

[Address by Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, for the International Workers' Day ceremony held in Revolution Square May Day, 2006, "Year of the Energy Revolution in Cuba" \[1\]](#)

Date:

01/05/2006

Dear fellow Cubans,

Distinguished guests,

I will begin exactly where I left my latest address but a few hours ago, on April 29, at 10:35 in the evening, on the question of Bush and terrorism.

The United States has, for the first time, admitted that Posada Carriles entered Miami illegally on board the Santrina.

This past April 22, after 13 months of silence in response to our insistent questions, Miami's El Nuevo Herald revealed FBI documents submitted by the District Attorney's Office to the Federal Court trying terrorists Santiago Álvarez and Osvaldo Mitat in which US authorities recognize, for the first time, that murderer Luis Posada Carriles entered the United States illegally at the end of March of 2005, on board the Santrina vessel owned by Santiago Álvarez Fernández Magriñá.

We had denounced this many times and urged the president of the United States to come forth with what he knew.

It happened exactly as it had been reported by Quintana Roo's Por Esto! newspaper and by Cuba in March and April of 2005.

Although Posada's entry in the United States had stirred up controversy and become almost public knowledge, the Department of Homeland Security, responsible for protecting the United States from terrorism, did not arrest Posada until May 17 of last year, after the terrorist offered a press conference to a number of US media. All the while, Washington denied knowledge of his whereabouts.

Gilberto Abascal, the prosecution's key witness in the case of Santiago Álvarez Fernández Magriñá and Osvaldo Mitat, informed authorities of his participation in an illegal operation to bring Posada clandestinely from Isla Mujeres, Mexico, to Miami, aboard the Santrina shrimp boat.

A document signed by US District Attorney Alexander Acosta and Assistant Attorney Randy Hummel reveals that Abascal, an FBI informant, reported the fact. The disclosure about Posada appears in a letter dated February 27, 2006, sent out by the District Attorney's Office in response to a petition by lawyer Arturo Hernández, who represents Fernández Magriñá.

"He —Abascal— "also traveled with Santiago Álvarez Fernández-Magriñá in his boat"—[Santrina—" to Mexico during the successful adventure in human trafficking that resulted in Luis Posada's illegal entry

in the United States", the text of the letter reads.

El Nuevo Herald admitted that "it is the first time a government document has corroborated that an FBI informant was in contact with Posada during his transfer to U.S. territory". The Cuban government has alleged this version of the account since April, supported by a report in the Mexican periodical *Por Esto!*—which was subsequently confirmed, with absolute precision, by Cuban authorities— something Posada consistently denied, claiming that he reached the US by crossing the Texan border in a car and later taking a bus to Miami, and something the US government knew, from day one, through agents who traveled in the same boat.

Abascal, Álvarez and Mitat were the crew of the *Santrina*, as were skipper José Pujol and Rubén López Castro. The vessel sailed to Isla Mujeres and ran aground in a reef area on March 14, 2005, and, following authorization from Mexican authorities, it set sail for Miami, where it arrived four days later.

In his comments for the CUBADEBATE web-site, renowned lawyer José Pertierra, the Venezuelan government's legal representative in the extradition case of the Cuban-born terrorist who is a naturalized citizen of Venezuela, evaluated the FBI documents in this way:

"By affirming that Posada Carriles entered the United States on the *Santrina* with Santiago Álvarez Fernández Magriñá, the prosecution itself is questioning the credibility of Posada, Álvarez, his accomplices and even the White House.

Upon entering the United States illegally, Posada and his accomplices lied to protect the *Santrina* crew. "To help a terrorist enter the United States illegally is a very serious felony that is punishable by several years in prison. To lie to cover up a felony is also a federal crime", added the legal expert.

"Now we learn that one of the people who helped Posada to enter the country illegally worked for the FBI. It is evident that the White House has always known how Posada entered the country, with whom he entered, and where he was living", assured Pertierra, who added: 'This besmirches them all'.

"If the FBI knew—argues Pertierra—the Security Department knew. Why didn't they arrest him in March? Why didn't they press charges against Álvarez and Mitat for having helped a terrorist to illegally enter the country?'

"A month before these statements appeared in the Herald, on March 22, the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement wrote Posada Carriles a letter to explain the reasons why he, tried as a mere 'illegal immigrant', continued in prison. In the letter, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement tells Posada that he: '...will not be released from the custody of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at this time, because, as described below, you continue to present a danger to the community and a flight risk'.

Further on, the letter states that Posada has a 'history of engaging in criminal activity, associating with individuals involved in criminal activity and participating in violent acts that indicate a disregard for the safety of the general public and a propensity for engaging in activities proscribed within the provisions of INA § 212(a) that pose a risk to the national security of the United States'.

"Further, you have shown a cavalier attitude towards the impact your actions have had on the safety and well-being of persons and property. Open source information and your own statements link you to the planning and coordination of a series of hotel and restaurant bombings that occurred in Cuba over a several month period in 1997. Moreover, on April 20, 2004, you were convicted in Panama for Crimes Against National Security and Counterfeiting Public Records, for which you were sentenced to 7 years and 1 year imprisonment respectively. Although you were later pardoned for these crimes by the President of Panama, a foreign pardon, in itself, does not have any effect in relation to US immigration laws. Additionally, a review of your arrest and criminal history shows that following a trial and acquittal on criminal charges in Venezuela, your acquittal was overturned on appeal, and, while pending a retrial

on the charges, you made several escape attempts and eventually succeeded in escaping from prison. Due to your long history of criminal activity and violence in which innocent civilians were killed, your release from detention would pose a danger to both the community and the national security of the United States".

At the end of the letter, the ICE reminds the terrorist that his "expertise in assuming false identities, your disregard of the immigration laws of the United States, your history of escape and the presence of your pending international extradition request demonstrate that you pose a significant risk of fleeing, if released from custody".

In spite of the facts mentioned by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement in its letter, Posada Carriles continues to enjoy many privileges and is not in the least bit treated as a criminal. While thousands of illegal immigrants are persecuted, imprisoned and sent back to their countries, in the midst of the largest political mobilization by Latinos seen in decades, terrorist Luis Posada Carriles has the privilege of a nearly 6-hour-long hearing to review his request for US citizenship.

An article published last Wednesday in the Mexican periodical *Por Esto!* the same newspaper which reported the Santrina's accident in Isla Mujeres, unflinchingly accuses Mexican authorities of knowing about and supporting the operation to take Posada Carriles from Mexico to the United States.

In an article titled "Cover-up for terrorist", journalist Renán Castro affirmed: "What *Por Esto!* had denounced on March 2005 through a journalistic indictment is now being recognized by US authorities in court, the indictment that has undermined the credibility of the White House" —if it had any left, I say.

"After going through Honduras, Guatemala and Belize", the article continues, "Posada Carriles entered Mexico, arriving at Cancun and Isla Mujeres via Quintana Roo, with aid from the Mexican Federal Government.

"Federal government officials offered members of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) protection to guarantee the safety of the international terrorist during the week when he remained in hiding in Isla Mujeres, awaiting the arrival of the vessel that took him to Miami, Florida.

"Starting March 14, 2005, the periodical *Por Esto!* warned of the maneuvers that CANF members had executed when the Cuba—American vessel, the Santrina, ran aground at a coral reef area known as El Farito, reporting it had arrived at Quintana Roo's littoral with its owner, Santiago Álvarez Fernández Magriñá, at the helm.

"The crew of the Santrina, registered to a non-existent Ecological Marine Protection Foundation named Caribe Viva and Research Inc., headed by terrorist Ernesto Abreu, who was a key actor in the operation to protect and transport Posada Carriles from Honduras to Miami, Florida, through Mexican territory, attempted to conceal the covert action to facilitate the entry of the international criminal into Miami.

"At the time, the *Por Esto!* periodical published photographs and eyewitness accounts to denounce the presence, in Mexico, of terrorists José Pujol, Ernesto Abreu and Santiago Álvarez Fernández Magriñá, who were rescued by Mexican naval authorities and taken to Isla Mujeres for a routine inspection of their vessel.

"'Three arrived and four set sail' were the titles of these articles published in April 2005, when the Cuban government issued an international alert reporting the presence of Posada Carriles in Mexican territory and Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz demanded an explanation from the federal government about the covert operation that had been executed there to help the international terrorist escape and subsequently enter the United States.

"Then, an investigative report had revealed that, upon its departure, Mexican federal authorities had protected the vessel that took Posada Carriles to Miami, Florida. Posada had boarded the ship at the

Integral Port Administration (API) dock on March 15, 2005, with the three Cuban-Americans who had departed from that US port, sailing from Miami to Bahamas and from there to Isla Mujeres.

"None of this would have been known", the Mexican newspaper goes on to assert, "had 'the Santrina' not ran aground in the early morning of March 14, at the coral reef area of 'El Farito', as the protection of Mexican federal authorities, tasked with guaranteeing a clean operation, was guaranteed and in line with the commitments assumed by the current Mexican president, Vicente Fox Quesada, who became a close friend of several distinguished members of the Cuban American National Foundation when involved in the electoral campaigns that placed him in power in July 2000". This is how the article ends.

