horizontal organizational structure, contrasting with the Communist Party's vertical structure. At the Soviet level, the opposition has been less successful and rather dispersed. A key feature of the coalition at the republic level is that it incorporates difference sectors of society, not just the intelligentsia.

Stefan Tafrov believes that the key to establishing the opposition Bulgarian Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) in December 1990 was the existence of a strong, single opponent in the form of the Communist Party. The UDF was created as a coalition and incorporated three types of organizations: historical parties, independent movements (such as Eco-glasnost and the unions) and new political parties, including some comprised of former communists. The UDF believed that former communists had the right to reform and was willing to include them. Tafrov described the process of coalition building as two parallel processes, with each constituent group seeking to establish its identity as both an independent group and as a member of a collective body.

Following the panel presentations, a Cuban participant cited four factors that may make a democratic transition in Cuba more difficult than in Central and Eastern Europe: 1) the romanticized quality of the Cuban revolution; 2) the fact that the same person who led the revolution is still in power; 3) the almost complete totalitarian nature of the Castro regime; and 4) the fact that the political elite in Cuba seems to have no viable way out of the impending political quagmire.

Arriagada responded that the Cuban exile community should guide the international community toward a unified position against Castro, with an immediate goal of moving the regime from totalitarian rule. Cuban exiles should make clear to potential reformists in the Cuban government that there will be room for them in a post-Castro polity and that they are not sealing their fate by distancing themselves from Castro.

Another Cuban participant contended that European governments pay more attention to Cuba than do Latin American governments and asked Arriagada for his impressions. Arriagada acknowledged that a certain double standard has existed among Latin Americans with respect to Castro. He urged the Platform to work with Latin American governments to unify their position with respect to Castro. The best approach, he believes, is to emphasize universal principles such as human rights rather than make hostile declarations that sound like calls for intervention in Cuban affairs.

Rumyantsev was asked whether it would be a great risk to put a constituent assembly in the hands of a transitional government led by communists, or even reformists, if Castro fell. Rumyantsev remarked that the danger of co-opting the process tends not to be as great as long as the constitution has been approved by referendum. What is more dangerous, he said, is to create a parliament that is merely a transitional body, thus giving it absolute authority to make laws on its own without any sense of permanence.

### *E. Elections and Plebiscites*

Enrique Baloyra of the Cuban Social Democratic Party moderated this panel comprised of Balint Magyar, Jan Litynski, Genaro Arriagada, Stefan Tafrov and Nicaraguan Vice President Virgilio Godoy.

Magyar reviewed the historic roundtable negotiations between the communist government and the democratic opposition that established the guidelines for political reform and led to multiparty elections and a democratic transition in Hungary. Magyar described the negotiations as having occurred in two phases. During the first phase, negotiators established the conditions for the actual negotiations on political reform. The

opposition roundtable pressed for four conditions it considered necessary for conducting meaningful negotiations: 1) the negotiations must be two-sided, in which the coalition of opposition political parties and organizations would be recognized by the communist government as its legitimate counterpart (the opposition feared three or four-sided negotiations in which communist satellite parties could influence the process); 2) the parliament could not consider or draft laws dealing with issues under negotiation; 3) negotiations were to be held in the parliament building as opposed to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences as requested by the Communist Party; and 4) negotiations were to be open to the media.

The second phase involved the actual negotiations over political reform, which took place from June-September 1989. Negotiators were divided into working groups to address six key political issues: 1) the immediate modification of the constitution, the institution of the presidency and the constitutional court; 2) rules and regulations regarding political parties; 3) the election law; 4) modifications of the criminal code; 5) new legislation on information and the media; and 6) guarantees against coercive measures taken by the government during the transition period.

Upon the conclusion of the negotiations in September, only six of the original nine parties in the opposition roundtable signed the final agreement with the communist government. Instead of vetoing the agreement and thereby dissolving the coalition, the Alliance of Free Democrats, the Federation of Young Democrats and the League of Independent Trade Unions chose not to sign it. They were dissatisfied with four unchanged measures included in the agreement that they believed did not go far enough toward meaningful reform.

The three groups quickly collected more than double the 100,000 signatures required by law for the parliament to hold a national referendum on the issues. On November 26, 1989 the people of Hungary were asked in a national referendum whether they favored the following four changes as presented by the three groups: 1) to hold general elections prior to presidential elections, thus allowing the parliament to select the president; 2) to prohibit the operation of party organizations in the workplace; 3) to require the Communist Party to publicly disclose its assets; and 4) to dissolve the

worker's militia. Hungarians voting overwhelmingly in favor of the reforms and setting the stage for the historic elections beginning March 1990.

