

THE U.S.-CUBA FRIENDSHIPMENT

Cuba is suffering through its worst economic crisis in the past 33 years, and the U.S. bears much of the responsibility. The "special period" is characterized by shortages of fuel, food and medicine.

The U.S. blockade has either caused or exacerbated each of these problems. The blockade includes prohibitions against the sale of food and medicines by U.S. corporations to Cuba. And in an effort to extend the blockade to other countries, the Bush administration recently declared it illegal for ships from third countries to dock in the U.S. if they have been in Cuba during the previous six months.

The next twelve months will prove critical for the survival of the Cuba. It will also prove a critical time for the success or failure of the U.S. administration's goal to destabilize Cuba. Many Cubans think that if their country can get through an economic transition period of perhaps 12 to 18 months, the current economic crisis can be surmounted. A successful transition may also force a re-appraisal of current U.S. policies.

At this critical juncture in Cuba's history, IFCO-Pastors for Peace, in conjunction with dozens of national organizations, is organizing the "U.S.-Cuba Friendshipment." A caravan of as many as 100 vehicles and 200 drivers will travel through the U.S. along eight routes, stopping each day in a different city for educational presentations, press conferences, prayer vigils and aid collections. Aid items will include medicines, bicycles, powdered milk, Bibles and possibly spare parts for broken Cuban machinery. (The vehicles will not be donated to Cuba.)

The routes will converge in southern Texas for several days of orientation, then drivers will proceed south to Mexico where the materials will be loaded onto a freighter and shipped to Havana. Drivers will travel to Cuba and spend five days distributing the aid through the Cuban Ecumenical Council of Churches and the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center.

Upon return to the U.S., drivers will carry Cuban-made items, such as sugar, medicines (Cuba

produces many medicines that are used widely in the developing world), cigars, musical instruments, etc. The medicines will be donated to health clinics that serve poor constituencies. The other goods will be sold along another set of U.S. routes that will include educational presentations and press conferences. The profits will be repatriated to Cuba.

The caravan will depart from northern U.S. cities the first week in November, shortly after the presidential elections. The Friendshipment will stimulate debate around U.S. policies toward Cuba early in the next administration and will provide a national platform for organizing against these immoral policies.

Widespread participation by U.S. citizens will insure that the Friendshipment is a success. We call on people of conscience to sign on as drivers and to volunteer the use of their vehicles to transport humanitarian aid (the vehicles will not be donated to Cuba). We are also looking for host cities to sponsor the caravan as we travel across the U.S. in November. For information contact:

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