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Cubans seal off embassy

S. Catman

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Police yesterday cordoned off the grounds of the Peruvian Embassy in Havana, where between 8000 and 10,000 Cubans, seeking to leave the country, have gathered.

The police kept people away from the compound and one police official said anyone seeking to leave the grounds would have to hand in his personal identity card.

Witnesses described sanitary and other conditions in the crowded compound as very bad.

Earlier, Cuban guards had been withdrawn from around the embassy and the Government said those inside were free to emigrate and to leave or return to the compound.

The police officials said the handing over of identity cards was now necessary as part of the Government's attempts to up proper documentation

arrangements for those wanting to emigrate.

But after the Government announced that they could leave the country, some people in the compound said they would not go outside the embassy grounds until they were given safe conduct out of Cuba.

The Peruvian Red Cross were reported yesterday to be sending aid to the people now camped in the compound under a burning tropical sun.

By Saturday afternoon there were 1500 people in the compound. Later many more clambered over the embassy fence. But yesterday morning the police set up their cordon and prevented anyone from approaching the grounds.

Inside there was only one toilet available and water supplies were inadequate witnesses said.

Some of the campers said they had eaten little since

entering the grounds. Trees laden with mangoes provide shade for a number of the aspiring emigrants but the mango fruit itself is still not sufficiently ripe to be eaten.

Several people were reported hurt in the grounds on Saturday night but the cause of their injuries was not known.

Most of those in the compound seem to be under 30 and the crowds include mothers and children.

Yesterday police were keeping outside diplomats and foreign correspondents from entering the mission. One officer said this was done to "alleviate the chaotic situation in and around the embassy."

Before they announced that those inside were free to leave the country, the Cuban Government had accused Peru and Venezuela of encouraging acts of violence against embassies in Havana by giving asylum to Cubans

Both South American Governments denied these charges.

Last Tuesday, one Cuban guard was killed and two people seeking asylum were injured when a vehicle carrying six Cubans crashed into the Peruvian Embassy.

The Venezuelan Government yesterday recalled their ambassador to Cuba for consultations.

Peru yesterday requested international aid for the Cuban refugees. The Foreign Ministry said in a statement in Lima that humanitarian support was urgently required "to aid that multitude of people suffering the consequences of a lack of food and basic facilities."

The Peruvian Embassy had sought aid from other diplomatic missions in Havana and the Peruvian Government had approached the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the statement said. — Reuter and AP