Por Esto! played an exceptional role in denouncing how the monstrous terrorist Luis Posada Carriles, the Bush family's friend and protégé, entered the United States, whose Department of State hypocritically and shamelessly accuses President of Venezuela Hugo Chávez of supporting terrorism and calls Cuba a terrorist country.

But, would this be the end of the US President's endless chain of brazen lies about terrorism? Impossible!

On April 19, when we celebrated the 45th anniversary of our victory at the Bay of Pigs, we received the news that, in Los Angeles, California, a man named Robert Ferro, whose home was found to contain the scandalous sum of 1,571 firearms and a number of hand grenades, all hidden in secret compartments and rooms, had been detained.

No sooner had he been detained than Ferro declared himself a member of the anti-Cuban terrorist organization Alpha '66 and stated that the latter had 100 members in California and Miami who were ready and trained to carry out actions against the Cuban government.

On April 28 —that is to say, 72 hours ago— the Los Angeles Times, one of the most important newspapers in the United States, published a long article which, among other things, reports:

"The Upland man accused of selling guns illegally from his home said in a jailhouse interview Thursday that some of the weapons were covertly supplied to him by the U.S. government, intended for an attempt to overthrow Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

"Police say felon Robert Ferro had 1,571 firearms and some hand grenades stashed inside secret compartments and hidden rooms he built inside the sprawling foothill estate. He was arrested last week after a search of his home in connection with another case uncovered the weapons.

"But in an interview Thursday" —it's Monday today, no? Okay, in the article published, as I said, 72 hours ago—, "Ferro, 61, contended that some of the high-powered weapons", pay attention to this — including assault rifles, silencer-equipped handguns and Uzis — were supplied to him by the U.S. government. He said the weapons were supposed to be used in an attempt to oust Castro that would have coincided with U.S. Navy operations being conducted in the Caribbean Sea.

"'Obviously, now it will not take place', Ferro said. 'Those guns I had were very sophisticated weapons. It was for a fight. I was just trying to mimic what President Bush has done in Iraq, bring freedom to the country.'

" 'I was born [in Cuba]. I want to free them. I love freedom. I love [the U.S.], and I want the same thing for my country.'

"U.S. military officials acknowledged that 6,500 sailors on several ships and the Virginia-based carrier George Washington are participating in an exercise with at least eight other navies in international waters in the Caribbean. Although the exercise will come as close as 12 miles to Cuba's territorial waters, military officials said it would primarily be hundreds of miles away from the island nation." That

excuse of a military exercise they're doing over there, hoping to intimidate Cuba, Venezuela and the rest of Latin America; yes, those innocent ships that are sailing through the Caribbean, one of the most modern aircraft carriers with hundreds of sophisticated planes, war ships of every kind; a nuclear submarine that can launch God knows how many missiles, equipped with technology to intercept radio messages, etc, etc.

They hadn't tried this type of nonsense for some time.

The US newspaper goes on to report:

"Ferro was arrested last week by officers with L.A. IMPACT, a Southern California multi-agency task force, as they investigated his connection to Frank Beltran, 36, a fugitive arrested in late March while living in a Rancho Cucamonga rental home owned by Ferro". They didn't know where they had hidden, nor had they had the time to discover that Ferro had 1, 571 weapons of war.

"Beltran was wanted on suspicion of shooting a Glendora police officer in the hand after the officer responded to a domestic dispute between Beltran and his wife. A few weeks later, Beltran shot his wife eight times at a San Dimas intersection after pursuing her in his vehicle, a Los Angeles County sheriff's official said. The woman remains hospitalized—as you would expect—, and the gun has not been found, authorities said." They were after the weapon and they found the arsenal, they get lucky sometimes. Hugo Chávez would say it was the hand of God who guided them (Laughter).

"Ferro, who says he's a member of a Miami-based group, Alpha '66, that advocates the overthrow of Castro's regime" —they have insisted on this nonsense for ages, ignoring the people, ignoring the masses, ignoring the laws of society and history, the laws of a revolution—, "said Thursday that about 50 other U.S. citizens were scheduled to accompany him to Cuba, with further assistance coming from people inside Cuba.

"FBI spokeswoman Laura Einmiller said her office was investigating the possibility that other anti-Castro sympathizers connected to Ferro had stashed weapons in their homes.

" 'Mr. Ferro's motives, and all aspects of what Mr. Ferro's statements have been — whether or not he was planning violent acts — are under investigation,' she said. 'No one else has been arrested in this matter.' "

"In the 1990's, Ferro was sentenced to two years in prison for possessing 5 pounds of the putty-like explosive (C-4)."

"Prosecutors in the 1990s case said Ferro was an Alpha '66 member training Mexicans at a Pomona chicken ranch he owned for a Castro overthrow attempt.

"Ferro (...) entered the military and ultimately joined the Army's Special Forces, performing covert operations that included a search for missing servicemen in Vietnam, he said.

"'I'm advocating the same thing President Bush is doing in Iraq for my country, that's all. I don't know why I'm in trouble for that.' "

These were quotations from the article published by the Los Angeles Times.

Though military spokespeople have tried to keep Ferro's plan and the military exercise in the Caribbean separate matters, the US government has maintained absolute silence —once again, for the umpteenth time— with respect to whether it supplied weapons to this terrorist, who, in 1992, was sentenced to two years imprisonment for illegal possession of explosives, after being accused of heading an Alpha '66 paramilitary camp in Pomona ranch, where Mexicans were being trained to carry out anti-Cuba operations. On that occasion, 5 pounds of C-4 explosives were confiscated from him.

In the course of his life as an anti-Cuban terrorist, Robert Ferro has worked for the CIA —just look, he had as many infantry weapons as those brought by the fifteen hundred something mercenaries who landed at the Bay of Pigs, under the protection of a US squadron, which also included an aircraft carrier and a good number of marines, who contemplated the last battles that took place there, three miles off the coast of the Bay of Pigs. There they were, back then the limit was set at three miles, it was later extended to 12—, has been an official of the US Special Forces and a member of Alpha '66.

Though Alpha's main leader has denied any ties between his terrorist organization and Ferro, judge Oswald Parada, in charge of the case, turned down his petition for bail, considering he has "access to more weapons and explosives through Alpha '66". Defense attorney Wayne M. Rozenberg stated he was not surprised by the organization's denials, as it is a paramilitary group which operates clandestinely.

Alpha '66 has a long history of paramilitary actions and of planning terrorist actions against Cuba. Created in 1961—45 years ago—, Alpha '66 participated in a number of the so-called "autonomous operations"...That is what the CIA called them; this is why it created Orlando Bosch's group, which was trained by Posada Carriles. They were autonomous, and the war communiqués were published in Miami. They perpetrated some of their most horrible crimes during this period. They organized Operation Condor; they sent the second CIA director to Santo Domingo, when Bush Sr. was the head of this agency. One of the most horrible crimes they committed was the mid-air bombing of a Cubana airliner in Barbados. The second CIA director went Santo Domingo, where he met with a group of criminals from Cuba, the United States and other countries, to begin that odious criminal crusade which came to be known as Operation Condor, denounced here not long ago, precisely after Posada Carriles' entry into the country and the US government's attempts to protect him. These heinous deeds were described by Estella Calloni, an Argentinean journalist, honoring all of us with her presence here today, at this square where truth, revolutionary spirit and honor prevail. (Applause.)

The list of crimes perpetrated is long: foreign ministers, like Letelier, assassinated in Washington; honorable military men, such as Pratts, who opposed the Chilean coup, were killed; generals like Juan José Torres, who dignified the Bolivian military; personalities like the leader of the Christian Democratic party, Bernardo Leighton, whom they tried to assassinate in Italy in an action organized by Operation Condor operatives; there were no seas or borders that placed a limit on their criminal activities, actions that people are beginning to become aware of and remember more clearly, because these actions had not been fully described or denounced.

What's important, what links the Bush family directly to Orlando Bosch, Posada Carriles and the bombing of the plane which claimed 73 lives, is that this act of sabotage was planned there in Santo Domingo and Posada Carriles was there. Because Orlando Bosch, that other monstrous criminal who Bush Sr. released and today freely walks the streets of Miami, was, at the time, in Chile, plotting crimes with Pinochet's DINA. One cannot easily forget the denunciations that eminent Latin Americans made at Cuba's International Convention Center during the International Conference titled "Against terrorism, for truth and justice".

Just see how many things this perverse empire has done in nearly half a century.

I was saying that Alpha '66 participated in several of the so-called "autonomous operations" directed by the CIA from its JM/WAVE Miami station. The criminal actions this group has perpetrated include pirate attacks and the hijacking of fishing vessels; armed infiltrations into our country; death threats aimed at people with links to Cuba living in Mexico, the United States, Ecuador, Brazil, Canada and Puerto Rico, and numerous attempts to assassinate me. Miami police intelligence documents reported, some years ago, that the group is one of the most dangerous and most active of organizations in terrorist Miami.

