

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

FIDEL CASTRO

PRINCIPLES ARE WORTH MORE THAN LIFE ITSELF

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FIDEL CASTRO

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Dear friends, and I say “dear friends” with great pleasure! It is difficult to summarize or make a synthesis of the contents of these conference days, but I can make some comments.

Throughout the last few days we have heard the best sentiments and the best ideas of this century, expressed as a call to battle, you could say. We have discussed many aspects arising from humanity’s concerns over many years. In one way or another, you have expressed values for which humanity has battled and fought throughout this century now drawing to a close.

Throughout this conference, you have discussed the issues central to the long-fought struggles for independence and against colonialism, neocolonialism and imperialism — the fight by the world’s peoples for equality, for justice, for their develop-

ment, for their sovereignty, never so threatened as today; the fight for social justice, the fight against exploitation, the fight against poverty, the fight against ignorance, the fight against disease, the fight for all vulnerable and dispossessed peoples; the fight for dignity, the fight for respect for women; the fight for unity among all peoples and races; the fight for peace — all of these values and many more. Thus we could say that this has not been just a conference of solidarity with Cuba, and it fills us with pride that this solidarity has inspired such a discussion.

The best values of our time have been reflected at this meeting, and we have also seen the presence of many, though not all — for there are so many that they would never fit into 1,000 or 10,000 theatres such as this one — of the world's finest, most selfless and altruistic citizens, representatives of humanity's best. This meeting has been attended by persons with the highest human and moral sensibility.

I greatly admire humankind's capacity to give, to sacrifice, to show generosity, and each time we receive visitors to Cuba, I observe them, assess them and try to gauge how they are thinking and feeling. My admiration for so many human values never ceases.

Absent from this meeting are many, many people whom we know as friends, who have demonstrated their solidarity and who have been examples of sensitivity, solidarity and human generosity. But those traits remain the indelible, unforgettable impression that we will take away with us from this conference. How has this conference unfolded and developed? Everyone I have talked with has told me it has gone well; it has been unlike many of the other conferences we have had, where everyone who wanted to speak did so and the meetings became an interminable series of speeches, and although this meeting has witnessed many excellent, brilliant, profound and cogent speeches, an event many days longer and dedicated to letting everyone speak would not have had the same quality.

Thus there have been speeches, statements from the floor, questions and answers; we have had the working commissions on various themes; those who did not speak here spoke there, and a miracle has been worked to allow contributions from hundreds of people, although it was impossible for everyone to speak.

I think that the people who did speak more or less expressed the sentiments of eve-

ryone present. For that reason, we have to congratulate the organizers and leaders of this event, [*applause*] since in spite of differences, we have not had a Tower of Babel situation, and despite language diversity — 109 countries are represented here, according to the information given out — we have understood each other perfectly well, because, although we have different languages and even different political opinions, we were unanimous in the noble idea of solidarity with the Cuban people. [*Applause*]

The blockade has become the central issue of this event. Many people have talked on this subject; comrades have stated that there is nothing much to add about the blockade. But, essentially, what is the blockade? The blockade is not only the prohibition by the United States for any kind of commerce with our country — whether it is technology or machinery; whether it is something more, food; whether it is medicine. The blockade means that they cannot sell to Cuba even an aspirin to relieve a headache, or an anti-cancer drug which could save lives or alleviate the suffering of the terminally ill; nothing, absolutely nothing can be sold to Cuba!

The blockade is not only the prohibition

of all credits and finance facilities. The blockade is not only the total closure of economic, commercial and financial activities by the United States, the world's richest nation, the most powerful nation of the world in economic and military terms. It is not only just 90 miles off our coasts, but a few inches away from us, in the occupied territory of the Guantanamo naval base. The most powerful imperialist nation is not only close to us, but within Cuba; and it is not only close to us with its ideas, its theories, its concepts, its philosophy, but it is also among us in that minority which unfortunately supports the concepts, philosophy and ideas they have been disseminating for so many years throughout the world.

The United States does not trade with markets that trade with Cuba, but it does want to export ideas, and the worst ideas; it does not export foodstuffs to Cuba, it does not export medicines, technology or machinery to Cuba, but it does export incredible quantities of ideas. What is happening now is that before the ideas market was much wider, and it exported many ideas to the socialist bloc, to the former Soviet Union and other countries; these days the United States reserves its counter-revolutionary ideas for us,

from a vast and powerful stock of enormous, infinite mass media programming. This trade is a one-way trade as we do not have that kind of mass media, those enormous communications systems which cost billions, ten of billions of dollars every year, which we are condemned to receive, not to exchange.

