

# Cuba, the Internet and Reporters without Borders

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Global Research, September 10, 2007

10 September 2007

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

Clearly, Reporters without Borders (RSF) has a limitless obsession with Cuba. For several years now, this organization has carried out a sadistic disinformation campaign against the Caribbean island and its government. Recently it deliberately manipulated the words that Ramiro Valdés, Cuban Minister of Communication and Information Technology, delivered at the XII International Conference on Computer Science in Havana February 11, 2007, where more than 600 delegates came from 58 countries [1].

## Manipulation of Ramiro Valdés' words

"Communications Minister Ramiro Valdés, said on February 12, 2007 [sic], that he considered the Internet as a 'tool for global extermination' and, that it was imperative to control this "cruel weapon.", RSF writes [2].

In fact, the Cuban minister never said anything of the sort, as can be easily proven by looking up his speech. He denounced the bellicose and repressive use that Washington makes of the Internet in order to spread war propaganda in favor of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and to "increase the control over governments, businesses, and people, including its own population." Valdés emphasized: "the Pentagon, without any shame, has declared its intention to add a fourth army to the specialized forces of conventional war. To the classic ones: earth, sea, and air, it has now added cyberspace," aware of the growing importance of this space for alternative expression [3].

To the contrary, he pointed out that "information and communication technologies will also be at the center of this integrationist movement of the area." Valdés stigmatized the unhealthy way the United States uses the Internet — not the information tool that is the Net. He insisted on the fact that it was "essential to find strategic alliances to confront the hegemonic attempts in this new battlefield" which threaten the "sovereignty of our peoples". "These technologies can be used to create a mechanism of global extermination, but paradoxically, despite the known risks that they entail, they are essential in order to continue advancing along the paths of development" [4].

Valdés never described the Internet as a "wild weapon". He evoked the metaphoric way that "the wild colt of the new technologies [could] and [should] be tamed and infocommunications put at the service of peace and development" and not war, as is the case of the United States [5]. In fact, the U.S. Department of Defense announced November 2, 2006, the creation of a Cyberspace Operations Command of the Air Force in order to strengthen electronic war since, according to Lieutenant General Robert Elder who commands this force, "there is, undoubtedly, a lot of interest in utilizing cyberspace as a battle field " [6].

## **The actual statements of the Cuban Minister**

Thus, RSF's manipulations are clear. The organization directed by Robert Ménard attributed words to Valdés which he never said. In addition, it carefully conceals the Cuban minister's real, clear and unambiguous statements about the Internet. I have some here: "The Internet is not only allowing sectors silenced by the big media to express themselves, but also spreads important messages in favor of crucial issues for humanity such as peace, protection of the planet and justice, to name only three. True communities are created for exchange, solidarity and cooperation in the most varied fields of human knowledge [7].

Valdés pointed out that "the Internet could become a vehicle for carrying out a cultural and educational revolution that promotes knowledge, that promotes education, culture, cooperation, and solidarity, together with ethical and moral values that this new century requires, advocating the most noble human sentiments, discarding inhuman, selfish, and individualist conduct imposed by the capitalist system, with the United States at the head" [8].

## **The RSF "report" about the Internet in Cuba**

In regards to the Internet in Cuba, "Reporters without Borders pointed out that Cuba's delay on the matter of the Internet is a consequence, above all, of the wish of the government to control the circulation of information in its territory. With less than two Internet users per every 100 inhabitants, Cuba is among some of the most backwards countries on the matter of the Internet. It is by far the worst in Latin America - Costa Rica is 13 times better—and is at the level of Uganda or Sri Lanka" [9].

These claims of RSF aren't derived from a meticulous and comparative study of Internet development throughout the world. No, it only deals with an arbitrary allegation which is not based on any research and which is completely disconnected from reality. No international organization has ever given such figures. Once again, RSF is content with rehashing the U.S. propaganda against the Caribbean archipelago.

## **A different reality**

In Cuba close to 2 million children and adolescents have daily access to the Internet in their schools, all equipped with a computer classroom provided with the latest generation of materials. In Cuba, 146 schools exist in distant regions of the country at which only one student attends and all have a computer laboratory. There are also free community computer clubs in every municipality, used by thousands of people. One mere, ordinary question: if the Cuban government wishes "to control the circulation of information in its territory", why would it spend several millions of dollars to universalize the access to computers and the Internet? [10].

