



2030 M Street, NW, Fifth Floor
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 728-5500
fax: (202) 728-5520
mail: contactndi@ndi.org
www.ndi.org

March 31, 2003

Dear Friend,

As Chairman of the National Democratic Institute (NDI), I am writing to seek your support for the more than 70 human rights and democracy activists suffering under a recent crackdown by the Cuban government. A broad cross-section of Cubans, including independent journalists, human rights activists and independent trade union members, has suffered harassment, intimidation and imprisonment.

Among those the Cuban government has targeted are organizers of the Varela Project, an unparalleled effort to advance through peaceful means fundamental political and civil liberties in Cuba. As you may know, the Varela Project draws upon a provision in the Cuban constitution that enables citizens to introduce legislation when accompanied by 10,000 signatures. In May 2002, the organizers submitted 11,020 signatures to the National Assembly calling for a referendum on open elections, freedom of speech, freedom for political prisoners, and free enterprise. While the Cuban government has attempted to suppress the Project, the number of signatories and the strength of the movement continue to grow.

NDI has been working with the Varela Project's supporters to promote the movement internationally. International support is essential to raising the profile of this important effort and in providing solidarity with the organizers and signers. Last September, in recognition of his courageous efforts to promote peaceful change in Cuba, NDI bestowed its highest honor, the 2002 W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award, on Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas, the Project's leader. In December, the European Parliament awarded Mr. Payá with its Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, and former Czech President Václav Havel and other world leaders have nominated him for the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize.

The activists arrested in this crackdown seek only to exercise fundamental political and civil liberties, such as the right to self-expression. Such liberties are universally recognized in international human rights conventions and must be respected by any government.

Attached please find a statement from Mr. Payá calling for the immediate release of the activists and respect for the fundamental rights that thousands of Cubans are seeking through the Varela Project. I hope that you will share your concern about this repression of freedom in Cuba and the welfare of the activists.

Sincerely

Madeleine K. Albright
Chairman