

National/International Report

Cuban political prisoners given tearful welcome in Miami

By Araceli Cantero

Miami (NC) — With cries of "viva Norte America," about 100 Cuban political prisoners and their families arrived in Miami on Monday, Sept. 15.

They received an emotional welcome from a crowd of 3,000 gathered at the city's Tropical Park. Family members and old friends waved American and Cuban flags, and some waved white handkerchiefs with which they also wiped their tears.

"It gets more emotional each time," said Monsignor Bryan O. Walsh, executive director of Catholic Community Services for the Miami Archdiocese.

Twenty years earlier, Monsignor Walsh worked closely with — but had never met — one of the arriving prisoners in Operation Pedro Pan, a program that brought about 1,400 unaccompanied children out of Fidel Castro's regime into the United States.

Ramon Grau Alsina, 62, was arrested and charged in the mid-1960s for his role in that unaccompanied-children program. After 20 years in prison, the nephew of former Cuban President Ramon Grau San Martin last week met Monsignor Walsh for the first time. The two looked at each other and shared a long embrace. They also cried.

Grau showed no bitterness about his 21 years in prison. "My faith kept me going," he said, as he showed a wooden cross hanging from his neck. In English he told reporters that a Cuban official had tried to take the cross away before he boarded the flight to freedom.

"First you'll have to kill me because this is my soul," Grau said. He told the official, "For 21 years you have had my body but my soul, never."

The release of the Cubans followed almost two years of quiet diplomacy by the Catholic



Miami Archbishop Edward A. McCarthy greets one of about 100 Cuban political prisoners arriving in Miami after being freed by the government of Fidel Castro. NC Photo

Church. A group of U.S. Catholic bishops, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, and oceanographer Jacques Cousteau all visited Cuba and presented Castro with a list of prisoners.

Among the prisoners, all men, were Cubans who had served for 27 years in prison. None had served less than 20 years. Some had been incarcerated for having supported former Cuban president Fulgencio Batista, overthrown by Castro in 1959.

One prisoner, Jose Gomez Blanco, died in a Havana hospital just hours before he was scheduled to board the flight.

Miami Archbishop Edward A. McCarthy and Auxiliary Bishop Agustin Roman had greeted the prisoners at the airport. During the welcoming ceremony, Bishop Roman, a native of Cuba, shouted, "For 20 years, we have been praying for the prisoners, and we are glad these are now here with us."

Also at the ceremony were Monsignor Nicholas DiMarzio, who heads the U.S. Catholic Conference Migration and Refugee Services; Deputy Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Elliot Abrams; and Miami's first Cuban mayor, Xavier Suarez.

Monsignor DiMarzio said that the event marks a new era in the relationship with Cuba. He confirmed reports of further negotiations for the arrival of other groups of prisoners.

Thousands of Cubans left the country during the Mariel boatlift of 1980. A 1984 agreement provided for the return of nearly 3,000 Cuban criminals and mental patients who came to the United States in exchange for a plan to permit thousands of new immigrants to move to the United States.

But the Reagan administration's decision to launch Radio Marti broadcasts to Cuba from the United States led Castro to break the agreement in May, 1985, in retaliation.

Bishops' divestment move rooted in repeated condemnation

By Liz Schevtchuk

Washington (NC) — The U.S. Catholic Conference's plan to divest South Africa-related corporate stocks if the nation refuses to begin dismantling apartheid by next spring follows increasingly frequent and anxious outcries by U.S. bishops against the South African system of racial discrimination.

Divestment was approved by the 46-bishop USCC administrative board, which supervises activities of the USCC, the bishops' public policy agency.

The board asked Catholic dioceses and other Church entities to remove their funds from companies doing business in South Africa if that nation's government fails to begin dismantling apartheid and negotiating with black leaders by May 15, 1987.

Through apartheid, the legally mandated separation of the races, white supremacist South Africa has maintained national power for a white minority over majority black and Asian citizens.

The system, now exploding in violence, has drawn the world's scorn. It also has prompted divestment moves by many U.S. religious denominations, universities and private investors.

Church involvement began in November, 1984, when Auxiliary Bishop Emerson Moore of New York asked other bishops to adopt positions regarding divestment. That suggestion developed into a nearly two-year study by the USCC Office of International Justice and Peace, and culminated in this month's recommendation.

