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The Department of State refers the Cuban Interests Section of the Embassy of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic to the recent events involving the Panamanian flag vessel "Hermann," the captain and crew of which are Cuban nationals.

As the Government of Cuba is aware, the "Hermann" was intercepted by a U.S. Coast Guard cutter in the Gulf of Mexico last night (January 30). The Coast Guard authorities requested permission to board and inspect the vessel as there was reason to believe that the vessel was carrying contraband. The captain of the "Hermann" refused permission and proceeded on toward Mexico.

The Coast Guard subsequently confirmed the vessel's Panamanian registry and obtained permission from the Government of Panama to board and inspect to enforce United States law. After consultation with appropriate U.S. and Panamanian authorities, the Coast Guard advised the "Hermann" that it would use necessary force to board the vessel if it did not stop and permit the Coast Guard to board.

The Cuban Government informed the U.S. Interests Section in Havana that the crew was Cuban and stated that the vessel should be allowed to continue unimpeded. U.S. authorities advised the Government of Cuba that it would defer enforcement action for several hours so as to allow the Government of Cuba to instruct its nationals aboard the vessel to cooperate with this lawful exercise of authority pursuant to the instructions

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of the flag state. Cuban authorities then inexplicably ordered the civilian crew of the "Hermann" to resist any attempts by the Coast Guard to board the vessel.

After pursuing the "Hermann" all night, the Coast Guard cutter fired small caliber rounds into the hull of the vessel in an attempt to disable it. The "Hermann" still ignored orders to stop and proceeded into Mexican territorial waters.

By instructing the crew of the "Hermann" to resist an authorized boarding by Coast Guard officials, the Government of Cuba jeopardized the lives and safety of its citizens and demonstrated blatant disregard for legitimate law enforcement efforts to interdict illicit trafficking in the region. The Government of the United States is unable to understand the Government of Cuba's action in the face of repeated Cuban assurances that the Cuban Government seeks cooperation with the United States on combatting illegal drug trafficking.

The Government of the United States holds the Government of Cuba responsible for having exposed the crews of both the "Hermann" and the involved Coast Guard vessel to unnecessary danger and calls upon the Government of Cuba to offer an explanation of its behavior in this incident.

Department of State,
Washington, January 31, 1990.

