

## **Cuban President Talks of Improving Higher Education**

Havana, Dec 19 (Prensa Latina) President Raul Castro highlighted the need to draw up a long-term rational plan to increase the quality of higher education, during the most recent session of the island's Council of Ministers.

That body, chaired by the Cuban head of State, certified the implementation of a policy of assurance of human resources, and the infrastructure required for improving education, Granma newspaper reported today.

The first stage of the approved leadership is aimed at stopping the deterioration of schools and, at mid term, the deficit of the technical staff.

Boosting exports, raising external financial resources such as complement of the government's subjects, and contracting retired teachers with beneficial wages to encourage their permanence at schools, are also on the list.

The higher education system in Cuba is made up of 67 institutions, with more than 250,000 students, as well as 120 centers for research, science, innovation, and technology, distributed along the country.

## **Raul Castro Talks on Violations vs. Cuban Economy**

Havana, Dec 19 (Prensa Latina) President Raul Castro stated that the violations against the country's economy cannot remain unpunished, on occasion of the damages to the island in foreign trade, an issue recently debated by the Council of Ministers.

Raul Castro highlighted the need to be exigent with those who cause damages, either through negligence or ignorance, Granma newspaper stated.

During the Council's session held yesterday, Rodrigo Malmierca, Minister for Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment, talked about the damages irregularities in foreign trade operation have caused to the country in 2013 second half.

He announced, among them, the wrong selection of suppliers, protracted contracting processes, poor handling of products, transportation problems, and labor indisciplines.

Measures to face and reduce damages were taken during the period, but implementing them systematic and rigorously is still required, Malmierca concluded.

### **Cuban Council of Ministers Adopts Policies on Different Social and Economic Areas**

HAVANA, Cuba, Dec 19 (acn) The Cuban Council of Ministers adopted a group of new policies to improve the performance of different sectors, such as education, health and foreign trade.

During the session, the President of the Councils of State and Ministers Raul Castro stressed the need to keep enforcing institutional order to keep recovering order, discipline and control.

A proposal to improve the attention that the Central Government must give to local administrations was analyzed by the Council, which considered and approved the setting up of an auxiliary body under the Council of Ministers, which attends to such local government offices and their performance.

The meeting also considered a proposal to guarantee the necessary human resources and the maintenance of the infrastructure in the higher education system, which now counts on 67 institutions and 120 entities dedicated to technological projects. Raul Castro said called for the

drawing up of a long-term plan of action to address the necessities in the sector.

Such plan will help actions to manage the current human resources in a better rational manner. Council of Ministers' vice-president Marino Murillo said that based on the high demand of Cuban medical services and the advancement in the pharmaceutical sector, it is necessary to increase the exports of these services to guarantee sustainability of the health system and make a larger contribution to the economy.

He added that several commercial modalities have been considered, including offering medical attention in Cuba, academic courses and others related to optical products, pharmaceuticals and natural medicine, as well as scientific events.

### **Cuban Deputies Express Solidarity with Ecuador against Chevron**

Havana, Dec 18 (Prensa Latina) A statement of solidarity with the people and the Ecuadorian government "against the unjust aggression of Chevron" was approved here today by the deputies in the Committee on International Relations of the Cuban Parliament.

The text accuses Chevron of causing the biggest ecological disaster in history and of damaging human health and the environment in the Ecuadorian Amazon.

It claims that, with its outdated technology, Chevron has caused the spill of 71 million gallons of waste oil and 64 million liters of oil in that region for more than 30 years.

It is an aggressive, highly polluting and harmful practice damaging people, who suffer various types of cancer, says a statement issued before the second session of the National Assembly of People's Power.

He added that the Committee on International Relations of the legislative joins the statements

issued by the Union of South American Nations, the 29th Annual Meeting of the Latin American Parliament, as well as other organizations and individuals in support of Ecuador.

### **Almost Half a Million Cubans Work in Private Sector**

Havana, Dec 19 (Prensa Latina) A total of 444,109 Cubans work in the private sector, First Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Security Marta Elena Feitó reported here today.

In a presentation to members of Parliament's Committee on Childhood, Youth and Equal Rights for Women, Feitó said that her employment data was from November.

She said that the figure represents an increase of 44,763 workers over earlier this year and added that 26 percent of the total are women and 32 percent are youth.

