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SUBJECT: QUESTIONS FROM YOANI SANCHEZ TO POTUS

Classified By: COM Jonathan Farrar for reasons 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Internationally renowned blogger Yoani Sanchez (see profile below) passed us seven questions for POTUS as well as seven questions she would like to ask Cuban president Raul Castro, if given the chance. Post believes a response to these questions would provide significant support to not just the growing blogger community in Cuba, but to all who fight for the human right of freedom of expression in oppressive environments around the world. Post issued Yoani Sanchez a non-immigrant visa on August 25 to travel to the United States to receive her most recent award, a special citation for journalistic excellence as part of the 2009 Maria Moors Cabot Prize to be presented by the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism on October 14. The U.S. government and the Spanish government have both issued Yoani Sanchez non-immigrant visas before, but the Cuban government has refused to grant her the exit permit required for all Cubans to leave the country. A response to Yoani's questions on or before October 14 would highlight the Cuban government's extensive control over what its citizens say and where they are allowed to go.

¶2. (C) We provide an unofficial translation of the questions and Post's draft responses below (the original, Spanish version of the questions were sent to WHA/CCA via email).

Questions for U.S. President Barack Obama from Yoani Sanchez
(with Draft Responses)

(INTRO TO DRAFT RESPONSE FROM POTUS)
Let me start by congratulating you on receiving a special citation as part of the prestigious Maria Moors Cabot Prize from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. I admire your brave and creative efforts to share your unique voice with the world, as well as to empower your fellow Cubans to express themselves, in particular through the use of technology. I know you are not alone in this effort. I

also want to recognize the many other Cubans who may not have received the same level of international recognition, but who are just as bold in expressing their own thoughts, beliefs, and dreams. The U.S. Government and the people of the United States join all of you in looking forward to the day in which all Cubans can freely express themselves, in public, without reason to fear.

Now, I would like to take some time to respond to your specific questions.

QUESTION #1: FOR YEARS, CUBA HAS BEEN A U.S. FOREIGN POLICY ISSUE AS WELL AS A DOMESTIC ONE, IN PARTICULAR BECAUSE OF THE LARGE CUBAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY. FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE, IN WHICH OF THE TWO CATEGORIES SHOULD THE CUBAN ISSUE FIT?

All foreign policy issues involve domestic components to one degree or another, especially issues concerning countries like Cuba from which the United States has a large immigrant population. The overlap of foreign and domestic concerns regarding Cuba in particular is enhanced by geographic proximity and hundreds of years of shared history. Many of the challenges our two countries share in common, such as migration, drug trafficking, and economic issues, are both domestic and foreign policy concerns. Furthermore, the United States aims to protect and support ideals such as free speech, human rights, and democratic reform within our borders and around the world. Thus, U.S. relations with Cuba are rightly seen in both a foreign and domestic policy context. Our past, present, and future are too interconnected for them to be otherwise.

QUESTION 2: SHOULD YOUR ADMINISTRATION BE WILLING TO PUT AN END TO THIS DISPUTE, WOULD IT RECOGNIZE THE LEGITIMACY OF THE RAUL CASTRO GOVERNMENT AS THE ONLY VALID INTERLOCUTOR IN THE EVENTUAL TALKS?

Over the past two years, I've indicated that I'm prepared to have my administration engage with the current Cuban government on a wide range of issues. That being said, we recognize that the current regime is not the only voice on the island, much like my administration is not the only voice in the United States. While engaging with the Cuban government, we will also seek a dialogue with Cubans outside of government in the same way that we try to engage with citizens inside and outside of government in every other country around the world.

QUESTION 3: HAS THE U.S. GOVERNMENT RENOUNCED THE USE OF MILITARY FORCE AS THE WAY TO END THE DISPUTE?

The U.S. government has no plans to use military force on Cuba.

QUESTION 4: RAUL CASTRO HAS SAID PUBLICLY THAT HE IS OPEN TO DISCUSS ANY TOPIC WITH THE U.S. PROVIDED THERE IS MUTUAL RESPECT AND A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD. IS RAUL ASKING TOO MUCH?