Don't forget that this gentleman I mentioned, Santiago Álvarez Fernández Magriña, that guy —you've seen him on TV—who gave orders over the phone to a man who had infiltrated Cuba, who he had sent with explosives and firearms. The infiltrator was captured and Fernández Magriña, who was later

arrested for who knows how many crimes in the United States —yes, Mr. Magriña, buddy of the Bushes— was the head of that group gave it orders over the phone.

You recall that phrase, the last instructions he gave. When he asked whether the infiltrator had seen the plan through or not, and the latter responded that things were getting complicated, he asked about the mission he had been tasked with, a monstrous act of terrorism on the Tropicana cabaret, he said: "Throw the two tins inside, through a window of the cabaret, and nothing will remain standing". He admitted that he had said this and he was there in Miami, he did what he pleased, protected by the US government. Apparently, there was a conflict of interests at one point or other and the government had no other choice but to arrest him and accuse him of some of the hundreds of crimes he committed.

Posada Carriles was there, all of these things were taking place in Miami and this super-organization, designed to protect the United States from terrorism --headed by Negro Ponte who is implicated in the dirty war in Nicaragua-- which controls over 30 intelligence organizations, didn't know anything. The State Department declared on numerous occasions that it didn't know Posada Carriles' whereabouts. The White House said it didn't know, and everyone else was saying the same thing, that they didn't know anything.

Just look at how morally, how ethically impoverished they are, how low they have stooped in such basically ethical questions. They arrest him, protect him and don't send him to Venezuela, which rightfully demands his extradition, because Cuba had renounced this request, so as not to give the US government the pretext for a maneuver. There is no death penalty in Venezuela, not even the people who organized the heinous coup of April 11, 2002 are in prison, nor have they spent time in prison, and they didn't extradite him to Venezuela by virtue of the International Convention against Torture. Just look at the pretexts they come up with to protect the terrorist.

They took him out of Panama, because the US government knew of and was responsible for the assassination plans that were to be executed at that meeting of heads of Government and State who participated in the Ibero-American Summit, myself among them, who had planned to meet with students, and that's where they were planning to set off 40 kilograms of TNT. The US government and Bush still know nothing of these things, nor of the plans to blow up Tropicana, where, back then, there were doubtless many US citizens, because, then, they allowed some Cuban-born people who were naturalized citizens of the United States and even US citizens, people who had been born in and were citizens of the United States, to come to Cuba. No, they know nothing of these things!

I spoke of Mr. Díaz Rodríguez, head of Alpha '66, who was trained in Santo Domingo.

On May 20, 2003, US President George W. Bush invited eleven representatives of the South Florida Cuban American extreme right to the White House. Among them was Ernesto Díaz Rodríguez —the one who succeeded Sargent as head of Alpha '66, the organization which, undoubtedly, owns or controls those fifteen hundred and some weapons, was at the White House, invited by the US president— and his partner Eusebio de Jesús Peñalver Mazorra, arrested in California on December 12, 1995, in possession of an arsenal of weapons, when he participated in the preparations for a terrorist action against Cuba, and another notorious terrorist, Ángel Francisco D'fana Serrano. Never have US governments been unaware of these entire terrorist and assassination plans.

I mentioned two exceptions in this long period: President Ford who, following the investigation on plans to assassinate me conducted by the (US Senate) Church Commission, apparently embarrassed by these, had issued a resolution prohibiting these types of actions. Another president who was unquestionably incapable of ordering these kinds of assassinations was Carter, whom we know well —he visited us and participated in that important baseball game between a team from Baltimore and Cuba, he visited the University of Havana and spoke there, engaging in discussions—, he doesn't share our ideas, his ideology is not even remotely related to ours, but we can say that he is an honest American.

Then, the same people who had organized Operation Condor, the bombing of the Cuban airliner in

Barbados and myriad international crimes returned to office. They were the same and are the same people who are today in power in the United States. Some are even worse, because a number of them were old hawks and these are the apprentices of hawks that want to outdo their masters.

It remains to be seen whether they can do this or not, whether the American people will allow it, if they are willing to put up with more crimes like the genocide and the countless acts of torture they are committing around the world today, in any country in the world, encroaching upon the sovereignty and borders of nations and ordering killings. Not long ago, at a joint session of the US Congress, Bush said that many enemies of the United States would no longer bother it because they were either in prison or dead. He said it with haughtiness, with arrogance, and what he said meant: I have ordered the killing of everyone I have felt like killing.

This is what he has done. Bush was quick to rescind Ford's decree and, with the support of the President of the US National Rifle Association who was at the House, he repealed the prohibition to commit those crimes and misdeeds. Not even Rome's worst emperors dared to claim such rights, of killing, of assassinating —through any means possible, resorting to the most sophisticated means— any patriot, any revolutionary, any political leader who opposes the empire's vulgar efforts of domination.

No one has the right to issue such an order, even when dealing with terrorists. Where is the Law, where are the laws, where are the courts? Even though some of the empire's judges are also repulsive, like the one who sentenced our Five Heroes, a ruling that a court acting with a minimum of freedom and honor later had to overturn, the notorious Court of Atlanta, which overturned that trial's ruling. Then, instead of releasing them, something unprecedented took place, they appealed the court's ruling, turning —even from the point of view of US law— the Five into hostages, two of whom have addressed you today. And they remain in prison, while Posada Carriles is granted a hearing to discuss his right to US citizenship, perhaps because of the crimes he's committed, perhaps because of his moral fiber, similar to that of the illustrious character that holds executive power in that country.

On June 2, 2005, the US president expressed his gratitude for Alpha '66's "support" in a letter in which he stated that he "appreciated knowing" the ideas of the paramilitary group.

Alpha '66's activities in California are well known. In January 1982, the cable agency UPI reported that a group of Cubans and Nicaraguans were receiving military training in a remote and derelict camp site in the south of Florida operated by Alpha '66, but the FBI and the authorities of the Californian city of San Bernardino did not consider these actions illegal for, according to them they were not in violation of any local or state law.

In 1995, an Alpha '66 ringleader privately stated that the organization's California wing had stepped up support for violent actions and had recruited ex Cuban-born members of the US National Guard who had access to heavy artillery such as machine guns and bazookas, registered in California.

In November 1999, news arrived from California that René Cruz and Eusebio Peñalver (both closely linked to Posada Carriles) and terrorists Roberto Martín Pérez, Ángel D'Fana and Ernesto Díaz, Alpha '66's current leader, were involved in a plan to assassinate President Hugo Chávez, receiving aid from a group of wealthy Venezuelan individuals. This was denounced by Cuba in a timely fashion.

The plan was to be executed in the month of December by a commando made up of Cubans and Venezuelans, who were to arrive in Venezuela from a third country.

SELECTED ECONOMIC INFORMATION

In the first quarter of 2006, Cuba's economy grew by 11.8 % more what it did in 2005; its current growth rate —hear this— is of more than 12.5 % (Applause). I know %ages can get annoying and that they are both used and abused. Some people say: "There's such and such %age of growth, but where do we see it?" If you're building the premises to produce eggs and poultry meat and breeding the chicks you need,

you're growing but you're not distributing eggs —though eggs are already being distributed— do you understand? If you construct high-tech storage silos to conserve the grains, you're making an investment; if you buy hundreds of locomotives and repair thousands of wagons, or purchase trucks and motors by the tens of thousands, and you reconstruct everything, or if you work in an enormous plan to construct houses after a hurricane razed more than 50,000 to the ground —and it did more than raze houses to the ground, you also have to count the houses that were damaged, those that required new roofs and many other things— you're not seeing the finished houses, you may not even visit the site of the disaster. A bus on a ship sailing across the Atlantic is not yet in service; when it arrives, one first tests it and uses it to address the country's urgent needs, it is not yet picking up passengers down a regular route. When you start using the bus, you really have to look at the routes you're going to assign to it, though these vehicles are not used exclusively in bus routes, the country needs to and has the duty to optimize the resources and costs associated to every route.

That is why we speak of growth which is not yet immediately evident. But we're starting to see some things, you know this, everyone knows this, and these things are becoming ever more numerous and reaching never-before-seen figures. We're not after luxury; we're not simply moved by a desire to improve the living standard of our people, which is our greatest wish, for our people to live better in every sense of the word. We're not selfish, we want to support other peoples of the world, because humanity is one. I spoke of this not long ago, on the 29th.

I say this because we need to learn many things, all of us, you and we; you, many of you well educated, there are already more than half a million Cubans pursuing higher education studies, and we also, who didn't have such privileges, some of us have to learn more, and less, than others, depending on how privileged we were. We are all duty-bound to think and learn constantly, to learn from the lessons of history and continue till our last breath. No one graduates at the end of the fifth or sixth year of their university studies —and, in Cuba, this is less and less the case— nor when they specialize or complete a Masters degree or a doctorate. Some will reach this level, not everyone, because there are many things to do for society. This won't be true of everyone, but it will be true of more and more people, and not one of them will ever cease learning.

Our economy's current growth rate already exceeds that of 12.5 %.

This is the result of the rapid development of services, with high added value, that the country is offering.

The construction sector grew 15.8 %, transportation 4.8 % —it will grow much more than this, at a much quicker rate—, communications 12.9%, and trade, owing to the sale of domestic electric appliances over this period, 30.8 %.

