

Asking for Castro to be indicted for murder

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By Wilfredo Cancio Isla

On Monday, an influential U.S. congressman joined a petition seeking the prosecution of President Fidel Castro for his alleged involvement in the shooting down of two Brothers to the Rescue planes in the Straits of Florida in 1996.

The vice president of the International Relations Committee for the House of Representatives, Christopher Smith, declared that the U.S. Attorney General, John Ashcroft, should consider whether Castro's immunity as head of state "could be applied for killing four civilians in international airspace."

"Otherwise, a federal grand jury should be convened to determine whether the evidence justifies the indictment of Mr Castro for murder," Smith wrote in an article published in the Wall Street Journal.

Smith argued that shortly after the shooting of the four volunteers of Brothers, the U.S. presented convincing evidence to the United Nations demonstrating that the attack "was not the result of an error or a notion of the MiG pilots, but an order from the Cuban military command."

This proposal by the New Jersey Republican representative and former president of the human rights subcommittee of the House, occurs at a time when activists and organizations supporting Castro's indictment have increased their lobbying of the government of George W. Bush.

The case has renewed national attention to the root of the trial in Miami against an alleged spy network, and the release of the conversations between the Cuban military command and the MiGs pilots, openly ordering the downing of the planes.

"A tremendously effective movement is being generated towards the goal of prosecuting Fidel Castro," said Jose Basulto, president of Brothers to the Rescue.

Last weekend the former U.S. ambassador to the UN, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, sent a letter to Ashcroft, requesting that "the impunity enjoyed by those responsible for this crime be put to an end."

The letter has also been signed by several directors of the Center for a Free Cuba (CFC), including: Everett Briggs, former U.S. ambassador to Portugal; Modesto Maidique, president of Florida International University; and the sociologist Irwin Horowitz, professor of Rutgers University.

"The officers who pulled the trigger, their bosses whose orders were recorded, and the highest level authorities who approved this act of state terrorism, have not yet been processed," said the signatories.

The organization Judicial Watch has also requested a meeting with President Bush to put forward the reasons for Castro to be criminally prosecuted.

Moreover, Basulto and Eva Barba, the mother of the pilot Paul Morales, met last week with

Governor Jeb Bush and handed him a letter addressed to the president requesting that the ruler be brought before the courts of the United States.

“We already have over 5,000 letters petitioning in favor of this request, and tomorrow we are mailing another 10,000,” said Basulto. The sample letter can be obtained at more than 20 sites and shopping facilities in the Miami-Dade county.

Caption: ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Christopher Smith (n)