

THOUSANDS OF CUBAN WOMEN MARCH TO URGE RETURN OF BOY LEADING YESTERDAY'S PROTEST IN HAVANA WERE ELIAN GONZALEZ'S STEPMOTHER AND GRANDMOTHERS.

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Body

Tens of **thousands** of **Cuban** mothers **marched** yesterday as Fidel Castro's government appealed to emotion in demanding the repatriation of a 6-year-old **boy** separated from his father by the same sea that took his mother's life.

Hundreds of visibly pregnant **women** were organized into rows, while other mothers carried small children and many waved **Cuban** flags.

"Bring back our son!" they cried as they moved slowly up the Malecon highway to the American diplomatic mission. "We want our son!"

The **march** outside the U.S. Interests Section marked a **return** to the demonstrations of early December, when hundreds of **thousands** of people rallied in some of Cuba's biggest gatherings since the triumph of the revolution that brought Castro to power 41 years ago.

The **boy**'s mother was among 11 who died when their boat sank off the Florida coast.

Yesterday was the U.S. government's original deadline for **Elian Gonzalez's return** to his father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service ruled that only the father could speak for the **boy** on immigration issues.

Attorney General Janet Reno lifted the deadline to give the **boy**'s Miami relatives a chance to fight for him in federal court. Reno said this week that only a federal court has jurisdiction in the case and rejected a Florida state judge's order that **Elian** remain in Miami until **March** 6 so that the judge could hear arguments by his American relatives.

Ricardo Alarcon, president of the National Assembly and Castro's point man on U.S.-**Cuban** relations, said yesterday that officials here were frustrated by Reno's failure to set a new deadline and the INS's failure to enforce its decision that **Elian** be **returned** to his father.

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Heading yesterday's march was Eliau's young stepmother, Nelsy, pushing his baby half-brother in a stroller. She was flanked by Eliau's two grandmothers and Vilma Espin, head of the Cuban Federation of Women and wife of Raul Castro, the president's brother and the armed forces minister.

Authorities estimated that 100,000 women participated in the march.

A sign outside the American diplomatic mission showed the boy behind a fence, underscoring Cuba's position that the boy has been kidnapped.

Red, white and blue Cuban flags fluttered amid the sea of women stretching for many blocks down the Malecon. A few men and children also joined the march.

Since his rescue Nov. 25 off Florida's coast, Eliau has symbolized the government's decades-long ideological battle with Cuban exiles in Miami.

Rather than a clash between two governments, the dispute over Eliau is a battle between Cubans of differing political views living on both sides of the Florida Straits.

Eliau's paternal great-uncle, Lazaro Gonzalez, is fighting to keep the boy with him in Miami, saying he can give him a better life there.

Alarcon said that while Cuba has not prohibited Juan Gonzalez from going to Miami to retrieve Eliau, American attorneys - and even American officials - have counseled against it.

The concern in Cuba always has been that if Gonzalez goes he will become involved in political and legal problems that will prevent his speedy return.

In Washington, four Republican House members said they would introduce a bill to give Eliau immediate U.S. citizenship when Congress reconvenes Jan. 24.

Rep. Bill McCollum (R., Fla.), a member of the House Subcommittee on Immigration, is leading the drive for the bill, which will be sponsored by two other Florida Republicans, Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. The bill is supported by Rep. Tom DeLay (R., Texas), the House Republican whip.

Graphic

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Thousands of Cuban women march in Havana yesterday to demand the return of 6-year-old Eliau Gonzalez, who is in Florida after surviving the sinking of a boat that carried Cubans. The sign translates to "Let's Save Eliau." (Knight Ridder Tribune)

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