RSF carefully minimizes the main constraint to development of the Internet in Cuba, which are the ruthless economic sanctions that the United States has imposed on the country's population since 1960. Cuba couldn't connect to the Internet until 1996 since before a clause from the economic blockade impeded having access to the international network controlled by the United States. But the Cuban access is conditional because of the Torricelli law, which stipulates that each megabit bought from a U.S. business, needs to have previous approval from the Department of the Treasury. All violators are subject to extremely harsh sanctions. Furthermore, it must be remembered that more than 80 percent

of Internet traffic passes through U.S. servers [11].

On the other hand, the United States denies Cuba the use of its fiber optic submarine cable which surrounds the archipelago. Thus, the island is obliged to connect via satellite, which reduces the speed of communication and quadruples the price. For a small country from the Third World, isolated for close to half a century, the effects are not negligible. In the same way, Cuba is obliged to procure new technologies through third countries because of the economic sanctions, which substantially increases their price. Nor can it be forgotten that the United States produces close to 60% of the software of the world and that Microsoft controls the operating systems of 90% of the computers on the planet [12].

RSF deliberately censors this reality. How could it be otherwise with an organization financed by Washington through a CIA front group—the National Endowment for Democracy? Can one expect anything different from an entity that receives tens of thousands of dollars from the Cuban extreme right such as, for example, “Center for a Free Cuba”, directed by Frank Calzón, the same former director of the Cuban American National Foundation, a terrorist organization responsible for numerous attacks against Cuba? [13]

RSF never has denounced the fact that Washington uses the Internet to inflict sanctions which can carry ten years of jail for its own citizens who commit the unpardonable crime of traveling to Cuba and who buy their ticket on the Internet. Several travel agencies who offer tourist packages to Cuba saw their Internet sites blocked in the United States. RSF never has been moved by such an attack on freedom of expression and never has condemned the economic sanctions against Cuba [14].

### **RSF’s other “objective report” about the Internet**

On October 19, 2006, RSF published a “report” about the Internet in Cuba which “shows that the authorities deliberately impede access to the Internet.” Here the organization, which tries to be objective and apolitical, also doesn’t explain why the only country about which it issues a “report” – which stands out for its flimsiness—is Cuba. But the most interesting thing is that this same tendentious report, peppered with contradictions and manifest falsehoods, recognizes at the end that it is possible in Cuba to have “access to practically all the information sites, *lemonde.fr*, *bbc.com*, *el Nuevo Herald* (a daily newspaper from Miami [controlled by the extreme Batista right]) and includes the sites of the dissidents of the anti-Castro regime [15].

The report adds: “Tests carried out by Reporters without Borders show that the majority of the sites of the Cuban opposition, as well as those international human rights organizations are accessible by means of ‘international’ service. In China, by means of key words filters were installed on the Net, which makes it impossible, for example, to download pages which contain ‘subversive’ key words. The organization could ascertain, testing a series of prohibited terms in cybercafes, that this type of system is not installed in Cuba”. Nonetheless, RSF, doesn’t explain why it carries out such an obsessive campaign about the supposed censorship of the Internet in Cuba. [16]

The report is also full of crude accusations. “In Cuba, they can be sentenced for twenty years in prison for some ‘counterrevolutionary’ articles published on foreign sites and to five years for connecting to the Internet illegally”. RSF multiplies the lies: “The political dissidents and independent journalists in general aren’t authorized to go to the cybercafés”.

Any person who has visited a cybercafé in Cuba absolutely knows that this is false. They don't ask either name of address, only payment for the time that one spends on the Internet. [17]

RSF continues with the same tone and admits at the U.S. Interests Section (SINA) in Havana offers valuable help to the famous dissidents: "Many of them utilize, consequently, the twenty computers that are put at their disposal at the SINA [...]. But a single visit to the premises of the American diplomacy is enough to be considered as an 'enemy of the revolution.'" For RSF, the "American diplomacy" doesn't welcome the opposition in order to subvert the established order and to overthrow the government. Only a disinterested and altruistic hand is offered to them. Washington is only defending democracy. Additionally, its activities throughout the world and the actions of Washington in Afghanistan and Iraq are irrefutable proof of that. [18]

In any country of the world, assiduously visiting the diplomats of a foreign power—that, in this specific case publicly stated on July 10, 2006, that it gave itself 18 months to overthrow the government—with the confessed objective of breaking the constitutional order is a synonym for treason and invites the most severe sanctions. In Cuba, the legendary "independent journalists" go each week to the offices of the SINA not to practice the job of press professionals but to conspire. Those individuals are not encouraged by great feelings in favor of freedom and democracy. The generous payments which Washington offers are their principal sources of motivation. Even now, the Cuban authorities have shown themselves to be a little indulgent. It would not be astonishing if in the future they decide to severely apply the law as was the case in March 2003 [19].