I have said that it is time to pursue direct diplomacy, without preconditions, with friend and foe alike. Such diplomacy should create opportunities to advance the interests of the United States, and to advance the cause of freedom for the Cuban people. In other words, we do not want to talk just for the sake of talking. We have already started a dialogue on one area of mutual concern: safe, legal, and orderly migration. We have also agreed to talks on reestablishing direct mail service. These are small steps, but an important part of a process to move U.S.-Cuban relations in a new direction.

QUESTION 5: IN A HYPOTHETICAL U.S.-CUBA DIALOGUE, WOULD YOU ENTERTAIN PARTICIPATION FROM THE CUBAN EXILE COMMUNITY, THE CUBA-BASED OPPOSITION GROUPS AND NASCENT CUBAN CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS?

When considering any policy decision, I think it's critical

to listen to as many voices as possible. Discussions between and amongst governments are only significant to the extent that they affect the lives of citizens. So, it is only right and just that citizens, and not just governments, are consulted. The U.S. government regularly dialogues with groups and individuals on and off the island that have an interest in U.S.-Cuba relations. Many of those groups do not always agree with the current Cuban government; many of those groups do not always agree with the United States government. Most importantly, we need to listen to Cubans living on the island, which is why everything you are doing to project your voice and help others do the same is so essential - not just for the advancement of freedom of expression itself, but also for people outside of Cuba to gain a better understanding of your life, your struggles, your joys, and your dreams.

QUESTION 6: YOU STRONGLY SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES. BUT, CUBANS CONTINUE TO HAVE LIMITED ACCESS TO THE INTERNET. HOW MUCH OF THIS IS DUE TO THE U.S. EMBARGO AND HOW MUCH OF IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT?

I believe some previous policies of the U.S. government have not advanced liberty or opportunity for the Cuban people. That is why I announced on April 13 a change to U.S. policy to promote the freer flow of information. We know the Cuban government allows access to the Internet at tourist facilities on the island. The government claims they can not provide similar access to Cuban citizens due to restrictions in place under the embargo. For our part, this policy change will authorize greater telecommunications links with Cuba to advance people-to-people interaction. This will increase the means through which Cubans on the island can communicate with each other and with persons outside of Cuba. Now, this will not happen overnight. Nor will it have its full effect without the cooperation of the Cuban government. Let's see how the Cuban government responds. In addition, we welcome your ideas regarding areas in which we can further support the free flow of information within, from, and to Cuba.

QUESTION 7: WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO TRAVEL TO OUR COUNTRY?

Similar to the issue of direct dialogue, I would never rule out a course of action that could advance the interests of the United States and advance the cause of freedom for the Cuban people. I think it's important to keep all diplomatic tools on the table. At the same time, all of those tools should be used only after careful preparation and as part of a clear strategy.

Questions for Cuban president Raul Castro

QUESTION 1: HOW WOULD AN IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES UNDERMINE THE IDEOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTION?

QUESTION 2: ON SEVERAL OPPORTUNITIES YOU HAVE STATED THAT YOU ARE WILLING TO HOLD A DIALOGUE WITH THE UNITED STATES. ARE YOU ALONE? HAVE YOU DISCUSSED THIS WITH THE REST OF THE MEMBERS OF THE POLITICAL BUREAU TO TRY TO CONVINCE THEM THAT A DIALOGUE IS NECESSARY? DOES YOUR BROTHER FIDEL AGREE TO END THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS?

QUESTION 3: IF YOU WERE MEETING FACE TO FACE WITH **OBAMA**, WHAT THREE THINGS WOULD YOU HOPE TO GAIN FROM YOUR MEETING? WHAT THREE THINGS COULD THE U.S. SIDE GAIN?

QUESTION 4: SHOULD THIS LONG BILATERAL DISPUTE COME TO AN END, WHAT WOULD BE SOME CONCRETE BENEFITS FOR THE CUBAN PEOPLE IN THE IMMEDIATE AND MID-TERM FUTURE?