The industrial sector as a whole remained at levels similar to those reported in 2005. The seven sub-sectors that experienced growth were: construction of non-electrical machinery (11.4 %); electrical engineering and electronics (50.5 %); metallic products (15.8 %); clothing (14 %); building materials (13 %); fishing industry (11 %); and chemical industry (7.9 %).

As of April 30, 2006, approximately one million one hundred thousand tons of raw sugar polarization 96^o have been produced. We are starting to see the results of the efforts that have been underway since mid-February and we're reaching the objectives set forth, at a time when the price of sugar in the world market is favorable. These efforts are indeed worthy of recognition, especially if we consider different, pre-existing factors that demanded even greater efforts, efforts that were made to obtain surprising results: having produced less than 200,000 tons on Saint Valentine's Day, February 14, today we are already producing 1,100, 000 tons, nearly 80 % of the goal figure, and there are still some weeks of harvest left, though refineries are slowing down in terms of milling and the rain and heat is intensifying, reducing performance rates. But we won't far off the goal we've set down for this decisive year.

We can say we feel satisfied with the efforts of the farmers and sugar industry workers (Applause), who

are sowing and working intensely to produce even more in 2007, when sugar prices will be even higher.

You should know, comrades, that these efforts I am describing mean more than 200 million dollars more than would have been earned at the pace we had in mid-February.

The production of the following products has experienced growth: Wires (up to 1 KW), 14.1 %; steel structures, 44.9 %; laundry soap, 20.1 %; medication, 35.7 %; paper, 2 times; concrete blocks, 33.6 %; asbestos-cement tiles, 69.3 %; fabrics, 14.9 %; clothing, 58.1 %; eggs, 22.7 %; corrugated metallic tiles, 9 times —don't forget a hurricane lashed us a few months ago; pressure cookers, 9 times; fertilizers, 1.3 times; retreads, 50.7 %; porcine meat on the hoof, 21.7 %; dairy milk, 15.2 %.

Nearly 1 million 244 thousand tons of equivalent crude oil and natural gas have been produced domestically in this four-month period, four times what was produced at the beginning of the Special Period.

We are working hard to dig 36 new wells this year, in addition to other shallow wells dug up while the wildcat wells are made operational or their operation is discontinued. Currently, 11 wildcat wells and 2 development wells —wildcat wells are very important, they tell us what's there and what should be done there— are being worked on; 5 of these new wells are being evaluated or about to enter the exploitation phase.

The consumption of oil-based fuels, including the consumption of electrical energy expressed as the quantity of oil-equivalent used to generate it, is estimated to reach 2,716,000 tons, which represents a 3.7 % reduction of the real consumption reported until April 2005, a physical difference of some 105,000 tons of oil. This is chiefly owed to a reduction in the amount of fuel (45 thousand tons), kerosene and liquid gas (44 thousand tons) used to generate electricity; we are talking about fuels used domestically by the population.

The consumption of diesel fuel also dropped by 7,000 metric tons, as did gasoline consumption, which had gone down by 1,000 metric tons up until March, in spite of the economic growth achieved: there are more bricks, more blocks, more concrete, more rods, all of this has to be transported, don't forget. Cuba's energy intensity figures (units of energy per unit of GDP) —not including population figures—were reduced considerably during the first quarter, by more than 15 %.

The electrical energy consumed during this four-month period is estimated at 3.656 million kilowatts/hour, a figure similar to that reported during the same period in 2005. But, in relation to how many generators? This is a question we must ask ourselves, because, from it, we can derive the truly significant figure of over one million kilowatts/hour —I would say that well over one million kilowatts/hour—saved, that is to say, what would be being used without the energy saving measures, during consumption peak hours.

In the residential sector, the average monthly consumption per household has been reduced from 130 kilowatts/hour to 126.8 kilowatts/hour. What do you think? And there are many things still to be done to reduce the country's total energy consumption. There are energy saving measures, more energy is being consumed in some places and less in others. All of these factories I am mentioning and all of these production and growth processes consume and consume energy, especially electricity. The number of new consumers of electricity has gone up to approximately 43 thousand. Not only is the economy growing, the number of consumers is growing as well.

To satisfy the electricity consumption needs of the national electrical energy system, some 4.660 millions of kilowatts/hour will be generated approximately, a mere 0.3 % increase with respect to last

year. Until April, energy generation has been increased by 5 % through the use of ENER GAS natural gas...One of these facilities, one of the most economical ones, was giving us a bit of headache some days ago, strong winds that hindered the supply process, the accompanying gas. This rarely happens, and we hope the measures taken will remedy the situation as quickly as possible. Are they operational today? (Minister of Energy Yadira tells him something).

For how many hours did it stop working the second day? (Yadira tells him it stopped working for 10 hours). Ten hours. And the first day? (She tells him three hours). Yadira, tell those plants to stop fooling around, okay? We're talking about 200,000 kilowatts, and they produce electricity the safest and cheapest way. Solar energy is cheaper, though not easily exploitable. We have thousands of solar panels in schools, and the video rooms in the mountains are also powered by thousands of solar panels.

Electricity generation went up by 5 % and, in the first months of 2006, Diesel generators produced 4.5 % of the total energy output. This has meant a 5 % reduction in terms of thermal energy generation using fuel and crude. I can tell you these figures will go down considerably this year, and we're talking about hundreds of millions of dollars saved in terms of costs associated with thermoelectric plants.

The above-mentioned reduction, by 45,000 tons, of the volumes of fuel and crude used in the generation of electricity is the result of increased efficiency in thermal generation, a reduction in the volume of consumables used (from 7.57 % to 6.91 % during the first quarters of 2005 and 2006)—that is to say, 7.5 and 6.1 % savings at the plants, we're talking about savings in terms of consumption, these are not insignificant figures—and the total losses due to transmission and distribution —we've seen a reduction in this sense— (which went from 17.99 % to 15.75 % in that period).

You should know that this piece of equipment that amplifies our voice is powered by electricity and electricity, wherever it comes from, must first go through a transmission and then a distribution network. Havana is an Olympic champion in this sense, it consumes 17.97 % of electricity in that. We're witnessing a clear energy-saving trend that we can measure with mathematical exactness.

A program aimed at improving the country's power grid, to which a total of \$ 262 million has been directed, is currently underway — it's like building thermoelectric plants but these do not consume fuel— and gaining in momentum. Once concluded, this program will allow for improved services and a reduction in the total losses associated to electricity distribution to, according to calculations, approximately 11 %. Look, from about 18 to 11 %. The cost is high, but it considerably reduces costs, improves the quality of the electricity supply which, when poor, damages electrical appliances and causes all sorts of inconveniences for the population.

The installation of emergency generators and those synchronized to the national electrical energy system, which we will talk about later, continues, unabated.

Up until April 28, the population has received 2 million 478 thousand 300 electric stoves —I already mentioned we're going to improve these, optimizing their maintenance, replacing them immediately, if a defect cannot be immediately fixed, honoring the State's guarantee; improved electric stoves are now being produced and are about to be imported into the country, and additional measures are being taken in this connection, measures closely linked to our energy saving efforts and the quality of services for the population. Everyone has a different type of cooker, all sorts of cooking pots, and it is very important to bear the shape and size of these instruments in mind, of cooking utensils, pots, and to adjust these to the energy source. We can reduce energy consumption in this connection six fold.

With respect to articles distributed: 3 million 59 thousand 926 rice cookers, 2 million 50 thousand 381 'Reina' pressure cookers —these save a lot of energy, 70 %, whether they are on an electric, kerosene or oil-derived liquid gas stove; I should have mentioned it, normal pressure cookers are not electrical appliances but they have the same effect— 2 million 314 thousand 284 water heaters, 251 thousand 676 fridges, 39 thousand 187 television sets — I don't want to promise anything with respect to these two articles, but transportation personnel and those tasked with distributing these should start getting

ready for lots of them, aimed at saving electricity, incredible amounts of electricity. The immense majority of refrigerators in the country consume four to five times what one of these consume in 24 hours, some even more, even after having been fitted with gaskets. Only at the end of this process, with all of the information at hand, will we truly know how much we have saved and what remains to be done. Just about everything that will be distributed from now on will be energy-saving equipment, electricity-saving equipment, which will multiply, by several times, hard currency resources that are today needed for many other things and to continue investing and improving, as much as possible, consumption by the population. Only this way, through the use of electrical appliances, will the country free itself from these things that horrify us, such as kerosene and its derivatives, which all of you, save for our invitees, know well— and 967 thousand 56 fans. You know very well how many were being manufactured using the motors of Aurika washing machines which were imported into the country by the millions and which guzzle electricity; nearly one million have been replaced. In addition to this, 9 million 118 thousand 250 energy-saving light fixtures have been distributed to households to date. You know about this well, there are still some bulbs out there that have not been replaced, those that must be replaced by better and more economical fixtures won't last long. I say fixtures because they could be bulbs, they could be fluorescent lamps, etc.

More than 4 million 400 thousand gaskets for fridges, nearly 650 thousand thermostats and 7 million gaskets for coffee makers have also been distributed. All of this has contributed to our energy-saving efforts, but the antediluvian fridges continue to consume as much as I told you.