Litynski explored what he called "the Polish paradox," the fact that Poland was the first Eastern European country to abolish Communist Party rule but still has not held free presidential elections. Litynski said it is because Poland's advantages in the early phase of the transition soon became its handicaps. Lech Walesa and Solidarity were popular symbols of national unity and democratic heroism. However, with his rise in government, Walesa has concentrated power, making it more difficult for other democratic political parties to develop. Litynski said the roundtable negotiating process that was so effective at the beginning of the transition is coming under increasing criticism by many who argue that it allowed Communist Party officials to escape accountability for their previous acts.

Litynski also noted that economic issues were overlooked in the early phase. Most Poles mistakenly thought that democracy itself would resolve their economic woes. Now Poland is beset with serious economic difficulties. Litynski advised the Cuban participants to be conscious of economic issues from the inception of a political transition.

Arriagada offered six impressions on plebiscites based on his experiences in Chile. First, plebiscites are useful in situations where the government is strong and the opposition is developed but unable to force the government out of power. A plebiscite is a kind of negotiation process during which both sides accept a common arena to resolve their power struggle. Second, plebiscites provide opportunities for opposition movements. They help foster unity among opposition groups because it is far easier to agree on a position for a plebiscite than on a single candidate for a presidential election. Third, plebiscites in transitional periods are never completely democratic. Many electoral features such as access to media, campaign funds and human resources will inevitably favor the government. Fourth, plebiscites in transitional periods are difficult and risky. In Chile, Pinochet won 43 percent of the vote. It should not be assumed that a plebiscite will bring an easy victory for the opposition. Fifth, plebiscites involve deep psychological as well as political factors. Most Chileans perceived Pinochet as an undesirable but invincible leader. To win a plebiscite, a democratic opposition must

convince the electorate to overcome its deep-rooted fears born from authoritarian or totalitarian rule. Sixth, a plebiscite is not the end of the transition process but just the beginning.

In summarizing the Bulgarian experience, Tafrov described how President Todor Zhivkov was deposed the day after the Berlin Wall fell in a coup planned by his colleagues. Widespread social unrest placed pressure on Zhivkov's government, which the democratic opposition utilized to force the communists to engage in roundtable negotiations that led to multiparty elections. The negotiations were broadcast live on television and radio, which helped to establish the legitimacy of the opposition while exposing the government to public scrutiny. The communists won the elections, but soon thereafter growing public pressure resulted in the selection of an opposition leader as president and the resignation of the communist prime minister. Currently a coalition government is implementing an ambitious economic reform program. The opposition groups now realize that despite the opposition's initial loss, the results of the electoral process proved ultimately positive.

Vice President Godoy drew some comparisons between Nicaragua's transition and the Cuban situation. In Nicaragua, he said, there was a layer of fear in the populace that was necessary to overcome. Unity within the opposition forces was essential. Nicaragua's opposition managed to persuade 14 of the 21 opposition parties to join in a coalition. The Esquipulas peace process was a major factor in bringing the opposition together.

Godoy noted that many people in Nicaragua, including opposition members, believed that only the Sandinistas could guarantee a stable post-election Nicaragua. He told the Cuban participants that if the Cuban opposition is ultimately victorious, it may be called upon to share power with the very people it is trying to defeat. Prior to the new government assuming office, the Sandinistas moved to preserve their interests, and Godoy warned the participants to be ready for such actions by any outgoing Cuban regime. Finally, Godoy affirmed Arriagada's view that the electoral process represents only the first, and probably the easiest step in the transition process.

## *F. Closed Societies and the Exile Community*

The panel was led by Luis Humberto Guzman and Jan Litynski and was moderated by Amaya Sanchez of the Cuban Christian Democratic Party. Guzman explained that many Nicaraguans in the United States sought the support of the U.S. government in bringing down the Sandinista regime. The Cuban case is unusual, he said, because of the hermetic quality of the Cuban system. The Cuban exile community nonetheless faces the important task of trying to establish a window of information into Cuba to advise its counterparts on the island of external events and to assist them in promoting democratic change. If there is a viable opening, Guzman believes, it will be necessary for Cuban exiles to return and contribute their resources and expertise to the democratization effort. Guzman advised the Cubans to begin thinking about such issues as nonresident voting rights.

