

Statement by Ana Belen Montes, who received 25-year sentence for spying for Cuba

Oct. 16, 2002

'An Italian proverb perhaps best describes the fundamental truth I believe in: 'All the world is one country.' In such a 'world-country,' the principle of loving one's neighbor as much as oneself seems, to me, to be the essential guide to harmonious relations between all of our "nation-neighborhoods." This principle urges tolerance and understanding for the different ways of others. It asks that we treat other nations the way we wish to be treated -- with respect and compassion. It is a principle that, tragically, I believe we have never applied to Cuba.

` ` Your honor, I engaged in the activity that brought me before you because I obeyed my conscience rather than the law. I believe our government's policy towards Cuba is cruel and unfair, profoundly unneighborly, and I felt morally obligated to help the island defend itself from our efforts to impose our values and our political system on it. We have displayed intolerance and contempt towards Cuba for most of the last four decades. We have never respected Cuba's right to make its own journey towards its own ideals of equality and justice. I do not understand why we must continue to dictate how the Cubans should select their leaders, who their leaders cannot be, and what laws are appropriate in their land. Why can't we let Cuba pursue its own internal journey, as the United States has been doing for over two centuries?

` ` My way of responding to our Cuba policy may have been morally wrong. Perhaps Cuba's right to exist free of political and economic coercion did not justify giving the island classified information to help it defend itself. I can only say that I did what I thought right to counter a grave injustice. 'My greatest desire is to see amicable relations emerge between the United States and Cuba. I hope my case in some way will encourage our government to abandon its hostility towards Cuba and to work with Havana in a spirit of tolerance, mutual respect, and understanding. Today we see more clearly than ever that intolerance and hatred -- by individuals or governments -- spread only pain and suffering. I hope for a U.S. policy that is based instead on neighborly love, a policy that recognizes that Cuba, like any nation, wants to be treated with dignity and not with contempt. Such a policy would bring our government back in harmony with the compassion and generosity of the American people. It would allow Cubans and Americans to learn from and share with each other. It would enable Cuba to drop its defensive measures and experiment more easily with changes. And it would permit the two neighbors to work together and with other nations to promote tolerance and cooperation in our one 'world-country,' in our only 'world-homeland.' "