I'm talking about the economy, not the energy revolution. There were some data related to economic developments and spending which I thought fit for inclusion here, data related to the saving of energy.

The investment program which has been underway in the pharmaceutical industry for three years now, with a total budget of \$120 million (recall the times when things were going badly, when we faced problems, some of which we still have today; it is comforting to see how we overcome obstacles and the spirit to continue clearing these obstacles is strengthened) —of which \$ 52 million have been used (16 in 2004, 22 in 2005 and 14 in the first quarter of 2006, much more will be spent this year)— has resulted in the increased availability of the most important pharmaceutical products (tablets, vials, sanitary towels, cephalosporanic capsules and pills, powders for suspension, dental products, oral and topical fluids, creams, plastic bottles, among other things) and a considerable improvement of good manufacturing practices, meaning safer and more efficiently produced medications.

The investments made from 2004 to date have allowed us to expand our production capacity to that of 10 billion tablets a month and 78 million vials a year, to duplicate our production capacity in terms of powders for suspensions and increase vial production capacity from 27 to 32 million a year. This is what we've accomplished, and growth rates continue to increase.

Since mid-2005, a plan aimed at increasing the consumption of eggs to 10 units per consumer a month throughout the country has been underway. By the end of April, this plan had been extended to cover 148 municipalities and, at the close of this quarter, it will be extended to all of the country's 169 municipalities.

Cuba has taken on a plan to increase, in 2006, the total volume of pork meat on the hoof to 80 thousand tons —the previous year, the maximum reached was 60,000 tons, the plan was to produce 80,000 in 2006. Estimates were further increased to 100 thousand tons for this year. In addition to increasing food production, we must be concerned with the risks of epidemics such as the bird flu, which could deal a hard blow to other areas of production, such as that of eggs and meat. These are things we must prepare for, we shouldn't simply wait for one of these catastrophes that menace the world today to happen. The risk of these catastrophes is ever greater today, because nearly all corners of the world are connected. Before, a disease could take four or five years to spread to another location, antibodies had time to develop also. Today, a virus spreads and many a time there are no antibodies for it, the time needed for the biological resistance to develop simply didn't elapse. For 2007, we estimate the production of 120 thousand tons, twice the volume produced in 2005. Though we have faced some

difficulties because of the late arrival of imported fodder —something which shouldn't happen, and I think it's the least of our problems, because I've been making inquiries in the food industry and other places— including difficulties faced in land transportation, already in our first quarter we have reached the figure of about 15 thousand tons. The annual program demands a faster growth rate.

We have been continuing the repairs of the facilities for this production, reaching 255 units to date. This figure will remain unaffected and we will make every effort to produce the 100 thousand tons in 2006.

The goal of producing some 60, 700 tons of rice in 2006, is progressing without problems, and in the first four months, 20 thousand 100 tons were produced. Rice production dropped in the large harvest areas due to drought, hurricanes and high fuel costs. Following rational planning techniques, we can see there are production areas in which it is neither economical nor reasonable to invest, though investments continue to be made wherever this is economical and possible. There are other, much more economical areas to look into, no country in the world can aspire to self-reliance. The least self-reliant country in the world is also the richest, the United States, and it pays for an important part of its imports with money it prints —I've spoken about this already, I don't want to drag on.

The program for the production of soy yoghurt is on schedule. The first stage after the production capacity was increased concluded at the end of 2005 and has netted a million liters per day. We had been supplying the yogurt to nearly half a million junior high school students who today have meals at school, to workers, teachers, etc. We had been supplying it to the population, in limited quantities, in all other parts of the country. We are now expanding the production capacity of this product, which is in high demand because of its flavor and nutritive qualities, and Pinar del Río is our experimental province, not only with respect to electricity.

Capacity is growing in that province; it is growing day by day. Cold storage facilities for the yogurt have been created there. Till recently, some 6 million liters were being distributed daily. Today, it is more than 15 million liters a day and I hope that, within a few weeks, a distribution rate equivalent to 40, 000 liters a day is reached in Pinar del Río, not counting the yogurt distributed to schools and other places. There's no limit, if you consume 50,000, 60,000 or more, it will continue to be supplied to you. It is being sold at the same price as before, but before it wasn't as subsidized as it is today. Today, it is subsidized at 20 % its production and distribution cost. It wasn't a rationed product, but it wasn't abundant either. Now, we're going to increase production to one and half million liters a day in the following six months and, if more is needed, we will produce more.

Evo and Hugo were here, as you know, and we spoke of buying soy from Bolivia. One million and a half liters of soy yogurt requires about 60,000 tons of soy, such that this commitment does not affect us in the least. And we're going to consume more soy than we're going to purchase additionally from Bolivia.

In the first quarter of 2006, 47 thousand 100 tons were produced, 34 % higher than in the same period last year, at a rate of 850 thousand liters per day. This is more exact data. This is what's being produced, you have to take the container in which it is distributed into account, you can't bottle it, we use a very light plastic product which we have to purchase and which must be included in the production costs.

In the chocolate-milk program (Chocolé) —when we first spoke about this product, we called it chocolatín and, since man is a creature of habit, I continue calling it chocolatín— we produced 2,800 tons during the first quarter and production has been progressing according to the effective demand in order to ensure that there are no shortages of this product and that there are no surpluses above the demand.

In the program of pasta production there were some delays in the investment process. Nevertheless, we are aiming to set up the two factory production lines in Santiago by the end of June 30 —we'll see if we can get it finished by July 26, I know they're working hard, but they're months behind schedule, it has to be completed within that period —increasing that factory's capacity from 6 thousand tons to 21 thousand tons. The new line for the Vita Nova factory has already entered the country, and we plan on setting it up as well by June 30.

Where's the minister of the Food Industry? Roca, where are you? He's a wiz with the calculations and he saves us a lot (pointing to Roca), he knows these pieces of equipment inside out, I respect him a lot for that. You say June 30. Have you included any days for contingency situations? Add two weeks, even three, but get it finished before June 30 if you can. I trust him, because he knows how things are progressing. Hey, and why the delay? Was it the shipments? (He tells him it was due to late shipments). It had nothing to do with us or the purchases? Who? The manufacturers of the equipment. You're exonerated.

So, things should be up and running by June 30, and this should allow us to expand production by 10,000 tons, to reach a total of 24,000 at this important factory.

If, on the one hand, we have 21,000 tons and 24,000 on the other, we have a production capacity of 45,000 tons, three times what we had before, a quality product, because the quality of that pasta depends on the quality of the wheat and we know what wheat we need, Bonasso can help us buy it in Argentina, durum wheat.

In the program for noodle production, we are working with the Ministry of Sugar in 12 of the 13 projected plants. We have to define the terrain here, because the idea is use those facilities that were shut down to produce different things: pasta, noodles, bonbons, food industry products. But we don't have to divide the ministry, only expand it to include the food industry, because the Ministry of Sugar, in addition to sugar, deals with agriculture, that is, the production of food, quality vegetables, for instance, and other products. The Ministry of Sugar had many unused lands, and these lands ought to be parceled out. But industrial food products are quite another thing, we don't want pastas to be administered by the food industry and noodles and bonbons by the Ministry of Sugar. The Ministry of Sugar does not specialize in bonbons and the Food Industry Research Institute, responsible for so many excellent things, cannot be absent from quality control and production of bonbons and other things the Ministry of the Food Industry is concerned with.

The production of sugar was not good business any way you looked at it, these sugar prices are subject to market fluctuations, because we no longer have agreements that protected sugar prices, what we face in sugar production is chaos, as in so many other branches of the world economy. We're taking advantage of the favorable situation now and the fact that alcohol being used in fuel is at such a high price now.

These bonbons I mentioned require very fine and hence more expensive sugar. So, our country's food industry is going to need more quality sugar. Currently, there are markets for the limited production of sugar at reasonable prices.

Our country is experiencing climatic changes. We are experiencing more and more droughts and hurricanes are more violent and frequent. This has had an impact on rice production, because fields have been flooded and dams have burst, and much cane is lost every time a hurricane passes through a cane field, the harvesters have to cut pieces scattered across the ground.

We no longer have the slaves or illiterate unemployed people who used to cut the cane by hand, in the time of slavery and at the beginning of the last century, when the large US sugar cane plantations were established and they brought over Caribbean immigrants who lived worse than slaves, no one looked after their health and they were paid peanuts. It's the truth.

The Ministry of Sugar is working on 13 plants as part of the noodle production program. Plans are to complete four in April, seven in May and two in June.

We are working on finishing three plants for the production of chocolate candies; the four remaining are in various construction stages. These seven are but a few of the factories we're going to build. These high-quality bonbons will not be subsidized. Chocolatín, cocoa with milk, will be subsidized, but the high-quality bonbons will have market prices. 60 different flavors have been developed by the Food Industry Research Institute. One hell of a research facility! And they'll develop more flavors, mark my words.

All of this allows us to have a production capacity of pasta that will reach a proposed capacity of 70 thousand tons in 2006, guaranteeing a greatly increased supply.

We planned for a first phase of 120 silos that would store 240 thousand tons of grain. We have just set up 58 units and the remaining 62 should reach completion between May and June.

