

CASTRO ISSUES ULTIMATUM ON RETURN OF RESCUED BOY; HE WARNS OF MASS PROTEST IF YOUTH IS NOT RETURNED TO CUBA WITHIN 72 HOURS

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Missouri)

December 6, 1999, Monday, THREE STAR EDITION

Copyright 1999 St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Inc.

Section: NEWS, Pg. A3

Length: 362 words

Byline: From News Services

Dateline: HAVANA

Body

President Fidel **Castro** raised the stakes Sunday in an international custody battle for a 6-year-old Cuban **boy rescued** off the Florida coast. He urged the United States to **return** the **youth within 72 hours** or face **mass protests**.

"This is a flagrant crime of kidnapping by the U.S. authorities," **Castro** said in a broadcast Sunday by state TV.

The **youth** is Elian Gonzalez. He was found clinging to a rubber tube at sea a week ago after surviving the sinking of a boat carrying illegal Cuban immigrants. His mother and stepfather were among 10 passengers who drowned.

The U.S. government has released the **boy** to a great-aunt and great-uncle in Miami. But his father and grandparents in **Cuba** are demanding his immediate **return**.

"We are going to move heaven and earth ... it will be a war, an international battle," **Castro** said. "If they are averagely intelligent, they will announce the **return** of this **boy within 72 hours**."

The State Department's spokesman, James P. Rubin, said the case was referred to the Florida state courts because they take precedence in custody disputes. But Cuban authorities rejected this approach, saying they did **not** trust the "corrupt judges" in a nation where anti-**Castro** exiles hold political sway.

Elian's father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez, said his ex-wife took his son out of **Cuba** without his knowledge.

Castro said he was infuriated by the way his enemies in Miami had embraced the custody case as their own. He criticized television images of the child surrounded by toys and wearing a T-shirt of the Cuban-American National Foundation - his politically influential nemesis.

U.S. legal experts said what may have to be resolved are two conflicting principles. One is the child's custody, which in most cases is granted to the surviving biological parent. The other is the child's immigration status. The federal Cuban Readjustment Act of 1966 grants any Cuban who reaches American soil the right to stay.

The conflict comes a week before U.S.-**Cuba** migration talks in Havana. Under current agreements, the U.S. government was to stop accepting Cubans picked up at sea. In turn, **Cuba** promised to prevent illegal departures.

CASTRO ISSUES ULTIMATUM ON RETURN OF RESCUED BOY;HE WARNS OF MASS PROTEST IF YOUTH IS NOT RETURNED TO CUBA WITHIN 72 HOURS

Graphic

PHOTO Photo by THE ASSOCIATED PRESS - Cuban soldiers arrive at the U.S. interest building Sunday in Havana. They are reinforcing security in the face of potential protests over the fate of Elian Gonzalez, the boy rescued by Americans at sea.

Classification

Language: English

Subject: NEGATIVE PERSONAL NEWS (90%); CHILD CUSTODY & SUPPORT (87%); FAMILY LAW (87%); ANTI-CASTRO CUBANS (71%); CORRUPTION (70%); KIDNAPPING & ABDUCTION (70%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (70%); IMMIGRATION (66%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (63%); STEPPARENTS (63%); PROTESTS & DEMONSTRATIONS (50%)

Person: FIDEL CASTRO (74%)

Geographic: MIAMI, FL, USA (92%); FLORIDA, USA (92%); CUBA (94%); UNITED STATES (94%)

Load-Date: December 6, 1999

End of Document