The provinces of Havana, Matanzas, Villa Clara, Camaguey, Holguin and Santiago de Cuba account for 65 percent of all private sector workers, she said.

The most popular private sector activities are food production and sales, freight and passenger transportation, housing rentals, and the production and sale of household items, Feitó said.

According to estimates from 2012, the country's active workforce totals 4,846,647 and the unemployment rate is 3.5 percent.

### **Cuba Promotes Growth of Sugar Cane Production**

Havana, Dec 19 (Prensa Latina) The conditions of price, inputs, supplies and market have

made sugar cane into one of the most stimulated agricultural products in Cuba, experts told members of Parliament today.

The first vice president of the Azcuba business group, Jose Carlos Santos, told the Agri-Food Industry Commission that sugar cane is an item with a very reliable market in the country, and that it has technological support that serves as an incentive for growers.

Santos reiterated the importance of higher yields and growth for boosting investment in the sector. He noted that in 2012, some \$46 million was invested in sugar cane production.

He also highlighted the need to increase energy savings through a more efficient use of energy by sugar mills.

At least 1.80 million tons of sugar is expected to be produced in the 2013-2014 harvest, which started on Nov. 20. That would represent an increase of 18 percent against the previous harvest, according to estimates.

New equipment, greater transportation capacity, and training for personnel who are participating in the harvest were some of the improvements that should contribute to more efficiency, he said.

### **Parliamentarians Calls for Recovery of Urban Discipline and Order**

HAVANA, Cuba, Dec 19 (acn) The rescue of urban order and discipline with the support of institutions and the population, was at the center of debates by Cuban deputies in their commissions currently gathered at Havana's Conventions Center prior to the Session of the Cuban Parliament on Friday.

The lawmakers acknowledged the work of the Cuban Urban Planning Institute but noted that its

officials must get training and continue to enforce current regulations.

The deputies also called for a fight on illegalities in urban and rural areas and for an appropriate mechanism so that the people may carry out the legalization of new constructions according to the urban regulations.

They said that the elimination of urban illegalities accumulated over the past years is still at a very slow pace, though some advancement has been made in beach areas. Some of the functions of the Urban Planning Institute include the construction of new homes, the leasing of land for construction projects, the issuance of construction licenses and certificates for finished works according to urban and construction norms.

### **Cuban Deputies Address Need to Boost Housing Programs**

HAVANA, Cuba, Dec 19 (acn) Despite current material shortage, Cuba can advance the construction of homes, Cuban deputies agreed at the Parliamentary Commission on Industry, Construction and Energy.

It is possible to find solutions to current housing problems, with better control by managing staff, government authorities and the Construction Ministry with regards to the use of local potential in each territory, some deputies pointed out.

The lack of necessary resources and labor instability, among other factors have led to not meeting production plans, as pointed out by legislator Gerardo Hernandez Suarez who described as unacceptable the violation of contracts and investment projects.

### **Vietnam-Cuba Friendship Association Closes Solidary Congress**

Hanoi, Dec 18 (Prensa Latina) The president of the Vietnam Friendship Association with Cuba, Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan, highlighted today the relationship between both peoples when the fourth congress of the entity was closed.

Nguyen also evoked the leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro, who described the ties established as "exemplary model of the relationship between two peoples in our time," after stating that all members of the Association are happy for contributing to that solidarity tradition.

The also vice president of the Legislative National Assembly said that, as well as in the last five years, the exigency of the unconditional cease of the U.S. blockade on Cuba will remain one of the three main objectives of the Association.

She stressed the support to the cause for the immediate release of four Cuban antiterrorist fighters unjustly condemned in the United States.

Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labañino, Antonio Guerrero and Fernando Gonzalez have spent more than 15 years in U.S. prisons, for monitoring activities by terrorist groups that plan violent actions against their country.

Rene Gonzalez, also condemned, is already in Cuba after completing his unjust prison sentence.

The congress reviewed what the two sides have done in the last five years to strengthen mutual solidarity in many localities with wide participation of party and state institutions, grass-roots organizations, and elected its new executive.

The president of the Union of Vietnamese Organizations, Vu Xuan Hong, and Cuban ambassador Herminio Lopez spoke in the final session. The latter expressed gratitude for the support given to his country, and referred to the prospects to strengthen bilateral ties in multiple spheres.