But the blockade is not only that; the blockade is an economic war waged against Cuba, an economic war; it is the tenacious, constant persecution of any Cuban economic deal made anywhere in the world. The United States actively operates, through its diplomatic channels, through its embassies, to put pressure on any country that wishes to trade with Cuba, or any business interest wishing to make commercial links with or invest in Cuba, to pressure and punish any boat transporting cargo to Cuba; it is a universal war, with an immense balance of power in its favour, against the economy of our country, going to the extreme of individual moves against persons or individuals who attempt to undertake any economic activity in relation to our country.

They euphemistically refer to it as an embargo; we call it a blockade, but it is not an embargo or a blockade; it is war! A war solely and exclusively waged against Cuba

and against no other country in the world.

We have not only had to endure the blockade during the years of the Revolution; we have also had to endure incessant hostility in the political sphere, from attempts to eliminate the Revolution's leaders, through every known form of subversion and destabilization, to direct and perennial sabotage of our economy.

During the last 35 years, we have been the victims of every kind of sabotage. I am not just referring to piracy, mercenary invasion, dirty wars in the mountains and the plains, consistent and widespread destabilization attempts, but we have also been the victims of direct sabotage involving explosives and incendiary devices. Our country has also been subject to chemical warfare, through the introduction of toxic elements, and biological warfare via the introduction of plant, animal and human diseases. There are no weapons or resources that have not been used against our country and our Revolution by U.S. authorities and governments.

But you don't have to take my word for it. From time to time documents appear, papers that have been declassified after 25 years, although there are others that are kept for 50 or 100 years; some say they hold them

back for 200 years, something for the grandchildren or the great-grandchildren or great-great-grandchildren of the current generation, who will one day learn about the barbarities which these “champions” of freedom, these “champions” of human rights have committed.

The war waged against the Cuban Revolution has been total and absolute, and it is not an old war; it is still being maintained, and plans are being made and carried out to sabotage our economy and our strategic industries.

Currently, organizations closely linked to the U.S. government are preparing to attack the Revolution’s leaders — nobody should think that this is a thing of the past, it’s going on right now. They are planning dirty wars, armed mercenary infiltrations to kill, sabotage, create insecurity and to bring death to every part of our country. I am saying this in all seriousness, that such actions against Cuba are being planned by the United States. This amounts to something more, much more than an economic blockade.

All these policies come accompanied by an incessant defamation and slander campaign against our country, as a justification for their crimes. Now the fundamental em-

phasis is being put on the human rights banner; human rights are being quoted by those people who have committed and are committing all kinds of atrocities against our country.

As I recently stated to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, with whom I conversed at length, the most brutal and cruel violation of the human rights of our people is being committed with the purpose of killing off 11 million Cubans or bringing them to their knees through hunger and disease!

The United States talking about human rights! They began by exterminating their earliest Indigenous or Native population. Who could forget that period and that tradition of collecting the scalps of American Indians? They killed more American Indians than buffalo, and they even finished off the buffalo. [*Applause*]

They expanded their country at the cost of other territories; they extended their country by grabbing land, thus dispossessing their neighbours, in one way or another, of millions of square kilometres of land. In terms of Mexico alone, they grabbed over half of its territory; they still occupy Puerto Rico; they have wanted to devour Cuba for over

150 years; they have intervened dozens of times in Latin American countries; they imposed a canal in Panama. This refers just to our hemisphere. I have not mentioned the wars in Viet Nam, Laos, Cambodia and in many other places.

What a history! And what a paradox that they have just approved Proposition 187 — this was not 100 years ago, nor 100 days ago, but just a few weeks ago — to bar health care and education for undocumented children, for those families living in what was once Mexican territory. [*Applause*]

What respect for human rights are shown by these concepts? What ideas, what concepts about human beings? It's inconceivable that a child could fall ill and not be treated, when \$300 billion are spent on the military budget and on the most sophisticated weapons ever known!

We don't have to look back in history. In contemporary times, since the start of the Revolution, what has been the history of the foreign policy of the United States, that "champion" of freedom, that "champion" of human rights? A close alliance with the most repressive and bloody regimes in the world.