For the second phase, 130 silos are planned; 84 are already in various stages of construction. When this stage ends in August and September, storage capacity will have increased to 246 thousand tons. We are already working on the third phase in order to reach a storage capacity in 2007 for another 500

thousand metric tons.

In the program for protected vegetable crops on land managed by the Sugar Ministry, 462 out of a planned 2,800 vegetable gardens have been finished. Around 1,647 are being built; 691 are yet to be built. We hope that, as soon as possible, and as soon as the sugarcane harvest ends, work in which I have mentioned, their construction and conclusion speeds up. Vegetable production is very important, especially in these centers where processes are costly and in which high quality products are produced, where many different spices are produced, I'm sure that you'll be able to season the beans and many other products you will consume much better after this. We have much to learn in these culinary matters, though organoponics have taught us a lot. In the intensive orchards—another category— 369 out of the planned 376 have been finished. The 112 cultivation houses projected to be built were concluded; sowing has begun in 108 of them.

The Ministry of Agriculture, by the way, has centers growing these types of crops. The Ministry of Agriculture has planned to construct 666 cultivation houses and by April 28, only 99 had been completed.

The investment process in the construction materials industry, which began in 2005, continues. The plan for 2006 approved 41 million dollars of investments and this will increase the production of sand by 9 %, stone by 26 %, blocks by 36 % and flooring materials by 44 %.

By April 2006, 27,900 homes were completed. Additionally, we plan on completing 52,764 new homes, during the remainder of the year, to replace those that were totally destroyed during weather disasters, and plans continue to complete new constructions in order to look after the most pressing needs, with at least 30 thousand additional homes.

It's very important for people to learn how to build, for families to learn how to build their own houses, because everyone knows how to use weapons, knows how to build, how to harvest, do you understand? This is very important; because there are not enough workers for the State to build all of the houses the country requires (Shouts of "Long live Fidel!").

Up until April, approximately 27 thousand projects for the restoration and conservation of homes have been carried out, this representing a 43% increase over the results of the same period in 2005. In addition, during the remainder of the year, we shall be repairing most of the 90 thousand homes that were partially affected by all the reported weather phenomena.

Drought conditions continue affecting our geography. Rainfall in the November 2005 to March 2006 season amounted to only 140 mm; that means a 54% of the historical average for this period.

The provinces most affected by the drought are: Holguín, Ciudad de La Habana —though not much is grown here, isn't that so, Sáez, they have no land, and they'll start using the land they have—, Guantánamo, La Habana, and Santiago de Cuba, affected by the drought.

Until 2004, in order to deal with the effects of drought, it was necessary to make investments of 183,500,000 pesos and in 2005, we invested 58,300,000 pesos, for a total of 241,800,000 pesos.

For this year, an investment plan was approved for this purpose, for a total of 144,500,000 pesos, of these 54,300,000 in hard currency. At the present time, we are working on an important group of projects in different territories of the country, among these the pipes factory in Ciudad de La Habana and Holguín and the East-West Water Transfer which is being constructed in the eastern part of the country.

We have been continuing work on the transportation recovery program that was initiated last year.

We plan investments in the area of railway transportation for the approximate amount of 157,500,000 convertible pesos. Until the present, we have repaired 124 freight cars for 337,100 convertible pesos which, when added to last year's repairs, totals 1,824 cars.

Here it says convertible pesos. I warned about this, that we had to indicate whether purchases were made in dollars, purchases from China are made in dollars. Convertible pesos are worth more than dollars.

Until the present, we have repaired 124 freight cars for 337,100 convertible pesos which, when added to last year's repairs, totals one thousand 824 cars. This is in merely a year. Intense efforts in this area began at the beginning of last year. All railway workshops that can repair wagons are working day and night and they're consuming electricity, don't forget. In the contract stage, there are 100 cement silo wagons which could also be used in the transportation of other construction materials.

Repairs of 131 flat wagons used in containers transport have been carried out and we plan on acquiring 150 more, thus allowing for improved loading and unloading operations in the newly outfitted loading areas. For fuel transport, 78 tankers have been repaired and we shall be acquiring 200 railroad tank cars which will improve the transport of fuel. The preceding is complemented by the purchase of 100 locomotives from China for 130 million dollars. Many locomotives, of different manufacture, will be repaired in 2006. We're looking at a number of Russian offers, as many of our locomotives are of Russian manufacture and many could be made functional if fitted with replacement pieces. These are pieces of equipment we're familiar with. But, okay, I'm not saying we're going to purchase them, all I've said is that they've spoken to us about possible offers of locomotives.

In automotive freight transport, we also plan for immediate investments of approximately 72 million convertible pesos, which will further improve this type of transport; including the purchase of 23 cement trucks, 127 flatbed trucks with semi-trailers for grain —to store them, you have to unload them, you have to transport them—, 40 semi-trailers for containers and the acquisition of a thousand 20-ton trucks for a total of 65 million dollars, to be used in the domestic economy and to replace inefficient equipment —and to clean up our ports, one of our big headaches, which delays ships and we must pay hard currency for every hour that we keep the ship at the port over the agreed time, and we're talking about tens of millions of dollars we lose, you could almost pay for these 1,000 trucks in a year and a half.

An important feature is the acquisition of some 1,400 devices for the control of the fleet to be installed in the trucks; this will allow for the control of the usage of this equipment and will decrease fuel consumption.

We have already signed contracts for 20,600 new engines for replacing the engines in 3, 5 and 5-ton trucks, as well as thousands of pick-up trucks and other light vehicles for the same purpose of saving a great deal of fuel. That is to say, they have been purchased; a great many things have been purchased, and we're working in this area, because the energy revolution goes hand in hand with the fuel saving revolution.

A similar effort is being carried out in all areas of transportation. We have purchased buses of all sorts to replace non-efficient vehicles such as school-buses, city and inter-municipal buses. You know there are people who have an old banger from who knows what year, which they have fitted with a Diesel motor that no one knows how or where they obtained, who charge five or six times, sometimes more, sometimes less, than what these new buses are going to charge, especially the inter-provincial buses which are starting to circulate, for which the State will subsidize 20% of the fare. If we don't do this, we face either ruin or the risk of never having this type of transportation in Cuba again. We aim to eliminate the calamities we face today, to actually eliminate them, using transportation with extreme rationality, organization and efficiency, in all areas. We also have vehicles that transport goods; everything has to be transported, medication, food distribution centers, industrial products, etc, and the population needs to travel. When it's free, everyone travels, that's how it works.

We have to do two things: we have to be economically efficient and we have to educate the people. And I count on the people's support, as the people have no doubt about the fact that everything the Revolution has done, successfully or not, has been for the people, and that everything the Revolution is doing today, with more experience, absolutely everything is for the people and to meet our internationalist duties (Applause and shouts of "Hurray!").

These investments, begun during this quarter, have permitted us to transport 173,300 tons of freight more in this period as compared to last year and we estimate an increase of 3,900,000 tons by the end of 2006.

Thanks to the program for the repairing and totally remodeling of polyclinics, 19 were totally refurbished in the first quarter; this brings to a close projects involving 146 units of this same type, which will allow

for the provision of 20 new services. At the present time, work is going on in 183 and in 15 more it is about to begin. This program —I prepared it when I was gathering, compiling and organizing the data—, due to its enormous importance for public health, must be as intensive as can be, because we're talking about 446 centers, and we must devote special efforts, due to its enormous importance for public health.

Sáez gave me very good news, that, currently, infant mortality in Havana is of 3.5, is that right? Less than 4 per 1000 live births. Never before had this figure been reached in our capital! And it is proof of the importance of these polyclinics, of the works we are constructing, the equipment and growing excellence of our medical personnel (Applause).

During this first quarter, a new rehabilitation ward was constructed. Thus, this program for the refurbishing of polyclinics is practically concluded, with the grand total of 453 wards of this type being built throughout the country. There will be 52 more constructed in rural hospitals, along with the repairs being carried out in these institutions.

In the remodeling and expansion program for 52 first-rate hospitals that began in 2004, work is being done to conclude repairing in 6 hospitals in the capital by July 26 this year. As part of this program 963 projects have been undertaken, 254 of which are already completed. A total of 118 pieces of medical equipment, of which 59 have been fully installed, must be installed. Only 6 of 52 first-rate hospitals have been completed. They are very challenging works, there's been much disorganization in terms of construction and we've been inefficient. I feel embarrassed about how long it's taken to construct many works. This sector must make a very serious effort to organize itself, to overcome weaknesses in many areas. We are dealing, no doubt, with some delayed activity; organizations, construction crews and other sectors working on this task should be required to make a more serious effort.

Not all problems are easy to solve. One of them has to do with the workforce, it does not suffice. Productivity is low, construction workers and their bosses delude themselves many times. Still, we are hopeful. Construction materials and equipment are being developed; nothing has been neglected in the area of construction.

We have sometimes approached our friends in the construction sector and said to them: "If you don't start making progress, we'll have to hire foreign construction companies for some works". That's almost inconceivable; but, again, there were many inconceivable things before.

