

**Government Reform Subcommittee  
Human Rights and Wellness  
Opening Remarks  
June 16, 2004  
Congresswoman Diane E. Watson**

Thank You Mr. Chairman. The Human Rights and Wellness hearing today is an important review of United States foreign policy. This hearing will provide more information about human rights conditions in Cuba and the U.S. policy that results.

Mr. Chairman, I feel that a complete chokehold on Cuba's economy is the wrong approach. The U.S. sanctions of today do not take into account changes in the world's power structure. Fidel Castro's government is not in line with United States doctrine, but with out the former Soviet Union as a partner, the Communist threat has been severely diminished. We can be critical, but not force our will upon other cultures. Continued economic sanctions perpetuate poor conditions for the general population of Cuba.

Although I have some reservations on current United States policy, I have deep concern over recent human rights abuses in Cuba. In March 2003, the Cuban government began a massive crackdown that resulted in the imprisonment of independent journalists and librarians, leaders of independent labor unions, leaders of opposition parties, and other democracy activists. Seventy-Five activists were arrested, subjected to summary trials and prosecutions, and then given long prison terms.

On April 11, 2003, the government executed three men who had hijacked a ferry in an attempt to reach the United States. The executions, conducted after a swift and secret trial, have been condemned around the world. On July 14, 2003 the Havana-based Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation issued a report asserting that Cuba held 336 political prisoners, including the 75 arrested in the March 2003 crackdown.

Mr. Chairman, human rights issues, and their resolutions, are important to the relationship between the United States and Cuba. The angst between Fidel Castro's government and the United States has continued for too many years. The Cuban Government must bring its policies in line with international human rights standards so that the human rights of all Cuban citizens are protected. Cuba is responsible for the treatment of its citizens, but the U.S. has a responsibility to pursue a foreign policy that promotes human rights and avoids worsening human conditions. The United States 2004 quest for a resolution at the United Nations is a fresh approach. I support the inclusion of the United Nations in the pursuit of acceptable guidelines for relations between different cultures.

Mr. Chairman I look forward to the testimony today and I yield back my time.