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Statement on Review of Title III of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (LIBERTAD) Act of 1996

January 15, 1999

I am today notifying the Congress that I have decided to suspend for an additional 6 months implementation of provisions of Title III of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, which allow legal actions to be brought against firms trafficking in confiscated properties in Cuba. I believe that this decision best implements the Act's objective to enhance human rights and hasten the day when the Cuban people enjoy democracy and prosperity.

This action further enhances our efforts to strengthen international cooperation in promoting peaceful democratic change in Cuba. For the past 2½ years, the United States has pursued a strategy, coordinated by Under Secretary of State Stu Eizenstat, to increase international pressure on the Cuban Government to respect human rights and to begin political and economic reforms. We have urged our democratic friends and allies to take concrete actions in support of this goal. Encouraged by the results, in January 1997 I said that I expected to continue suspending this provision of Title III so long as our partners' stepped-up pro-democracy efforts continued.

Over the past 6 months, the Cuban Government has heard a more concerted message from the international community in support of democracy. A number of national leaders have publicly and privately pressed senior Cuban officials on the need for human rights and democracy. While visiting Cuba, they have spoken openly of the need for change, and they have met with and given important encouragement to pro-democracy human rights activists. In international forums, our friends in Latin America and Europe have been explicit in their condemnation of Cuba's deplorable human rights situation. The European Union has renewed its Common Position on Cuba, calling for "a peaceful transition to pluralist democracy, the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms." The senior-level report made at the U.S.–EU Summit last month stressed our joint efforts to promote such a transition in Cuba. This partnership has succeeded in increasing international pressure on Cuba to respect human rights and make fundamental reforms. Nongovernmental organizations have augmented their efforts as well. A strong consensus is emerging among business and labor groups that investors in Cuba should adhere to clear "best business" principles. While we do not encourage investment in Cuba, we welcome efforts to seek the agreement of those who do invest to provide Cuban workers with decent pay, the right to organize, and safe working conditions. Major European NGO's have undertaken to develop an international working group to pursue this important initiative further.

We underscored our determination to support freedom in Cuba again on December 10, International Human Rights Day, when we honored human rights activists around the world, including the four members of Cuba's Internal Dissidence Working Group awaiting trial merely for defending their right to speak freely about their hopes for the future. Their willingness to make personal sacrifices for their peaceful, democratic cause inspires us to persevere on their behalf. I again pledge this administration's strongest efforts to encourage and work with our allies on effective steps to promote democracy and human rights in Cuba.

NOTE: This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks to the Wall Street Project Conference in New York City

January 15, 1999

The President. Thank you. I'm not sure I know what to say. [*Laughter*] First I was thinking, here I have to go follow Jesse again. [*Laughter*] You know the story about the guy that went to heaven, and St. Peter said, "Well, we've got a lot of new entrants today, and we want everybody to stand up and tell them what the best thing they ever did in their life was. How would you like to participate?" The guy said, "I'd like to do that. I did a great thing once." He said, "Well, what did you do?" He said, "I saved a bunch of