I think we haven't been especially happy in the area of construction in the course of our Revolution and that's been the area where we've faced the most problems. I know something about this, because, for many years, I paid close attention to the construction of dams, roads, schools, farm facilities, sugarcane irrigation and drainage structures, flat rice terraces —I could go on and on—whole years devoted to these special efforts. Ramiro Valdés remembers this, when we had to divide the Ministry into various departments.

Construction has been a chaotic sector throughout our history and we have to solve this problem, because we have no other choice.

For the second quarter, we will have 12 highly modern oil drilling machines, some through joint ventures with China. Chinese and Cuban oil workers are working together, helping each other. Wherever I look, I see companies from China and other countries engaged in construction.

When our construction crews cannot take on a certain job because of the number of projects on their plate and after they have exhausted all resources in this sense, then we may have to hire foreign companies. Needless to say, all of our efforts have been devoted to top quality works and to satisfy the urgent needs of our people, who have heroically defeated this loathsome blockade which has lasted nearly half a century (Applause).

Now they're thinking about what they're going to do in May —I'm curious to know myself—their more than well-known period of transition, with their warships, aircraft carriers, submarines, bands of killers, arsenals, and assassination plots. Let's see what they say now, because all of you know we're in a transition period, didn't you know this? It's true, but it is the complete opposite of the bushavian or bushist or bushonite transition (Laughter and applause). I don't mean to offend anyone, but one comes across such strange, strange things, one can't help but laugh and poke fun at them.

In La Habana Province, work on 15 rural senior high schools has concluded, another 6 are about to be concluded and conditions are being created for repairs on the remaining 19.

The repair of 20 schools in the countryside has been completed and these are already being utilized to train Latin American doctors: Operations Hope and Miracle.

At the present time, the nation's primary and secondary schools are equipped with more than 109 thousand television sets, 43 thousand VCRs and 36 thousand computers. Growth in this area is expected, and the television sets in primary schools will be gradually replaced with 29-inch sets this year (the ones currently in use are 21-inch sets).

Today, 126 children recreation centers, 72 boyscout centers and 16 children camps have become fully operational.

As for junior high school education, the school lunch or snack program is now in general use, reaching 434 thousand students.

More than 110 thousand young people are studying in comprehensive training courses, of these some 18,600 will be completing their high-school graduation and another 16,400 will be graduating from 12th Grade. At the present time, more than 90 thousand graduates from these courses are enrolled in university studies.

University enrolment has increased to a total of more than 510,000 students this year, taught by 122,000 professors. The Municipal University Campuses (SUM by the Spanish acronym) total 3,150 throughout the country, including those associated with the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Health, the National Institution of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation and others.

The construction of the University of Information Sciences continues. Capital repairs are being carried out in the Jose Antonio Echeverría Higher Pedagogical Institute, the Agricultural University of Havana, the Higher Institute of Industrial Design, the Alamar VI student residence, the Students' House and the Law School of the University of Havana, as well as the student residence of Oriente University. The Municipal University Campus of Caimanera is 98 % completed, requiring only to be furnished and equipped.

In support of the new plans of the Revolution, more than 28 thousand social workers (Exclamations) are participating in various jobs having great social value and recognition: in the care of senior citizens, the physically impaired, the sugar industry workers under the Álvaro Reinoso Project, in Operation Miracle and together with university students in the energy battle delivering electrical appliances, among other important tasks.

Three hundred new Youth Computer Clubs have been opened, which add up to the existing 300. One hundred ten thousand and five hundred people are benefiting from the courses taught at these centers, which speaks highly about their solid work so far.

There are 352 video clubs for young people that have a capacity for more than 21 thousand people and offer a cultural option which is widely appreciated for its broad program. In addition to this, 26 computer science polytechnic schools are undergoing major repair work around the country; nearly 40,000 technicians are being trained in this specialty. Together with the 8,000 students enrolled at the University of Information Sciences and the faculties of other universities around the country, they are part of the more than 50,000 specialists the country is training in this promising field.

Television broadcasts on the educational channels reach every province, bringing benefits to 87.9 % of the population.

Eighty nine municipal radio stations, 8 television centers and one 1 918 television viewing rooms in remote populated areas are currently working. Channel Habana, covering the two Havana provinces,

was inaugurated on January 28. The investment process must be completed to make these fully operational.

The Cubanacán Art Schools, the National Ballet School, the National Circus School and the schools for Visual Arts throughout the country are still undergoing restoration.

The Art Instructors Schools are training as many as 15 thousand 700 young people. At the present time, the graduated instructors look after more than 700 thousand children and adolescents during school hours and 130 thousand in artistic creation workshops.

The Book Fair was held from February 2 to March 7 this year, and traveled through other 35 cities. Twenty-five countries participated, more than 3 million 300 thousand book copies were sold and, including the books brought by Venezuela as the invited country, more than 4 million books reached the hands of readers. Next year, let me tell you, there'll be many more, we're already purchasing the paper, because there is great interest in books. We have two highly modern printing presses which are almost capable of printing all of the books needed.

In March, the First Baseball World Classic was held; this was a competition where, as everyone knows, we ended up in second place, with very notable results both politically as well as in sports (Applause).

Hats off to the fabulous —I say fabulous because of their conduct, their performance, their honesty—members of this team, that wrote a glorious page for Cuban and world sports! (Applause). Now, we have the Cuban National Olympics. There are many athletes competing, and this event will continue to grow in importance.

We have advanced in the investment process of the 17 EIDE (Schools for Initiation in Sports), a program that allows for the capital repairs of the 15 existing centers and the construction of 2 new ones in the provinces of Guantánamo and Granma —I mentioned this recently. The repair of the José Martí EIDE in the capital was thus concluded, and the 14 remaining ones were operational after the main construction projects were completed, after which they are now able to accommodate some 12 thousand students.

Works continue at the National Gymnastics School and on through the second construction phase of the National Centre for Volleyball Training.

The International School for Physical Education and Sports was operational in the first semester with an enrolment originating from 79 countries (Shouts).

Full employment prevails, and unemployment is kept at less than 2 %.

I'd like to know if many countries in the world can say the same thing right now (Applause).

Consistent with an economic policy that would ensure the satisfaction of social interests and the basic priorities of the nation, a group of measures in the monetary-financial realm have been taken aimed at strengthening the national currency.

Some of the practical effects of these measures have been: a 42 % increase in Cuban peso savings (after comparing close of March 2006 to close of February 2005) which shows greater confidence in the national currency; an increased ratio of convertible Cuban pesos deposits in the foreign currency savings total, which went from 20 % to 65.3 % at the end of 2005 –well, it was in 2005 that we prohibited the circulation of the dollar, not deposits, any citizen knows that he/she can deposit foreign currency at the bank and withdraw it, that money is sacred, untouchable; before, most deposits were made in foreign currencies. Today, 65.3 % are in convertible pesos. These are highly important economic data, let the Chicago Boys say so, yes, they're always talking about that, to muddle things up so that no one can understand them and manipulate the world economy and exploit less developed peoples— and a significant increase of foreign currency taken in by the Central Bank.

Likewise, the dollar's share in the total cash currency inflow has substantially decreased. They thought they had annihilated us with their measures and the cruel prohibitions they imposed on US citizens and Cuban-born US residents, allowing them to see their relatives only every three years. They thought they were going to ruin us, but they are the ones who are economically ruined right now.

Though they say they've grown and that the stock exchange is doing fine, etc., they have overdrawn more than 800 billion dollars from their current account. And how's Cuba doing? I've been telling you here, for you to get the scoop, for them to hear it and put their brainy specialists to work on Cuba's case and ask themselves how Cuba has been able to hold its ground for as long as it has and to defeat the criminal blockade, a foul product of the intelligence one would suppose an underdeveloped nation to have. Nearly 50 years, the longest blockade in history. Thank you, Yankee Empire! You made us grow; you made us reach new heights along the years! You crowned the blood spilt by all of the Cubans who have fought and died here and elsewhere, with the shameful defeat of your cynical blockade, your cynical attempts to destroy us!

Today, you don't have doctors to send to New Orleans and we are training tens of thousands of them and we will be training 100,000 in 10 years who will be even better trained than today's doctors. I am not denying that there are many eminent doctors in the United States, but our doctors' basic training is far superior, for they are capable of traveling to any corner of the world, as are medical students from other Latin American countries (Exclamations), because we not only teach medicine, we teach solidarity, we teach humanism in our universities (Applause).

With this state of affairs, how can they send doctors to Africa? They can donate 20 billion dollars to combat AIDS, because they have all the financial capital they want, they mint it; what they don't have is human capital, they can't find it. We, on the other hand, can, when they tried to take away all of our doctors we had only 6,000, half of them unemployed, and they took them, they left us with 3,000 and 30 % of the professors. Today, we have 122,000 university professors, today, our universities are everywhere, and knowledge and talent are everywhere in Cuba, people have knowledge and are capable of transmitting it to others.

There are 8 times as many university professors in Cuba today than the total number of university students at the time the Revolution triumphed. Look at how our human capital has multiplied itself, the multiplication of fish and bread transformed into the multiplication of knowledge (Applause).