## **European Groups Demand Greek Prime Minister Change in Policy vs. Cuba**

Athens, Dec 18 (Prensa Latina) Dozens of European associations in solidarity with Cuba issued today a letter addressed to Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, urging him to strengthen a fair contact and a respectful cooperation with Cuba.

Samaras will assume on January 1 the six-monthly presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU), and for that reason, activists and social organizations along Europe wanted to convey their disagreement with the community policy towards Cuba.

The message recalled that the denominated "Common Position of the EU on Cuba" is merely a vestige of the U.S. strategy during the Cold War, and violate the principles of international law, sovereignty of the Cuban people, and brings poverty to peoples.

Senders stated that "being more and more the EU citizens who consider this common Position unacceptable," political representatives should act "of a fairer, more constructive way and were more led to the future of Cuba."

Moreover, and taking into account the result "almost unanimous of the UN General Assembly against the U.S. blockade on Cuba, they said the time has come "when the EU as a whole passes from words to action."

Based on this, the signers of the statement urged Samaras to "prepare and organize the immediate cancellation of the Counterproductive Common Position of the EU on Cuba," for being a policy contrary the international law, as is the right to rule a political system that the Cuban people itself elected in a sovereign manner.

## **Nacional Congress Honors Argentinian Graduates in Cuba**



Buenos Aires, Dec 19 (Prensa Latina) More than 450 young Argentinian graduates in Cuba in 2012 and 2013 were honored in a ceremony at the Nation's Congress, in which the concept that Homeland is humanity prevails.

The spacious Blue Lounge of the legislative house was filled with the joy of about 445 physicians, eight professionals in physics and mathematics, and one engineer in biomedicine. They were from the eighth and ninth grade promotion graduates.

Fathers, officials, legislators and diplomatic staff attended the emotive act, presided over by the flags of Argentina and Cuba.

The call for unity in the struggle for the Great Homeland, the application of the humanistic ethics and the appreciation to the Cuban people for helping them to forge in worthy professionals, as well as a recognition to the Cuban people for their support and especially to Fidel Castro and Raul Castro.

Daniel Lopez, representative of the Argentinian Ministry of Education, stated that the recognition of certificates granted by the Latin American School of Medicine is the slightest thing the Argentinian government can do, compared with everything Cuba has done.

### **Cantata for Peace and the Cuban Five in Eastern Cuba**

Camagüey, Cuba, Dec 19 (Prensa Latina) A Cantata for Peace and for the cause of the four anti-terrorist Cuban fighters unjustly held in U.S. prisons will be held on the night of Dec. 29 in this city, artist Yunielkis Naranjo announced.

Naranjo, who is also a member of the national council of the young artists and writers' association, Hermanos Sainz, said that the release of the four members of the Cuban Five still in prison Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labanino, Antonio Guerrero and Fernando Gonzalez would be demanded during the event.

The fifth member of the Cuban Five is Rene Gonzalez, who is in Cuba now after serving his 15-year prison sentence and giving up his U.S. citizenship.

### **Vietnam Contributes to Boost Agricultural Production in Cuba**

HAVANA, Cuba, Dec 17 (acn) Vietnam will help boost the output of Cuban crops of maize and soya beans through the introduction of new high yield varieties developed by Vietnamese scientists.

An agreement signed by the two countries foresees the creation of demonstration areas in the Western Cuban provinces of Mayabeque and Matanzas.

Doctor Nguyen Van Bo, Chairman of Vietnam's Agricultural Sciences Academy, said at a meeting with Cuban producers and officials of the Ministry of Agriculture that the results of initial tests have been very encouraging.

Cuba, he said, has ample possibilities to raise bumper crops of maize and soya beans, leading to the replacement of imports of both commodities by domestically produced high yield crops.

The Vietnamese expert also praised the efforts by Cuban agricultural producers towards the introduction of new varieties and techniques led by Vietnamese advisors.

Nelson Lorenzo is one of the Cuban technicians that joined this productive effort . He said that with the introduction of the Vietnamese techniques, the production of maize has increased six-fold. Yields, he said, have skyrocketed from one ton to six tons per hectare.