About this matter, RSF continues misleading public opinion and makes it believe that the persons arrested and sentenced to severe punishment in 2003 for conspiracy and for acting as agents of a foreign power are only "independent journalists." It cites 24 when in reality only one is really a journalist (Julio César Gálvez Rodríguez). Additionally, these people were sentenced only for receiving financing from an enemy country and in no case for a speech that was contrary to the official line. To be persuaded of this, it's enough to read the virulent statements against the revolutionary government that the famous dissidents make each week in the international press, without being bothered by the law. [20]

### **"The black holes of the Net", according to RSF**

On November 16, 2005, RSF published "its list of 15 enemies of the Internet," on which were Saudi Arabia, Belarus, Myanmar, China, North Korean, Iran, Libya, Maldives, Nepal, Uzbekistan, Syria, Tunis, Turkmenistan and Vietnam. Of course, Robert Menard's organization didn't indicate in any way the criteria he used for his selection [21].

A year after, in 2006, a new list with 13 countries was published in which Libya no longer appeared. The 2005 report, nonetheless, was overwhelming: "Unfortunately, in one country that doesn't tolerate any independent press, it might have been overwhelming that the Net will develop without obstacles. Thus, the sites of the dissident Libyans in exile are systematically blocked by means of filters installed by the power. More seriously, the authorities now harshly attack dissident cybernauts." [22]

The 2006 report is the opposite of that of 2005. "After one mission in the country, Reporters without Borders could affirm that the Libyan Internet no longer was censored", affirmed the organization, without any other explanation and without publishing another report. What

happened in one year in order that RSF radically changes its opinion with regards to Libya? Perhaps Moamer Kadhafi has become a great democrat? Or simply normalized his relations with Washington and now forms part of the Bush administration's allies? Will it now be the reason it can receive good marks on behalf of RSF? [23]

Thus, the classification of RSF isn't more than a farce. The work of the Parisian organization don't have anything to do with freedom of the press but that it is above all an ideological war at the services of its landlords who are the United States, among others.

### **The report of *OpenNet Initiative***

The "OpenNet Initiative," sponsored by the very conservative universities Harvard, Cambridge, Oxford and Toronto, function as an observatory of freedom of expression on the Internet. According to this group, 13% of the cybernauts of the world are not free to navigate on the Net. In other words, 146 million people. The "OpenNet Initiative" established a list of 9 repressive countries that limit Internet access and repress cybernauts. It includes China, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Belarus, Iran Uzbekistan, Tunis, Vietnam and Yemen. Cuba isn't on the list [24].

The foundation later established a list of 22 other countries where different degrees of control exist, among which are found the United Kingdom at the rank of 16, France at 17, Canada at 18, United States at 19 and Cuba only at 20[25].

Even more interesting, the "OpenNet Initiative" details the obstacles imposed on Internet access. For example, the United Kingdom filters some contents, according to the British government, to remove the spread of child pornography. With regards to France, the administration filters "without any legal ruling" the contents of the extreme right. For Canada, control and filters exist at colleges and public libraries. Finally, for Cuba, it is only the cost of the connection for individuals that is "prohibitive" [26].

The foundation doesn't point out any instance of control or filters imposed by the Cuban state. It emphasizes "on the other hand Cubans have complete access to the national Intranet. Preliminary tests indicate that very few web sites are blocked." The only blocked Internet site is, according to "OpenNet Initiative", that of the terrorist organization in Florida, "Brothers to the Rescue". Therefore, the main reason for Internet access restrictions is none other than the U.S. government itself which imposes sanctions on the country and impedes the technological development of the nation [27]

RSF continues with its propaganda war against Cuba and tries to deceive public opinion about the reality of this isolated island. It remains faithful to the bellicose agenda of the Bush administration against the Cuban people since Washington knows how to reward its servants.

### Notas

[1] *Reporters sans frontières*, «Reporters sans frontières réagit aux déclarations du ministre de la Communication à propos d'Internet», 13 de febrero de 2007. [http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=20998](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=20998) (sitio consultado el 13 de febrero de 2007).

