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EIGHTY-EIGHT CUBANS DEPART FOR GUANTANAMO BAY

Eighty-eight Cubans will depart tomorrow (Friday, 13 January) for Guantanamo Bay in what officials hope will be the first in a phased programme of transfers to the US-run camp. The United States Government has agreed to accept up to 900 from the Cayman camp.

This first group qualify for consideration under the humanitarian cases programme in which the US issues visas for entry to that country to families with children, and to elderly and sick persons. The United States had announced in December that Cubans from the Cayman Islands who go to Guantanamo Bay will be eligible for the same consideration under the programme as those already in the camp.

The group of 88 will depart on a Cayman Airways charter flight tomorrow morning, leaving at 7:30 a.m. They will be accompanied by Camp Director Alistair Duncan and five senior immigration officers.

The 88 comprise 22 family groups. Two persons are travelling alone, including an orphan 17 years old. Thirty of the group have a chronic health condition, mainly asthma. Among the young children

travelling with the group are three infants -- one is 11 months and two are each one year. There are 16 children ranging in age from two years to 14 years, and nine between sixteen and 18 years.

There are five persons ranging in age from 60 to 81.

Describing the arrangements for the transfer, Chief Immigration Officer Gerry Maguire said that the Cayman contingent would be provided with a separate compound within the larger camp. This will allow them to maintain their present family- and community-support while affording access to the facilities of the larger camp.

He said that the camp has many social, sporting and cultural amenities.

(GIS)