If we turn to Europe, we can recall that immediately after World War I the United

States became the ally of Spanish fascism, which was supplied with weapons from Hitler and Mussolini and which cost millions of lives.

We cannot overlook the U.S. alliance with South Viet Nam and its genocidal war against the Vietnamese people in the south and north of that country. We cannot overlook the Korean war, because Korea was completely demolished, reduced to dust. We cannot ignore Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the unnecessary use of nuclear weapons — a completely unnecessary use which, in any event, could have been used against military installations but instead fell on civilian populations of hundreds of thousands of inhabitants. It rang in the era of atomic terror in the world.

We cannot forget the alliance with South Africa and apartheid. Neither can we forget that the apartheid regime built its own nuclear weapons, and when we were fighting in southern Angola against the apartheid army, alongside the Angolans, South Africa already had nuclear weapons, various nuclear weapons! The United States knew that South Africa had nuclear weapons and that those nuclear weapons could have been used against Cuban and Angolan soldiers. Ah!

But this was the South Africa of racism and fascism.

The United States has created a great fuss and has even threatened war against North Korea, due to its assumption that the North Koreans were developing nuclear weaponry, but it tolerated, allowed and indirectly facilitated South Africa's building of nuclear weapons.

But if we come closer to our continent, and to recent times, who could forget the dirty war in Nicaragua, orchestrated via armed mercenaries, which cost tens of thousands of lives and the mutilation of thousands and thousands of Nicaraguans? Who could forget that? [*Applause*] The "champion" of freedom! The "champion" of human rights!

Who could forget the dirty war in El Salvador, the U.S. government support for a genocidal government to which it gave billions of dollars in sophisticated weapons to trample on the people's rebellion, a war that caused over 50,000 deaths?

And why did the Malvinas War happen? Simply because the United States had been using Argentina's 401st special forces battalion for its dirty war against Nicaragua and El Salvador, and it provided such exceptional

service to the United States that the battalion felt it could occupy the Malvinas Islands.

This has nothing to do with Argentina's right to the Malvinas, which we have always defended. [*Applause*] But the Argentine military felt that the moment had come to collect from the United States for services rendered in Central America, so that the former would back them in their military adventure. It was an adventure, in fact, because in the final analysis that is not the way to wage war. You either wage war or you don't. And if you wage war you take it to its ultimate consequences, if it's a just war. [*Applause*] And they invaded the Malvinas Islands. But when the United States was put into the position of choosing between its allies and its British forebears, they chose and backed the British.

Who can forget what has happened in Guatemala since Arbenz' government in the '50s, [*applause*] when a popular government chosen by the people was trying to carry out agrarian reform to help campesinos and Indigenous communities? Immediately the dirty war broke out and they were invaded by mercenaries. And what has happened since then? What has happened up until now? Over 100,000 people have disappeared. This is a country where for decades there were no

political prisoners because everyone disappeared. To this day, who supplies this government, who trains it, who prepares it? The “champion” of freedom, the “champion” of human rights. What happened in Chile with Salvador Allende’s government, which had great popular support? [*Applause*] They plotted against him, the economy was blocked in many ways and conditions were gradually created for a coup which gave the country thousands and thousands of disappeared persons and murders.

And what happened in Argentina with that military government I mentioned? They say at least 15,000 disappeared [*the audience tells him “30,000!”*]. I say “at least,” because I don’t want people to think I’m exaggerating and yet many say there were 30,000; and some people here are saying even more. But let’s take my figures as the minimum. Are 15,000 disappeared really a small amount?

And who provided weapons to this government, who backed it, who gave it political support, who made use of their services in Central America? The “champions” of freedom, the “champions” of human rights!

And what happened in Uruguay? And what happened in Brazil? And who supported the coup leaders and those who tor-

tured and killed people and made them “disappear”? Who invaded the Dominican Republic at the time of the Caamano rebellion? [*Applause*] Who invaded Grenada? [*Applause*] Who invaded Panama? [*Applause*] The “champions” of freedom and human rights!

Which of those governments was harassed? Which of the governments I named have been blockaded? Which of them have been denied credit and trade? Which was denied the purchase of weapons and war materiel? Who didn't they train in so-called anti-subversive action? Who didn't they train in the arts of crime, disappearances and torture? And these are the ones who blockade Cuba, who slander Cuba, who accuse Cuba of human rights violations to justify their crimes against our people.