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Ramiro Valdés, «Discurso pronunciado por el Comandante de la Revolución, Ramiro Valdés Menéndez, Ministro de la Informática y las Comunicaciones en el Acto Inaugural de la XII Convención y Expo Internacional, Informática 2007», *Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Cuba*, 11 de febrero de 2007. [http://www.cubaminrex.cu/Sociedad\\_Informacion/2007/DiscursoRamiro.htm](http://www.cubaminrex.cu/Sociedad_Informacion/2007/DiscursoRamiro.htm) sitio consultado el 14 de febrero de 2007).

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Sara Wood, «New Air Force Command to Fight in Cyberspace», *American Forces Press Service*, U.S. Department of Defense, 3 de noviembre de 2006. <http://www.defenselink.mil/News/NewsArticle.aspx?id=2014> (sitio consultado el 27 de febrero de 2007).

[7] Ramiro Valdés, *op. cit.*

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] *Reporters sans frontières, op. cit.*

[10] Rosa Miriam Elizalde, «Cinco estrategias en el 2006: El Ejército de Estados Unidos está a la ofensiva en Internet», *Rebelión*, 12 de noviembre de 2006; Ramiro Valdés, *op. cit.*

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Reporters sans frontières*, «Pourquoi s'intéresser autant à Cuba ? La réponse de Reporters sans frontières aux accusations des défenseurs du gouvernement cubain», 6 de julio de 2005. [www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=14350](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=14350) (sitio consultado el 15 de julio de 2005); *Center for a Free Cuba*, «About us», 2005. [http://www.cubacenter.org/about\\_us/index.html](http://www.cubacenter.org/about_us/index.html) (sitio consultado el 18 juillet 2005); *National Endowment for Democracy*, «Description of 2003 Grants: Latin America & the Caribbean», 2004. [www.ned.org/grants/03programs/grants-lac.html](http://www.ned.org/grants/03programs/grants-lac.html) (sitio consultado el 27 de Julio de 2005); *United States Agency for International Development*, «Appendix A: Descriptions of Cuba Program Grantee Activities», 2005. [www.usaid.gov/locations/latin\\_america\\_caribbean/country/pubs/program\\_report/appendix\\_a.html](http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin_america_caribbean/country/pubs/program_report/appendix_a.html) (sitio consultado el 25 de Julio de 2005); John M. Broder, «Political Meddling by Outsiders: Not New for U.S.», *The New York Times*, 31 de marzo de 1997, p. 1; Allen Weinstein, *Washington Post*, 22 de septiembre de 1991; *Reporters sans frontières*, «Lettre ouverte à ses détracteurs», *Réseau Voltaire*, 12 de septiembre de 2006. [http://www.voltairenet.org/article143413.html?var\\_recherche=Reporters+sans+fronti%C3%A8res?var\\_recherche=Reporters%20sans%20frontières](http://www.voltairenet.org/article143413.html?var_recherche=Reporters+sans+fronti%C3%A8res?var_recherche=Reporters%20sans%20frontières) (sitio consultado el 12 de septiembre de 2006).

[14] Felipe Pérez Roque, «La memoria corta dell'occidente», *Latinoamerica*, n°93, 8 de noviembre de 2005, p. 54.

[15] *Reporters sans frontières*, «Internet à Cuba: un Réseau sous surveillance», 19 de octubre de 2006. [http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=19334](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=19334) (sitio consultado el 27 de



febrero de 2007).

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] Condolezza Rice & Carlos Gutierrez, *Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba*, (Washington: United States Department of State, julio de 2006). [www.cafc.gov/documents/organization/68166.pdf](http://www.cafc.gov/documents/organization/68166.pdf) (sitio consultado el 12 de julio de 2006); Nestor Ikeda, «EEUU dice que rehabilitará a Cuba en 18 meses», *El Nuevo Herald*, 10 de julio de 2006.

[20] *El Nuevo Herald*, «Mensaje de Payá destaca que en la isla hay desaparecidos», 18 de marzo de 2005, p. 23A.

[21] *Reporters sans frontières*, «Reporters sans frontières rend publique sa liste des 15 ennemis d'Internet», 16 de noviembre de 2005. [http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=15611](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=15611) (sitio consultado el 25 de febrero de 2007).

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] *Reporters sans frontières*, «La liste des 13 ennemis d'Internet», 7 de noviembre de 2006. [http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=19601](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=19601) (sitio consultado el 28 de febrero de 2007).

[24] *OpenNet Initiative*, «Internet Filtering Map», noviembre de 2006. <http://www.opennet.net/map/> (sitio consultado el 27 de febrero de 2007; José Ángel González, «Censura.net para 146 millones», *20minutos.es*, 2 de noviembre de 2006.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] *Ibid.*

[Article in french](#), 9 of March 2007.

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