

on "parole," citing health reasons. The regime's callousness towards ailing political prisoners is well documented.

Now, independent Cuban journalists are reporting that Cuba's prisons have been virtually emptied of medical personnel. Why? Mr. Castro decided to send them to Venezuela and other places to advance his personal expansionist agenda.

Writing in the Spanish newspaper, *El Pais*, Nobel prize winner Jose Saramo, a Portuguese communist and close friend of Castro commented, "Cuba has won no heroic victory by executing these three men, but it has lost my confidence, damaged my hopes and robbed me of illusions."

Without anything that resembles due process, three alleged ferry hijackers were killed by firing squad in Cuba, while others got long jail terms.

Illusions, as Castro lover Jose Saramo has only now begun to acknowledge, often persist despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

Nowhere has this been more evident than in the case of Castro's Cuba.

Despite decades of credible reports of widespread egregious violations of human rights, including the pervasive use of torture and vicious beatings of political prisoners by the Cuban government, some have clung to indefensibly foolish illusions of Castro's revolution.

Despite the fact that the Cuban government systematically denies its people the freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and association, and severely restricts workers' rights, including the right to form independent trade unions, some have, nevertheless, clung to illusion.

Despite the fact that Castro maintains an unimaginably vast network of surveillance by the thugs in his secret police and Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs)—neighbors spying on neighbors—some continue to embrace bogus perceptions—illusions about Cuba.

In his book, "Against All Hope, a Memoir of Life in Castro's Gulags" Armando Valladares, a courageous and amazing man who spent 22 years in Cuban prisons wrote:

"The government of Cuba and defenders of the Cuban Revolution denied that incidents that I recount (in the book) ever happened. Castro sympathizers, who were more subtle, said the incidents I described were exaggerations. And there were others, well meaning, who simply could not bring themselves to believe that such horrors, crimes and torture existed in the political prisons of Cuba."

"My response to those who still try to justify Castro's tyranny with the excuse that he has built schools and hospitals is this: Stalin, Hitler and Pinochet also built schools and hospitals, and like Castro, they also tortured and assassinated opponents. They built concentration and extermination camps and eradicated all liberties, committing the worst crimes against humanity."

"Unbelievably, while many non-governmental organizations like Amnesty International and America's Watch have denounced the human rights situation in Cuba, there has been a continuing love affair on the part of the media and many intellectuals with Fidel Castro."

That love affair—that illusion—seemed to crash and burn with the onset of the current crackdown on dissidents. The EU took action in June 2003 by limiting high-level EU governmental visits and inviting Cuban dissidents to national day celebrations. But their memories are short. In January of this

year, at the initiative of the Spanish government, the EU temporarily suspended these measures for a six-month period.

Let me mention a few of the ones who were summarily sentenced and remain in prison. Omar Rodriguez Saludes, an independent journalist known to ride his bicycle to news conferences: 27 years. Hector Palacios, one of the key figures promoting the Varela Project: 25 years. Oscar Espinosa Chepe, who wrote critical articles about the Cuban economy for the Internet: 25 years. The President of the Independent United Confederation of Cuban Workers (CUTC), Pedro Pablo Alvarez, 25 years. Journalist Raul Rivero and Ricardo Gonzalez Afonso, an editor at "De Cuba" magazine, each got 20 years. The list goes on and on.

It was a true honor to hear from Economist Morta Beatriz Rogue today, who was sentenced to 20 years in prison and released for health reasons in 2004. We salute her courage to continue the fight on behalf of those who are still in prison today.

For its part, the Bush Administration has made its deep and abiding concern for the political prisoners and the protection of elemental human rights in Cuba abundantly clear. At the time of the crackdown, former Secretary of State Colin Powell declared:

"In recent days the Cuban government has undertaken the most significant act of political repression in decades. We call on Castro to end this despicable repression and free these prisoners of conscience. The United States and the international community will be unrelenting in our insistence that Cubans who seek peaceful change be permitted to do so."

In like manner, the Congress has consistently demanded the immediate release of all the prisoners and support of the right of the Cuban people to exercise fundamental political and civil liberties. H. Res. 179, a resolution offered by Congresswoman ROS-LEHTINEN in April 2003, passed by a vote of 414-0, 11 present. In April of 2001, I sponsored a resolution, H. Res. 91, calling on the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva to condemn Cuba's human rights abuse and appoint a Special Rapporteur for Cuba. While it passed, there were a disturbing number of negative votes. That vote was 347-44 with 22 voting present. We have another opportunity today to move forward a resolution offered by my Colleague, Mr. MENENDEZ, to show that these prisoners are not forgotten.

Fidel Castro, his brother Raul, and numerous leaders of Cuba's dictatorship, are directly responsible for crimes against humanity past—and present. Someday these oppressors will be held to account and the people of Cuba will live in freedom.

Note on the Varela Project: Named after a 19th century anti-slavery, pro-independence priest, Felix Varela, the Varela Project was a petition to the National Assembly seeking a nationwide referendum calling for basic human rights, an amnesty for political prisoners, private enterprise and election law reform to facilitate free and fair elections. On May 10th of 2002, more than 11,000 signatures were initially submitted—easily exceeding the constitutionally prescribed 10,000. Castro, however, responded by orchestrating his own petition drive that said Cuba's socialist system could not be changed, leading the rubber stamp National Assembly to declare Cuba's socialist system "irrevocable".

RECOGNIZING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF COMAL COUNTY COMMISSIONER GREGORY PARKER

### HON. HENRY CUELLAR

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, March 8, 2005*

Mr. CUELLAR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the accomplishments of Commissioner Gregory Parker. Commissioner Parker is not only the youngest Commissioner to win a seat in Comal County, he is also the first African American elected to this office.

Commissioner Parker is a military veteran who has served his country through hard work and commitment to his values.

Like many of us, Commissioner Parker had to work his way to the top. He spent 13 years working in the technology sector, eventually earning the title of Director of Software Development at Austin Data Systems.

Commissioner Parker founded Gregory Parker Consulting in 1999, where he serves as Senior Partner and Senior Policy Analyst. It was here that Commissioner Parker distinguished himself with his commitment to the issues important to Comal County and to the State of Texas. He is a man who believes that through dedicated community research, and traditional American values, we can provide the quality of policy that our citizens deserve.

Commissioner Gregory Parker, who resides in New Braunfels, is also the hard working single father of Jean Luc Parker.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to honor the past and future accomplishments of Commissioner Gregory Parker.

UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION  
MISSION IN THE DEMOCRATIC  
REPUBLIC OF CONGO: A CASE  
FOR PEACEKEEPING REFORM

### HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, March 8, 2005*

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise to address the recent U.N. Peacekeeping scandal in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

We know that there have been disturbing allegations of sexual misconduct and exploitation of refugees by U.N. peacekeepers and civilian personnel assigned to the U.N. peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Human rights groups and the U.N.'s own internal investigations have uncovered over 150 allegations against Mission personnel. These allegations typically involve peacekeepers' sexual contact with Congolese women and girls, usually in exchange for food or small sums of money. According to the U.N., these contacts occurred with regularity, and many involved girls under the age of 18, with some as young as 11-14. Even more troubling are allegations of rape, forced prostitution, and demands of sex for jobs by U.N. civilian personnel.

Some in our audience might be thinking that apart from the more serious allegations of rape and other sexual abuse, prostitution is the world's oldest profession and that it is unrealistic to ask soldiers away from their families to abstain from sex. This attitude of "boys