And I can say dispassionately, without being subjective, that Cuba is the country that has done the most for human beings. [*Prolonged applause and shouts*]

What revolution was more noble? What revolution was more generous? What revolution showed most respect for people? And I'm not only talking about a victorious revolution in power, but since the time of our own war, of our own revolutionary struggle,

which established inviolable principles, because what made us revolutionaries was rejection of injustice, the rejection of crime and the rejection of torture. During the 25 months that our intense war lasted, in which we captured thousands of prisoners, there was not one case of physical violence to obtain information, not even in the midst of the war [*applause*]; there was not one case of killing a prisoner. What we would do with prisoners is set them free — we would keep their weapons, which was all we were interested in, and we treated these arms suppliers with all the consideration they deserved [*laughter and applause*]. At first they had been led to believe that we would kill them all, and in fact they would resist up to the bitter end. But when they discovered during the course of the war the true behaviour of the Rebel Army, they would give up their weapons with less of a struggle when they were surrounded, when they knew they had lost. Some of those soldiers surrendered three times, because they were switched from one front to the other and they were used to surrendering, they had experience. [*Laughter and applause*]

But the most important thing is that the Cuban Revolution has maintained the principles of never resorting to torture, of never

stooping to crime, without exception to this day [*applause*], no matter what they say, no matter what they write. We know that a lot of this slander has been written by people in the CIA's pay.

Are there many other examples like it in history? In the world's history there have been many revolutions and in general they were rough, very rough: England's civil wars, the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, the Spanish Civil War and the Mexican Revolution. We know quite a bit about revolutions and many books have been written about them and about counter-revolutions. Well, one does not even speak of counter-revolutions. Revolutions tend to be generous and counter-revolutions are unfailingly merciless. Just ask the members of the Paris Commune. [*Applause*]

In the case of Cuba there has not been one exception. In the whole history of the Revolution, there has not been one single case of torture — and I mean that literally — not one political murder, not one disappearance. In our country we do not have the so-called death squads that sprout like mushrooms in this hemisphere's countries. [*Audience names several countries*] You speak for us! [*Applause*] We prefer not to mention

names, but everything has happened in our hemisphere.

Why is there no mention made of the United States, where people have been brutally murdered for defending civil rights, men like Martin Luther King and many others, a country where as a rule only blacks and Hispanics are given the death sentence?

Our country does not have the phenomena we see in others, such as children murdered on the streets allegedly to avoid the spectacle of begging and apparently to fight crime. The Revolution eradicated begging, the Revolution eliminated gambling, the Revolution eliminated drugs, the Revolution did away with prostitution.

Yes, unfortunately there can be some cases or tendencies that due to the economic difficulties, and the opening to numerous outside contacts encourages some “*jineteras*”. We do not deny this, and from time to time some may turn up on 5th Avenue, but one should not confuse decent people with *jineteras*. [Applause] Such cases exist but we fight against it. We do not tolerate prostitution; we do not legalize prostitution. [Applause]

There may be some children, encouraged by their parents, who approach tourists and

ask them for gum or something else; these are phenomena that we experience due to the special situation that we are living in, at a time of great economic difficulties as the blockade has been strengthened. But these things were not known during the normal times of the Revolution.

You won't see people sleeping in doorways, covered with newspapers, regardless of our present poverty. There is not a single human being abandoned or without social security, regardless of our present great poverty. [*Applause*] The vices we see every day in capitalist societies do not exist in our country. This is an achievement of the Revolution.

There is not one child without a school or a teacher, there is not one single citizen who does not receive medical care, starting before birth. Here we start medical care for our citizens when they are still in their mothers' wombs, right from the first weeks after conception. [*Applause*]

We are the country in the world with the most doctors per capita, regardless of the special period, [*applause*] and I'm not only referring to the Third World, but to the whole world! More than the Scandinavians, more than the Canadians and all those who are at

the top rankings in public health. By reducing infant mortality from sixty to ten per 1,000 live births and with other paediatric programs, the Revolution has saved the lives of more than 300,000 children.

We have the most teachers per capita in the world, [*applause*] regardless of the hardships we suffer; we have the most art teachers per capita in the world; we are the country with the most physical education and sports teachers per capita. [*Applause*]

That is the country that is being blockaded, that is the country that they are trying to bring to its knees through hunger and disease.

