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HA-OLYMPICS-CUBA (EDS: ALSO FILED TO SPORTS DESKS)
CUBAN ATHLETES BACK GOVERNMENT DECISION TO BOYCOTT OLYMPICS
HAVANA, JAN 17, REUTER - CUBAS ATHLETES EXPRESSED SUPPORT FOR HAVANAS DECISION TO STAY AWAY FROM THE OLYMPIC GAMES IN SEOUL IN A LETTER TO PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO PUBLISHED IN A GUVERNMENT NEWSPAPER ON SUNDAY.
"WE, THE ATHLETES THAT MAKE UP THE NATIONAL SPORTS PRESELECTION, MEETING IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, FIRMLY BACK THE DECISION ADOPTED BY OUR GOVERNMENT AND OLYMPIC COMMITTEE TO NOT ATTEND THE OLYMPIC GAMES IN SEOUL IF THE PRESENT CONDITIONS PERSIST," THE LETTER IN JUVENTUD REBELDE SAID.
"OLYMPIC MEDALS WILL NEVER BE A MIRAGE WHICH SEPARATE US FROM OUR PRINCIPLES," IT SAID.
LAST FRIDAY, CASTRO ANNOUNCED THAT CUBA WOULD NOT ATTEND THE GAMES THAT BEGIN IN SEPTEMBER BECAUSE THE POLITICAL TURMOIL IN SOUTH KOREA "WOULD NOT OFFER THE HEALTHIEST AND MOST HONOURABLE CONDITIONS FOR OLYMPIC GAMES."
CASTRO SAID IN A LETTER TO INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE (IOC) PRESIDENT JUAN ANTONIO SAMARANCH THAT "NOBODY CAN GUARANTEE THAT NEW, ENERGETIC, POPULAR PROTESTS WILL NOT BEGIN IN THE MIDST OF THE OLYMPICS AND WITH THEM THE MOST FEROCIOUS MEASURES OF REPRESSION AGAINST THE PEOPLE."
HE SAID HOLDING THE GAMES IN SEOUL WOULD BE "RISKY" BUT ADDED THAT "IF THE MIRACLE IS ACHIEVED OF GUARANTEEING SAFE GAMES AND NON-VIOLENCE IN SEOUL.... WE WOULD BE READY TO RECONSIDER OUR DECISION...."
THE HAVANA GOVERNMENT HAD PREVIOUSLY SAID IT WOULD STAY AWAY FROM SEOUL UNLESS NORTH KOREAS DEMANDS FOR CO-HOSTING THE GAMES WERE SATISFIED. NORTH KOREA AND CUBA ARE STRONG COMMUNIST ALLIES.
A RECORD 160 NATIONS, INCLUDING THE SOVIET UNION, CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES, HAVE CONFIRMED THEY WILL ATTEND.
NORTH KOREA HAS YET TO REPLY TO THE IOC INVITATION. PYONGYANG HAS REJECTED AN IOC COMPROMISE OFFER TO STAGE 10 INDIVIDUAL EVENTS.
FIVE OTHER NATIONS -- ALBANIA, ETHIOPIA, NICARAGUA, SEYCHELLES AND SYRIA -- HAVE UNTIL THE IOCS DEADLINE OF MIDNIGHT ON SUNDAY TO REPLY.
REUTER 1411