Litynski presented examples of how Polish exiles affected the political situation in Poland during communist rule. In 1956, a Polish police colonel fled Poland and wrote his memoirs, which were broadcast on Radio Free Europe, causing a great stir in Poland. In the 1970s and 1980s, intellectual journals published by emigres influenced intellectual life in Poland.

Litynski acknowledged significant differences between Poland and Cuba, but noted that Cuban exiles are geographically much closer to their country than were the Polish exiles and, for the most part, are better organized with more resources.

## **IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In the concluding session, participants focused on the Cuban Democratic Platform and its future efforts. Among the issues raised were the following:

- the Cuban exile community should utilize messages that appeal to a broader audience, both inside and outside Cuba. The Platform should take the lead in promoting a unified message among the entire exile community;



- the Platform should not develop programs for democratic governance in Cuba. People inside Cuba should be encouraged to devise their own solutions. The Platform must avoid creating the impression that it is trying to impose a political solution from outside;
- the exile community must continue to demand democratic change. By continuing to resist reform, Castro will further expose himself to internal and external criticism;
- the Platform must strengthen its contacts with intellectuals and dissidents inside Cuba. As was the case in Eastern Europe, they will likely play the leading role in the post-communist era; and,
- at its next meeting, the Platform should undertake a concrete initiative to encourage a democratic transition in Cuba.

Following the conference proceedings, leaders of the Cuban Democratic Platform drafted the *Declaration of Caracas*, which was released at the concluding press conference. In the declaration, the Platform reaffirmed its call for a peaceful democratic transition in Cuba, as stated in the *Declaration of Madrid* (see Appendix 6.) The Caracas statement declared, "there is no doubt about the course of history. Totalitarianism is collapsing and giving way to democracy. Cuba cannot continue being an anachronistic exception. Fidel Castro is leading us toward a catastrophe that endangers the integrity of the Cuban nation." The declaration called on the nations of the world, particularly those in Latin America, to pressure for fundamental democratic change and human rights in Cuba. The statement expressed support for dissidents inside Cuba who are being persecuted for their advocacy of democratic change and human rights. The declaration referred to a statement released two weeks earlier by members of the National Union of Writers and Artists in Cuba, which warned of a disaster of apocalyptic dimensions if the status quo under Castro continues. The declaration stated, "the Cuban Democratic Platform is attempting to collect and disseminate the message of these voices that today rebel on the island. We believe the answer lies within Cuba. We demand that Cuba be given the opportunity to decide its own destiny by means of free elections. A voice must be given to those in Cuba who have none."

Balint Magyar, Stefan Tafrov, Jan Litynski and Oleg Rumyantsev also drafted a parallel declaration that expressed support for the Platform and all Cubans struggling for

human rights, multiparty democracy and an open society in Cuba. The declaration stated, "We know how much personal courage is needed for your long nonviolent struggle. We are convinced that human dignity cannot be oppressed forever. Our respective experiences prove that a peaceful transition is possible and is by far the best solution."

## **V. CONFERENCE RESULTS**

The conference achieved several significant goals. The Cuban participants acquired practical information on democratic transitions and the important role of the exile community in promoting democratic change in Cuba. Given that few of the Cuban participants have had experience with the manifold issues that arise in political transitions, the exchange of expertise and experiences was beneficial. The conference has enabled the Cuban participants to more effectively prepare for and promote a transition in Cuba through the development of the political and civic institutions necessary for a successful democratic transition.

The conference provided the opportunity for member parties to strengthen their ties within the Cuban Democratic Platform and to address organizational and administration issues. Particular attention was given to the mutually acknowledged need for unity within the exile community, the importance of the exile community integrating its efforts with dissidents inside Cuba and the need to consolidate international support for democratic change in Cuba.

The conference promoted an awareness among the international community about the Cuban Democratic Platform and its call for peaceful democratic change in Cuba. The conference highlighted the ties of the Platform's member parties to the political party internationals and strengthened its relations with international democratic leaders. The international delegates returned to their respective countries with a heightened awareness of the efforts of democrats inside and outside Cuba and urging a democratic transition in Cuba.

Finally, the conference lent vital support to democratic activists on the island and informed Cubans and the Castro government that the Cuban exile community and the international community support democratic change in Cuba. The declarations as well as other excerpts from the conference were broadcast on the Voice of America Spanish Service and Radio Marti and were distributed to all USIS posts in Latin America for placement in the local press.

## **APPENDICES**