Some demand that, in order for them to lift the blockade, we must surrender, we must renounce our political principles, we must renounce socialism and our democratic forms. [*Shouts of "No!" "Never!"*]

Furthermore, quite a confusing document was issued at the Rio Conference, despite the noble efforts against it by countries like Brazil, Mexico and others. It was supported by some countries that were very, very hand-in-glove with the United States; I don't want to mention any names. It is a document with a certain degree of confusion which leaves room for erroneous interpretations,

and some interpret it as supporting the U.S. position of conditioning the blockade's suspension on Cuba making political changes.

Political changes? Is there a country that has made more political changes than we have? What is a Revolution, if it's not the most profound and extraordinary of political changes? [*Applause*] We made this Revolution over 35 years ago, and during those 35 years we have been carrying out political changes, not in search of a formal, alienating democracy which divides peoples and splits them up, but rather a democracy that really unites peoples and gives viability to what is most important and essential, which is public participation in fundamental issues. [*Applause*] Furthermore, we recently made modifications to the Constitution, based on the principle that the people nominate and the people elect. [*Applause*]

I'm not criticizing anybody, but nearly all over the world, including Africa, they are introducing Western political systems, together with neoliberalism and neocolonialism and all those other things, [to] people who have never heard of Voltaire, Danton, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, nor the philosophers of U.S. independence — and remember that Bolivar in our own hemisphere was very

much against the mechanical copying of the European and U.S. systems, which have brought catastrophe, division, subordination and neocolonialism to our countries. We can see societies splitting into thousands of pieces, societies that should be united in their efforts to develop have ended up not only with a multiparty system but with hundreds and even thousands of parties.

We have worked, we've developed our own system, which we did not copy from anyone. We established the principle that those who nominate in the first instance are the residents. One may or may not agree, but it is as respectable as the Greek democracy that people talk so much about and without slaves or serfs. Because Greek democracy consisted of just a few that would meet in the plaza, and they had to be few, because in those days they did not have microphones, and they would get together to have an election right there. [*Laughter and applause*] Neither the slaves nor the serfs participated, nor do they today.

When you analyse the electoral results in the United States you discover that they have just elected a new Congress, where undoubtedly there are worrying tendencies toward conservatism and the extreme right, but

those are internal matters in the United States. The truth of the matter is, I can assure you, I promise you, we have not made it a condition that the United States renounce its system in order to normalize relations. [*Laughter and applause*] Just imagine if we told them that they had to have at least 80 per cent of the electorate voting. Thirty-eight per cent decided to vote and the rest said, "I'm going to the beach," or "I'm going to the movies," [*Laughter*] or "I'm going home to rest." This is what happened to the "champions" of freedom, human rights and civil rights. [*Applause*]

It is very much the same in many countries of Latin America. Many people don't even vote. The slaves and the servants say: "What am I going to vote for, if I'm still going to be just the same?"

How difficult it is for us to come to an agreement! Because it's certain that the influence of the mass media is greater all the time and the series of obstacles that the popular forces have to overcome are increasingly difficult.

However, 95 per cent of Cuban citizens vote in our elections and nobody forces them to vote. Even those who are not with the Revolution go and vote, although they may

turn in a blank ballot, so as not to vote for this one or for the other; or they vote for one or they vote for the other.

Right now, in our nation, I repeat once again, the local residents nominate the candidates, the people nominate the candidates and the people elect them. In this way, the possibilities of any citizen being elected are infinitely greater than in any other country. One good example: I was talking with a Mexican delegation and they said to me: "The youngest of our deputies was here." "How old is he?" They told me: "Twenty-five years old." I was really astounded, but then I suddenly remembered that we have a number of deputies under the age of 20, because the students, from secondary school onwards, take part in the process of selecting candidates, as do all the mass organizations. [*Applause*].

The campesinos take part in the process of selecting candidates; the women's organization takes part in the process of selecting candidates; the trade unions take part in the process of selecting candidates; the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution take part in the process of selecting candidates and there are numerous students who are deputies to the National Assembly and women, campesinos, workers and intellectu-

als, from all sectors. It isn't the Party that puts up the candidates. The Party does not put up the candidates nor does it elect them. It oversees the elections to make sure that all of the principles and the rules are observed; but it does not take part in any of these electoral processes. That is the situation in our country.

In one of the most recent modifications made in the electoral process, a candidate has to win more than 50 per cent of the valid votes to become a deputy.

