



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

March 19, 2004

BILL NELSON
FLORIDA

The Honorable Colin L. Powell
Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Powell:

With the one year anniversary this week of the deplorable crackdown on democracy and human right activists in Cuba, we are reminded that we must continue to press for democratic change in Cuba with more resolve and resources. We should do so by significantly increasing assistance provided to dissidents, non-government entities and others pressing for freedom on the island.

In October 2003, President Bush gave a Rose Garden speech full of promise on this subject, when he called for, among other things, increased outreach to the Cuban people. Yet, this is not reflected either in administration actions or the budget presented to the Congress. We cannot be expected to meet this challenge with only approximately \$7 million budgeted for programs to reach out to independent journalists, international dissidents of other repressive governments, and to provide training and support for independent libraries, economists and business leaders. For example, we have done much more in places like Serbia, when we provided many times that amount for such programs. Successful democratic change must come from within - but we ought to be helping it along with resources commensurate with the importance of the task at hand.

As you are aware, the Varela Project is an initiative to petition for a referendum on civil liberties, including freedom of speech, amnesty for political prisoners, support for private business, a new electoral law, and a free, fair and open general election. And, when momentum for the Varela Project was gaining traction as a serious effort to advance democratic change in Cuba, some 75 activists were summarily rounded up and jailed following sham trials and more anti-American rhetoric. In one year, nothing has changed in Cuba, and this is an important time for the United States to steel its resolve in the fight for freedom 90 miles from our coast.

I understand the pressing matters requiring your attention that are critical to U.S. interests, I strongly urge you to take this lead and not allow Castro to continue to treat both the Cuban people and international community with contempt and disregard. I look forward to working with you on this and other issues important to our national security.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Nelson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.