

18Aug96 CUBA: CUBA CALLS ON U.S TO HONOR IMMIGRATION ACCORDS.

By Lionel Martin

HAVANA, Aug 18 (Reuters) - In a official note indicating its patience is wearing thin, Cuba demanded on Sunday that Washington honour immigration accords by turning over 11 Cubans who recently fled the island.

The note from the Foreign Ministry complained that eight Cubans rescued after their wooden boat capsized 25 miles (40 km) south of Marathon, Florida, on Aug. 12 had been admitted to the United States, while three others had been sent to the United States Guantanamo Naval Base in eastern Cuba to await permission to enter a third nation.

Two Cubans, including a 16-month-old girl, were drowned when the boat capsized, and 16 others who were rescued were sent back to Cuba on Saturday.

The note described Washington's refusal to repatriate the 11 remaining Cubans as "a flagrant violation of the immigration agreement signed by Cuba and the United States in September 1994 and amplified in 1995."

"The U.S government should repatriate to Cuba, as soon as possible, all the illegal emigrants intercepted on August 12 and others that have been admitted to the United States for the most incredible reasons," it said.

The "others" are three Cubans who hijacked a local passenger plane last week and are now in Florida and a former police official who hijacked a passenger plane at gunpoint on July 7 and forced it to fly to the U.S Guantanamo Naval Base.

The Cuban note said the refusal to repatriate immigrants "encourages illegal emigration and does not favour a normal immigration relationship between Cuba and the United States."

The accords were signed after 30,000 Cuban rafters fled the island in the summer of 1994 with the intention of seeking asylum in the United States. Until then, under U.S. law, all Cubans who defected to the United States were allowed to remain.

To put a stop to the growing number of uninvited Cuban immigrants, President Bill Clinton reversed the automatic entry policy during the rafters crisis by announcing that all Cubans picked up by U.S. Coast Guard craft in the Straits of Florida would be interned at the U.S. Guantanamo Naval Base.

Subsequently, immigration accords were secretly negotiated with Havana. They were strongly criticised by hardline Cuban exiles.

Under the agreements, the United States agreed to repatriate all illegal Cuban emigrants who are picked up at sea or cross into the U.S. Guantanamo Naval Base. Havana pledged to prevent illegal departures for the United States.

Washington also agreed to facilitate legal immigration by giving entry visas to at least 20,000 Cubans a year and announced that virtually all rafters interned at the Guantanamo Naval Base would be allowed to emigrate to the United States.

Since the accords were signed, the United States has repatriated about 370 would-be Cuban emigrants.

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