

Cuban exiles, dissidents sign democracy plan

Hard-line Cuban exile organizations worked with dissident groups in Cuba to implement a democracy action plan.

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Cuban exile organizations in South Florida working together with dissidents on the island this week launched a five-point plan designed to bring democracy to Cuba -- without budging on controversial issues like negotiating with the current leadership.

The document is an important historic step, because it demonstrates an unusual level of cooperation between dissidents and prominent Cuban exile groups, its signers said.

The resolution was signed by the Cuban Patriotic Forum, an umbrella exile group, and the dissident Cuban organization Assembly to Promote Civil Society. The Patriotic Forum includes the Bay of Pigs Veterans Association, the Cuban Liberty Council, Cuban Municipalities in Exile and others.

"This document is the beginning of the end of communism," said Roberto Martín Pérez, spokesman of the Association of Cuban Political Prisoners. "The forum's mentality is not to be against one man, but the principles these men have held for 48 years."

The exile groups represented traditional hard-line organizations that shun any kind of negotiation with the Cuban government. They worked with prominent dissident Martha Beatriz Roque, who could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Cuban-American legislators Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Lincoln Díaz-Balart and Mario Díaz-Balart attended an event presenting the document Tuesday in Little Havana, and heralded it as a sign of a united Cuban exile community.

The resolution advocates:

- Freedom for all political prisoners and an end to harassment of all kinds to internal opposition.
- Installment of a transition government that establishes democracy in Cuba, that respects human rights and offers the following freedoms: economic, press, religion, to associate, to assemble and to protest peacefully.
- Establishment of a constituent assembly that provides a new constitution submitted to a popular vote.
- Recognition of political parties and multiparty elections.
- Reestablishment of the rule of law, making sure that "every Cuban is protected from whimsical decisions that could lead to social discontent."

"This is a strong document endorsed by all freedom-loving people," Ros-Lehtinen said. "We're going to work hard to make sure all these points come true."