In the past, the dollar accounted for more than 90 %, while now it remains at around 30 %, thus substantially diminishing the risk emanating from the threats launched by the United States government.

Since 2005, a rational centralization has governed all decisions regarding the use of foreign currencies. Authorization for these transactions must be procured before the taking on of any contractual obligations, and this has signified greater contractual efficacy and greater security in the fulfillment of payment commitments. Moreover, this has contributed to the struggle against crime and corruption.

It has also allowed for a more rigorous fulfillment of obligations relating to the new external financial commitments and the renegotiated debts, thus permitting access to new financing under more advantageous conditions.

The agreement between the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Republic of Cuba, signed under the principles of ALBA, has been a significant step forward down the path of unity and true integration among Latin American and Caribbean peoples. The creation of PETROCARIBE and the signing of recent agreements to refine Venezuelan oil in Cuba also constitute extraordinary steps forward and true examples of brotherhood and solidarity among peoples.

In 2005, the commercial exchange between Venezuela and Cuba surpassed the figure of 2.4 billion dollars, and only during the first quarter of 2006 it was above 1.2 billion.

Now I'll get right down to what you've all been waiting for, as the sun's getting hotter and my time ran out long ago (Laughter).

TRANSFORMATIONS IN CUBA'S NATIONAL POWER GENERATION SYSTEM

Our people are well aware that we are undertaking a great energy revolution.

We have made a huge effort to acquire all the technological and non-technological equipment that is needed.

Less than three and a half months ago, on 17 January, in a ceremony taking place in Pinar del Río (Applause and exclamations), the first province having a self-sufficient installed power generation potential, the public opinion was informed that at that time a new capacity of 253,500 kilowatts/hour had been installed in the country.

After that ceremony was held in the capital of that province, an appeal was launched so that, under the guidance of the Party, the peoples' power organizations, and all State bodies, companies, work centers, electrical workers, construction workers, teamsters and the whole people mobilize, without losing a single moment, to redouble their efforts in civil construction and the installation of equipment and distribution networks, in order to finally and immediately put in place the generators which would work in synchronization with the National Power Generation System.

Until today, May Day, hundreds of generators with the capacity to generate 903,000 kilowatts (that is, 3.6 times as much the capacity installed on January 17 in Pinar del Río) have been installed throughout the country (Applause).

Another program which has been running smoothly has been the installation of emergency generators at essential economic and service entities in the nation in order to ensure power supply during any emergency situation, be it some weather phenomenon or other natural or provoked catastrophe affecting Cuba.

Up until today, 3,444 emergency generators have arrived in Cuba for this purpose as part of this plan; 2,755 of them have already been installed, and their output amounts to 296, 228 KW. These results have been made possible because of the efforts of the brigades of installers and local support and so we have been able to accomplish these ambitious plans in a very short time. With the emergency generators installed to date, we can guarantee protection for the following, among others: 203 hospitals, 311 polyclinics, 95 dental clinics, 161 blood banks, senior citizens homes, homes for the mentally and physically disable, and main pharmacies, 592 bakeries, 180 centers for the production, conservation and manufacture of foodstuffs, 200 water pumps, recyclers and treatment plants, 57 schools working for Operation Miracle and the new program for the training of Latin American doctors, 77 important educational centers, 104 centers for newspaper, radio and TV communications, 54 weather stations, 33 chemical, pharmaceutical and biotechnological industries, 158 hotels and other tourist installations

In the mountains of Pakistan, as part of the Cuban medical cooperative mission during the aftermath of the catastrophic earthquakes, 54 emergency generators were installed. Moreover, 20 generators were sent to the other side of the globe, to hospitals in our sister-nation of Bolivia.

Thousands of units are still being installed in the country for this purpose. They are new, standardized and consume very little energy. Of those which have been installed, 750 produce 210 KW or more, so that at this point they are able to reinforce the supplying of electricity to the country during peak hours, with which the main grid gets rid of the power consumption of the aforementioned centers.

To ensure the functioning of the synchronized generators and other equipment, a huge special effort has been made in the production of fuel tanks: 2,903 have been produced in 10 factories of our steel and mechanical industry —also working around the clock—, having capacities ranging from 1.5 cubic m. to 100 cubic m. In addition, the efforts made to ensure transportation, both for the units themselves and for the fuel tanks could be described as a prowess.

On January 17, 2006, at the Pinar del Río ceremony, we stated: “On the First of May we shall have reached the capacity to generate 1 million KW, equivalent to 3.3 thermo-power stations like the ‘Antonio Guiteras’”. This is what I said. This figure has been surpassed. (Applause). Today, on May Day, we have an installed capacity of more than 1,100,000 KW with the synchronized generators and the emergency generators with a capacity above 120 KW. That amounts to one hundred thousand kilowatts, more than 3.3 times as much the real capacity of the “Antonio Guiteras” thermo power station installed in less than eight months. This plant took six or seven years to be constructed, it shuts down all the time, right now it is not functioning, it's there as a reserve. A number of plants are on stand-by, saving on fuel. The truth is that the largest of them is currently not working, the one that cost God knows how many hundreds of millions, which we had to finance from the time we ordered it, the one that's caused our country so many headaches. There are a number of such large plants either on stand-by or working at half their capacity which, of course, we still need, because this is a program which is still in development, though we need them for only a little while longer. We'll see what happens in the course of a year. We'll see, I can't tell you about everything today, we have to save some for later.

At that meeting in January we referred to the importance of using accompanying gas, a source of pollution, which can be used after a simple purification process, as a fuel for power generation at the lowest possible cost for our country. Once we make this investment, we will be able to produce one kilowatt for less than two cents.

As part of the process of making the most use from accompanying gas, we have completed the substitution in Havana of LPG cylinders which used to be distributed using methane—this accompanying gas began to be used not long ago; before, we used naphtha, some naphtha, some gas, which would blacken containers, this is no longer the case— after the starting up of the Marianao Plant last February. This measure has allowed us to save, until today, 8, 650 tons of naphtha and 158 tons of liquefied gas.

Quick progress is being made in the studies, research and tests that will allow us to resort to wind energy as soon as possible. We have already purchased the first 100 pieces of equipment —they're due

to arrive— and, most especially, towers to measure wind speeds in all of the country's key regions. There are good prospects for many of these regions. We'll see when we have the information, how quickly we can build these. This system adjusts itself well to wind energy, because winds are whimsical and unpredictable, for a system with large plants like we had it was impossible to synchronize electricity produced through wind power. Eight hours would suffice and the process would be very economically efficient. We have places in which 12, 15 and 20 hours are guaranteed, and places in which measurements are being made and the speed has not dropped to a level below that required to produce electricity.

Reference was always made to the need of refurbishing the network in order to reduce significant losses in distribution and the low voltage that affects electrical appliances. These topics were discussed at length in several consecutive round tables during the past month of January.

What have we accomplished in the last months?

We have accomplished 85,538 actions to improve this service as part of the ambitious plan of ending 2006 with a 60 % rate of fulfillment of the full program.

Until April 30, the following actions have been accomplished:

Replacement of 12,719 electricity posts that were in poor shape.

Increased capacity in 3,000 transformers.

Replacement 49,384 units for home electrical input.

Installation of 956,781 breakers, eliminating the ones that were ancient and obsolete, a massive enterprise occurring for the first time in the nation and reaching all households

Manufacturing of 3,100 new transformers this year, and the creation of the necessary conditions to produce 15,000 by the end of this year.

These results, plus imports, have allowed us to install 5,357 new transformers in our distribution network.

A much more comprehensive and complete study has been made on the potential for savings in the residential sector, which included visits to every household, and based on this experience, this study on the savings potential was also carried out in the State sector.

This task was made possible thanks to the decisive support of our social workers together with the University Brigades of Social Work (BUTS), which joined enthusiastically this crucial endeavor. Our people recognize this work; the mass organizations have welcomed them in the neighborhoods and communities, for they are the key actors of this historic struggle.

As our country knows full well, we have also taken important measures to eliminate stealing and

squandering of fuel at the service centers and gasoline stations where it is sold.

From October 10, 2005 a total of 10,500 social workers began working at the gasoline stations, refineries, distribution centers and tank trucks. During this period, cash income from the sale of fuel in the gas stations has risen 2.53 times on a daily average. We are entering a new era of reorganizing the system and this signals an important victory that encourages us all in this battle we have decided to wage against squandering and vice, lifting up the revolutionary morale wherever routine and egoism have been eroding it.

We can say that what we have done so far is just the beginning. We have gone through a period of learning. Some details must be corrected, and so shall it be done, but we shall be advancing in a most decided manner in the matter of saving energy, motivated by our people's growing awareness on this vital subject and for the benefits that will surely be ours as a result of all this work.

If the efforts being made by Cuba today were imitated by all the other countries in the world, the following would happen:

1st The existing and potential hydrocarbon reserves would last twice as much.

2nd The pollution unleashed to the environment by these hydrocarbons would be halved.

3rd The world economy would have a break, since the enormous volume of transportation means and electrical appliances should be recycled.

4th A fifteen-year moratorium on the construction of new nuclear power plants could be declared.

Nothing will ever stop us!

Homeland or death, we shall overcome!

(Ovation).

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