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Cuban Prisoner Release Pushed

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Succor and freedom may still come by Christmas to the 1,113 prisoners of the Bay of Pigs invasion held by the Castro regime in Cuba.

This, at least, is the hope of the Cuban Families Committee, which has appealed to the

American people to urge President Kennedy to give the "go-ahead."

Alvaro Sanchez Jr., national chairman of the committee, who recently spent nine weeks in Havana in negotiations and visited the Isle of Pines and Castillo del Principe Jails, insists that everything is set at the Cuban end, where Premier Fidel Castro has agreed to accept food and medicines as barter instead of the tractors that were his first asking price.

James B. Donovan, the New York lawyer who has acted as chief negotiator in the hoped-for exchange of the half-starved prisoners for drugs, medicines, and baby foods valued in Havana at \$62,000,000, is currently in Washington to smooth out roadblocks to the exchange that went up with the outbreak of the Cuban missile crisis.

He is pushing the idea that Christmas, the traditional season of political amnesties and humanitarian acts, would be an appropriate time for the exchange.

Cubans here are specially proud of the fact that to date not a single one of the prisoners has defected to the Communists, though the men have lost 40 to 65 pounds in the 19 months of their imprisonment.

Pleading for the "brave veterans whose belief in the democratic way of life led them to risk their lives in fighting communism in the Western Hemisphere," the families committee called on "all Americans" to appeal to the United States Government to support our efforts for immediate action, so that the pris-

oners may be freed before Christmas.

"The Cuban Government," it said, "has agreed to accept medicines and drugs, surgical instruments and baby foods from the American people to the Cuban people to be offered in payment for the fines imposed by military tribunals. This has been made possible by the generous response of private Americans, European and Latin-American people to our moral and humanitarian cause."

Information here is that Mr. Donovan has received strong support for his exchange efforts from the White House, including a promise of funds that cannot be raised privately. He still is finding it necessary to fight off the pressures of those who feel it still is too early after the Cuban crisis to do anything that might bring the two countries closer together.

The President's sister-in-law, Princess Stanislas Radziwill, heads an international committee seeking to raise the money needed for the exchange.

In June, 1961, a committee set up to exchange tractors for the prisoners was established with White House encouragement, but this brought political and psychological complications that led to its being disbanded. On July 5, 1961, the Cuban Families Committee for Liberation was formed.

In connection with its efforts to raise the \$62,000,000 demanded by Premier Castro, a group of 10 prisoners went to Miami in the summer of

1961 on parole. Two of the 10 "defected"—refused to go back. The others, amid cheers and tears at Miami International Airport, returned voluntarily to imprisonment.

Subsequently, 63 captives have been released, on payments of cash ranging up to \$50,000.

The exchange would not affect some 84,000 anti-Castro political prisoners still held captive in Cuba.