

For Immediate Release June 4, 2008  
ifco@igc.org

Contact: (212) 926-5757  
[www.pastorsforpeace.org](http://www.pastorsforpeace.org)

## **Pastors for Peace to Launch 19th Non-Violent Challenge to Immoral US Blockade of Cuba Stops in 46 U.S. States and Six Canadian Provinces**

Over 130 Pastors for Peace volunteers from the US, Canada and Europe will challenge the immoral and illegal US blockade and travel restrictions against Cuba at the US - Mexico border on July 3rd. They expect to collect 100 tons of humanitarian aid during a two-week caravan that will converge in McAllen, Texas before traveling on to Cuba without US treasury department licenses. They intend to deliver school busses, educational supplies, medicines, and medical supplies gathered in communities in the US and Canada to Cuba.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Friendship Caravan will traverse fourteen separate routes stopping in 46 US states and 6 Canadian provinces. Along the way the caravan will be hosted in 125 communities who support a new US Cuba policy based on respect and non-aggression. Participants plan to blog and videotape their journey on [www.pastorsforpeace.org](http://www.pastorsforpeace.org)

"As people of faith and conscience, it is our duty to resist and condemn this cruel US policy," declared Rev. Lucius Walker, Jr., Executive Director of IFCO, a 40-year old ecumenical agency. IFCO/Pastors for Peace rejects this licensing system as both immoral and illegal. It is immoral because it endangers the lives of millions of Cubans and inflicts suffering on innocent children, as well as adults. It is illegal under international law because it uses medicine and food as weapons of war to force another nation to change its government. Licensing is unconstitutional because it requires people of faith to submit their acts of conscience and friendship to government licensing, violating our right to freedom of religious expression, political thought, association and travel," continued Walker.

Despite calls for an end to the blockade and travel ban from the UN and the overwhelming majority of nations around the world, and despite growing opposition in Congress to the policies, the Bush Administration has continued to tighten restrictions against Cuba, and is using "homeland security" funds to harass those suspected of travel to the island including the US citizens who participated in several recent caravans.

"Our non-violent caravan of peace-loving individuals is a challenge to this violation of our rights to express our faith and to travel to Cuba." said Rev. Thomas Smith, President of the Board of Directors of IFCO/Pastors for Peace.

Since 1992 Pastors for Peace has used hunger strikes and mass mobilizations to successfully challenge US government attempts to confiscate vehicles and humanitarian aid bound for Cuba. The ecumenical initiative is a project of IFCO, the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization, and has delivered more than 2,500 tons of urgently needed assistance to the Cuban people without seeking a US Treasury license.

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