

# **INS, Elian's Kin Fail to Reach Accord on Change in Custody; Castro Says Father Ready to Come to U.S. to Retrieve Boy**

The Washington Post

March 30, 2000, Thursday, Final Edition

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**The Washington Post**  
washingtonpost.com

**Section:** A SECTION; Pg. A02

**Length:** 694 words

**Byline:** Sue Anne Pressley; Karen DeYoung, Washington Post Staff Writers

**Dateline:** MIAMI, March 29

## **Body**

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The Miami relatives of Elian Gonzalez failed to reach an agreement tonight with immigration officials over possible future surrender of the child, receiving a 24-hour extension in their deadline for meeting the federal government's demands. Meanwhile, Cuban President Fidel Castro announced that the boy's father is ready for the first time to travel to the United States to reclaim custody.

After more than four hours of negotiations, Immigration and Naturalization Service officials said they would extend the deadline for further action on the case until Friday, in order to meet with the family again Thursday. INS officials had threatened to revoke Elian's temporary parole, or permission to stay in the United States, at 9 a.m. Thursday if the Miami relatives did not provide written assurances that they would give up the boy should they lose their next court battle.

"The lawyers [for the Miami family] seemed to think there was reason to continue the discussion," a government official said tonight.

Castro's announcement, delivered on live state television in Cuba, apparently did not play a role in the negotiations, as the parties were not aware of the development, the official said.

Throughout the four-month international custody dispute, Elian's father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez, has said he would not come here unless he was certain he would be bringing Elian home. Elian was one of three survivors of a shipwreck in which his mother and 10 others drowned as they were attempting to flee Cuba for the United States.

Castro said tonight that the father is ready to travel at a moment's notice to await the appeals process, accompanied by his wife and 6-month-old son, both sets of grandparents, Elian's first-grade and kindergarten teachers, a dozen members of his first-grade class, his pediatrician, and a team of psychologists and psychiatrists.

Castro said the group would help ease Elian's "readaptation" to his former life in Cuba. The group would stay with a Cuban diplomat in Washington and would not come to South Florida.

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The **father's** attorney, Gregory Craig, **said** tonight that "Juan Miguel Gonzalez is prepared to **come** and spend as much time as required if he has **custody** of Elian. He recognizes he needs a support group and would bring his family and friends for his own sake as well as for **Elian's**."

It was unclear how Elian would be transferred to his **father** from the home of the Miami relatives who have kept him since he was rescued at sea **in** November.

The developments capped a frantic day here, as several thousand members of the city's Cuban exile community staged a prayer vigil tonight **in** support of the **boy** and his Miami family.

Tensions here have been mounting since last week, when a federal judge upheld the **INS** decision to reunite Elian with his **father**. The Miami relatives are appealing the ruling to the 11th **U.S.** Circuit Court of Appeals **in** Atlanta; oral arguments **in** the case have been set for May 8.

At a news conference today, Miami-Dade Mayor Alex Penelas and a group of other local officials lashed out at the Clinton administration, **saying** that violence could erupt if federal officials continue "provoking" the Cuban exile community by threatening to take the **boy**. Accompanied by more than 20 other local mayors or their representatives, Penelas warned that he would hold President Clinton and Attorney General Janet Reno responsible if violence broke out over the case.

"The federal government is provoking the community," Penelas **said**. "We do not condone inappropriate behavior. But I have a responsibility to tell the federal government when they've gone too far. And they've gone too far."

Penelas and the other mayors also **said** that local law enforcement officers would not assist federal authorities **in** "repatriating the **boy**."

Clinton responded by urging the Miami relatives and the Cuban exile community to abide by the law.

"I have done my best not to overly politicize this. And I don't think we should," Clinton **said**. "There is a legal process here. We ought to let it play out."

Special correspondent Catharine Skipp **in** Miami contributed to this report.

## Classification

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Subject:** IMMIGRATION (91%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (90%); IMMIGRATION LAW (90%); CHILD **CUSTODY** & SUPPORT (89%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); TALKS & MEETINGS (78%); FAMILY LAW (78%); AGREEMENTS (78%); LAWYERS (75%); APPEALS (73%); RESCUE OPERATIONS (72%); JUDGES (70%); PAROLE (69%); MARINE TRANSPORTATION ACCIDENTS (69%); PRIMARY SCHOOLS (67%); PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS (62%); PSYCHOLOGY (61%); TEACHING & TEACHERS (50%)

**Company:** IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (90%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (57%)

**Organization:** IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (90%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (57%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (90%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (57%)

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**Industry:** LAWYERS (75%); MARINE TRANSPORTATION ACCIDENTS (69%); PRIMARY SCHOOLS (67%); PSYCHOLOGY (61%)

**Person:** FIDEL CASTRO (79%); GREG CRAIG (57%)

**Geographic:** MIAMI, FL, USA (93%); FLORIDA, USA (79%); CUBA (94%); UNITED STATES (94%)

**Load-Date:** March 30, 2000

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