During those two years, acts of bigotry, brutality and repression in South Africa have drawn frequent — sometimes, almost weekly — criticisms from U.S. Church leaders.

Most recently, in August, USCC president Bishop James Malone of Youngstown, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, and Cardinal John O'Connor of New York called for intensified American pressure to end apartheid and denounced the torture of jailed Father Smangaliso Mkhathshwa, secretary general of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference.

Meanwhile, the Archdiocese of Baltimore announced it would divest stock from assorted companies if those companies do not cease their South African operations by Dec. 31.

On July 30, USCC General Secretary Monsignor Daniel Hoyer backed Senate legislation to impose sanctions — economic penalties — on South Africa. He termed it "morally indefensible and harmful to Amer-

ican long-term interests" to fail to take a strong stance.

A month earlier, on June 17, Bishop Malone protested stringent South African state-of-emergency restrictions and crackdowns, including the curtailment of the press, harassment and incarceration of human-rights workers and detainment of journalists at a Church-run publication.

Bishop Malone had earlier called for days of prayers for peace in South Africa. In May, Monsignor Hoyer sought prayers by Americans for all South Africans unjustly detained or imprisoned.

The South African bishops, on May 2, meanwhile, became the first governing body of a South African church to call collectively for economic pressures to fight apartheid.

And in December, 1984, Bishop Malone, in a letter to President Reagan, criticized administration policies involving South Africa.

Finally, groundwork for the administrative board's Sept. 10 action came a year ago, when the board issued a "Statement on South Africa." The document, referred to the USCC's own, then-ongoing perusal of divestment, called for American

awareness of problems in South Africa, requested prayers for that embattled land, and recommended other actions.

The Sept. 11, 1985, statement minced no words in condemning apartheid.

As the statement put it, "on item after item, apartheid stands as a contradiction to the basic Christian teaching on human dignity and the human person." In an analysis presented in the board's statement, the USCC Department of Social Development and World Peace termed apartheid "one of the most reprehensible and all-pervasive systems of repression in the world today."

Rebel priest, Philippines president agree to cease fire

Baguio City, Philippines (NC) — Filipino rebel leader Father Conrado Balweg and President Corazon Aquino have forged a cease-fire which included political concessions to tribes in the Philippines' rugged Cordillera region.

Aquino said she has ordered a halt to controversial dam and cellulose-manufacturing projects, which had been important factors in sparking tribal rebellions.

During their meeting, Father Balweg and President Aquino drank wine together from glasses holding peso coins, a symbol of strength.

Aquino told Father Balweg she was acting against advice from some of her counselors regarding the cease-fire because she is committed to peace.

The priest's Cordillera People's Liberation Army and the Cordillera People's Alliance, a coalition of 33 mountain tribe organizations, seek autonomy for the mountain region.

Dam construction — initiated in the 1970s under the government of President Ferdinand Marcos — forced mountain people to relocate from their traditional lands.

The cellulose plant affected the territory of the Tingguans, Father Balweg's tribe, prompting him to join the NPA in 1979. He and several other tribal Divine Word priests were dismissed from their order for doing so. The priest left the communist-led guerrilla force in April to form his own rebel group because, he said, the NPA was using tribal people for larger strategic goals.

The NPA led armed raids on the dam and cellulose projects, using the activity to justify demands on tribe members for manpower

and other resources, observers said.

Bishop Emiliano Madangang of the Apostolic Vicariate of the Mountain Province said Aquino's cancellation of the projects strips the communist-led NPA of an issue around which to rally mountain tribe support.

Father Patricio Guyguyon, vice chairman

of the Cordillera People's Alliance, said he expects the NPA to criticize the cease-fire.

Father Balweg "stole the NPA's thunder," Father Guyguyon said, when he got the government to stop work on the dams.



Philippine President Corazon Aquino hands a Bible and a rosary to tribal leader Mario Yag-Ao and receives a shield and spear in return. The ceremony celebrated a recent cease-fire between the government and the Cordillera People's Liberation Army led by renegade priest Father Conrado Balweg, right. NC Photo