

# Bridge migrants wait for approval to leave

**The 14 Cubans returned after reaching an abandoned Keys bridge have their applications approved on the U.S. side -- now they're just waiting for Cuba to give them their 'white card.'**

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**HAVANA** - Cuban migrants sent home after reaching an abandoned bridge in the Florida Keys said Monday they are becoming frustrated waiting for final Cuban government approval to leave for good.

Members of the group were traveling from the central province of Matanzas, where they live, to Havana, where they will seek an appointment early today at the U.S. Interests Section, migrant Ernesto Hernández said by telephone.

"It has been 48 days -- we have the U.S. visa, we have passports," said Hernández. He said all they lack now is the "white card," the exit permit that Cubans must get from the communist-run government to leave the island.

The 14 members of the group applied for the exit permits about six weeks ago at Cuba's migration office in Matanzas Province. Hernández said the approval process generally takes 15 days.

In the meantime, said Hernández, group members have quit their jobs as instructed by Cuban authorities in preparation for their migration to the United States. They have even turned in their monthly food ration cards.

"But we remain without a response from the Cuban side," he said.

Hernández said they decided to travel to Havana to make sure American officials knew they were still awaiting final Cuban government approval.

U.S. Coast Guard officials determined that the old bridge did not qualify as dry land because parts of it are missing and it no longer connects to U.S. soil.

The repatriations caused an uproar in South Florida's large Cuban exile community.

Under the United States' "wet foot/dry foot" policy, most Cubans who reach U.S. soil are allowed to remain, while those intercepted at sea are returned home.

A deal allowing most of the Cuban group to emigrate permanently was reached March 15 between U.S. District Judge Federico Moreno in Miami and the U.S. government, which had argued that the U.S. Coast Guard acted correctly.