

RP-200

This is Lionel Martin in Havana - For the first time, the Cuban government has invited a delegation from the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit Cuba jails. Here is the story:

Last March Cuban president Fidel Castro told a U.S. television network that he did not object to a visit to Cuban jails by the International Red Cross. "We have nothing to hide" he said at the time.

Then came the official invitation and last week five delegates, from the International Committee of the Red Cross arrived in Havana. Two days later they were off to eastern Cuba to visit Boniato prison, a high security penitentiary. Fidel Castro once spent time there after his failed attempt to overthrow the regime of Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista in July 1953.

Almost all the Cuban counterrevolutionary prisoners, about 450 according to the Cuban government, are now at the modern, Combinado del Este prison to the East of Havana. According to a U.S. diplomat here in Havana, conditions for the prisoners are said to have improved greatly there over the past few months.

The Red Cross delegates plan to stay in Cuba a month and visit thirty prisons. They will be free to talk to any prisoners they want to without any Cuban officials present. After talking to several hundred inmates, they should have a pretty good idea if prisoners have suffered torture, cruel punishment or have been deprived of their human rights, a Western European diplomat told me.

The International Red Cross delegation makes it clear that it is non-political. When it finishes its investigation it will draw up a written report which will be given to the Cuban government. Then it will make a follow up visit to see if the defects it found have been corrected.

The United States government has charged Cuba with serious human rights violations. The Cubans deny the charges and hope the International Red Cross delegation will issue a favourable report.

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*CBC
June 4, 1988*

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When the delegation finishes its investigation it will draw up a written report which will be given to the Cuban government, probably in the Autumn. Then it will make a follow up visit to see if the defects it found have been corrected.

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