

## Statement on Cuba March 20, 1998

Eight weeks ago, His Holiness John Paul II made an historic visit to Cuba. He spoke to and for the Catholic faithful who have for decades endured a system that denied their right to worship freely.

In anticipation and in support of that visit, my administration made a number of exceptions to our policy regarding travel and shipment of humanitarian supplies to Cuba. The response of the Cuban people to that visit has since convinced me that we should continue to look for ways to support Cuba's people without supporting its regime, by providing additional humanitarian relief, increasing human contacts, and helping the Cuban people prepare for a peaceful transition to a free, independent, and prosperous nation.

Prior to the Pope's visit, we authorized direct charter flights for pilgrims to attend Papal services. We also authorized direct humanitarian cargo flights to Cuba in order to reduce the cost of getting these needed supplies to the Cuban people. The deliveries were carefully monitored to ensure that they reached the people for whom they were intended.

These measures were fully consistent with the letter and spirit of the Cuban Democracy Act and the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, which, in addition to sustaining tough economic sanctions, also enable and encourage the administration to conduct a program of support for the Cuban people.

I continue to believe in the validity of our policy built on four main components:

- pressure on the regime for democratic change;
- support for the Cuban people through humanitarian assistance and help in developing civil society;
- promotion of more concerted multilateral effort to promote democracy and human rights; and
- cooperative arrangements to move migration into safe, legal, and orderly channels.

I have been following carefully the various proposals put forward by Members of Congress and other interested groups for expanding humanitarian assistance to the people of Cuba, including food. I have asked Secretary Albright

to work on a bipartisan basis with the Congress to fashion an approach to the transfer of food to the Cuban people.

To build further on the impact of the Pope's visit, to support the role of the Church and other elements of civil society in Cuba, and to thereby help prepare the Cuban people for a democratic transition, I have also decided to take the following steps:

- Resume licensing direct humanitarian charter flights to Cuba. Direct humanitarian flights under applicable agency regulations will make it easier for Cuban-Americans to visit loved ones on the island and for humanitarian organizations to provide needed assistance more expeditiously and at lower cost.
- Establish new licensing arrangements to permit Cuban-Americans and Cuban families living here in the United States to send humanitarian remittances to their families in Cuba at the level of \$300 per quarter, as was permitted until 1994. This will enable Cuban-Americans to provide direct support to relatives in Cuba, while moving the current flow of remittances back into legal, orderly channels.
- Streamline and expedite the issuance of licenses for the sale of medicines and medical supplies and equipment to Cuba. Based on experience of the past several years, including during the Papal visit, we believe that the end-use verification called for in the Cuban Democracy Act can be met through simplified arrangements.

The Departments of Treasury, Commerce, and State will develop and promulgate new licensing arrangements in these three areas in the coming weeks.

The people of Cuba continue to live under a regime which deprives them of their freedom and denies them economic opportunity. The overarching goal of American policy must be to promote a peaceful transition to democracy on the island. Such a transition will depend upon the efforts of Cubans who seek to build a vibrant civil society and to secure respect for basic human rights. The presence of His Holiness John Paul II in Cuba inspired the Cuban

people, providing an important psychological boost to the Cuban Catholic Church, to Cuba's nascent civil society, and to the Cuban people. The measures I have announced today are designed to build upon that visit, to support the

Cuban people through the hardships and difficulties ahead, to contribute to the growth of a civil society and to help prepare for a peaceful transition to democracy.

## Statement on Andrew F. Brimmer's Service to the District of Columbia Financial Control Board

*March 20, 1998*

Dr. Andrew Brimmer has contributed his considerable skills, energy, and commitment to the effort to restore the District of Columbia to financial health. Today we can say the District has started down the path toward fiscal discipline and responsibility.

The First Lady and I, along with the entire administration, would like to thank Dr. Brimmer for all he has done on behalf of the District. We are pleased that he has been able to meet

his commitment to the administration to serve a 3-year term. His work for the District is the capstone of a long and distinguished career of public service.

We are grateful for Dr. Brimmer's service in this endeavor, which, at times, has been a difficult undertaking. Having worked with him during this period, I personally would like to offer Dr. Brimmer my sincere thanks and appreciation for a job well done.

## Statement on the Tornado Disaster in Georgia

*March 20, 1998*

Today I spoke with Governor Zell Miller to express my concern over the tornado that hit Georgia early this morning. Hillary and I are deeply saddened to learn of the individuals who lost their lives in this tragic disaster.

I have asked the Federal Emergency Management Agency to add the counties of Hall, White, Habersham, Dawson, and Rabun as disaster areas to the existing disaster declaration I issued for Georgia on March 11th. This action will allow victims of this tragedy to apply for Federal funds. I have also asked FEMA Director James Lee Witt to lead a Federal team to Georgia to inspect the damage and report back to me.

Labor Secretary Alexis Herman has approved a grant of up to \$3 million to assist workers who lost jobs. The money will help to create temporary jobs to assist in clean-up, repair, and restoration efforts. In addition, FEMA has begun working on a long-term recovery plan for Georgia.

I want to assure the people of Georgia that this administration is committed to ensuring a speedy recovery from this tornado. Our thoughts and prayers are with those affected by this extraordinary natural disaster.