QUESTION 5: IF THE U.S. ASKED THAT MEMBERS OF THE CUBAN EXILE COMMUNITY, OPPOSITION PARTIES ON THE ISLAND AND CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVES BE INCLUDED IN A NEGOTIATING SESSION, WOULD YOU ACCEPT?

QUESTION 6: DO YOU THINK THAT THERE IS A REAL POSSIBILITY THAT THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION IN THE U.S. WOULD USE MILITARY FORCE AGAINST CUBA?

QUESTION 7: WOULD YOU INVITE **OBAMA** TO VISIT CUBA AS A GESTURE OF GOODWILL?

¶3. (SBU) Below is **Yoani** Sanchez's profile as provided in her blog Generation Y (www.desdecuba.com/generationy).

"**Yoani** Sanchez, born in Havana, 1975.

I studied for two terms at the Pedagogical Institute, majoring in Spanish Literature. In 1995, I moved to the Faculty of Arts of Letters, and after five years finished a degree in Hispanic Philology. I majored in contemporary Latin American Literature, presenting an incendiary thesis entitled, 'Words Under Pressure: A Study of the Literature of the Dictatorships in Latin America.' On finishing University, I realized two things: first, the world of the intellectual and high culture is repugnant to me, and, most painfully, that I no longer wanted to be a philologist.

In September 2000, I went to work in a dark office at Gente Nueva publisher, meanwhile arriving at the conviction - shared by most Cubans - that with the wages I earned legally I could not support my family. So, without concluding my social service, I asked to be let go and dedicated myself to the better-paid labor of freelance Spanish teacher for German tourists visiting Havana. It was a time (which continues today) when engineers preferred to drive a taxi, teachers would do almost anything to get a job at the desk of a hotel, and at store counters you could find a neurosurgeon or nuclear physicist. In 2002, disenchantment and economic suffocation led me to emigrate to Switzerland, from where I returned - for family reasons and against the advice of friends and acquaintances - in the summer of 2004.

In those years, I discovered the profession I continue to practice today: computer science. I discovered that binary code is more transparent than affected intellectualism, and that if I'd never really come to terms with Latin, at least I could work with the long chains of HTML language. In 2004, I founded, with a group of Cubans all based on the Island, Consenso, a magazine of reflection and debate. Three years later, I work as a web master, columnist, and editor of the site Desde Cuba (From Cuba).

In April 2007, I entangled myself in the adventure of having a blog called Generation Y that I have defined as "an exercise in cowardice" which lets me say, in this space, what is forbidden to me in my civic action.

To my surprise, this personal therapy earned me, in a short time, the attention of thousands of people around the world. Thanks to the virtual citizens' network that has woven itself around GY, I have been able to update this blog every week. Since March 2008, the Cuban government has enforced a computer filter that prevents seeing my blog from public Internet sites in Cuba. So I need the solidarity of friends off the Island to post my texts on the web. Thanks also to other volunteer collaborators, Generation Y is translated into fifteen languages.

In May 2008, my personal exorcism also won me the Ortega y Gasset Journalism Award in the digital category. I was chosen by Time Magazine as one of the 200 Most Influential People in the World in the "Heroes and Pioneers" category, and my blog was included on the list of the 25 Best Blogs in the World issued by Time Magazine/CNN. I won the Jury Prize on the Spanish blog contest, Bitacoras.com, and top honors in the well known blog contest, The BOBs Awards, with more than 12,000 participants from around the world. The weekly magazine of the Spanish newspaper El Pais named the 100 Most Notable Hispanic Americans of 2008 in November of that year;

Foreign Policy listed its 10 Most Influential IberoAmerican Intellectuals of 2008 in December; as did the Mexican magazine Gato Pardo. Your humble servant is included in each of these lists. Much more than I could have dreamed of, when I started to combine sentences to upload my first post!

I live in Havana, I opted to stay and every day I am more a computer scientist and less philologist."
FARRAR