[Ricardo] Alarcón was explaining some of these things, when he recalled, with a magazine that he had in his hand — he has the advantage of speaking English and he reads a U.S. magazine now and again [*laughter*] — how one man had spent \$25 million in a campaign to become a member of the U.S. Congress. What kind of democracy is that? How many people have \$25 million to spend on a campaign? And in Cuba candidates don't even need to spend \$25, although any citizen might have to pay the bus fare to go and vote on the day of the elections. [*Applause*]

What kind of democracy is it that requires one to be a millionaire to be able to have all the resources with which to speak and persuade the people to vote for you, and

then the candidate doesn't remember those who voted for him until the next elections four or five years later; he doesn't think about them ever again; he forgets them.

In our country people can be removed from their posts, and the same applies to a municipal delegate as well as the highest official. Anyone can be elected, but they can also be dismissed from those posts. That is our system, which we don't expect all the other countries to apply; it would be absurd to try to make it a model; but it is the system that we have adopted; nobody imposed it on us, no U.S. governor or supervisor came here to establish an electoral code as they did before.

We drew up the Constitution ourselves, [*applause*] we drew up the electoral code ourselves, we have planned the system ourselves and we have developed it ourselves, which is what you have been defending: the right of a country to establish the regulations, the economic, political and social system that it considers to be appropriate. Anything else in the world is impossible, anything else is absurd, any other aim is insane and these lunatics go around trying to get everyone to do exactly the same as them, and we don't like their way of doing things. [*Applause*]

That is why for us the question of ending

the blockade in exchange for political concessions, concessions that correspond to the sovereignty of our country, is unacceptable. It is absolutely unacceptable, it is outrageous, it is exasperating and really, we would rather perish than give up our sovereignty. [*Prolonged applause*]

We have had the blockade for many years; however, it is necessary to think about one fact: there was one world when the Revolution triumphed; today, 35 years later, there is another world. The world changed and didn't progress, it retrogressed, because the bipolar world wasn't to anyone's liking, but the unipolar world is much less to our liking.

When the Revolution triumphed, there was a bipolar world. The United States imposed the blockade on us from almost the first moments. It began by doing away with the sugar markets, and it cut off our supply of fuel. Imagine the new Revolution in those circumstances! Of course they cut off our supply of machinery, of spare parts, of everything, but there was the USSR and the socialist bloc.

That was lucky for us, because faced with the U.S. blockade, 90 miles away, there was another power in the world, another move-

ment in the world which had a revolutionary origin and which was at odds with U.S. imperialism. Thanks to that movement we could find markets for our sugar, supplies of oil, raw materials, food, many things. That was explained here.

We were paid preferential prices; however, it is necessary to say that not only Cuba was paid preferential prices. The Lomé Convention established preferential prices for sugar and other products for many countries which were ex-colonies. In the United States itself, when it was a major sugar market, there were also preferential prices, before they snatched away our quota and redistributed it throughout Latin America and other parts of the world. Eighty per cent of the sugar in the world is traded through preferential prices. And very much in accordance with the principles of their political doctrine, the socialist countries paid us preferential prices.

That was the policy which we defended for all of the countries of the Third World, because it was the only way of reducing the great difference that existed between the developed countries and the underdeveloped countries. It was a demand of the world, it was a demand of all the countries of the

Third World. And even so it was mutually advantageous, because although they paid us preferential prices, it cost more to produce sugar in the Soviet Union than the prices they paid us for sugar. But at any rate, we benefited from those preferential prices, and we used the money to purchase fuel, raw materials and many things.

In our situation it so happened that the USSR and the socialist bloc collapsed and the blockade got stronger. As long as the socialist bloc and the USSR existed we managed better, we could endure the difficulties. Our economy even grew under those conditions throughout nearly 30 years and attained an extraordinary social development.

However, it was in that world that the Cuban Revolution was born. There was no other, there were no other alternatives, in the midst of the country being blockaded by the most powerful country in the world. That is why the disappearance of the socialist bloc and the USSR was such a terrible blow for us, given that the existing blockade was not only maintained but was also strengthened. For that reason our country lost 70 per cent of our imports, and I wonder if any other country in the world would have been able to withstand a similar blow, and I wonder how

many days they would have been able to withstand it — a week, two weeks or a month. [*Applause*] How would we have been able to if it hadn't been for the people's support for the Revolution? How would we be able to withstand it without our political system, without our democratic system, without the people's direct participation in all of the fundamental issues, which is true democracy? [*Applause*]

Which other Latin American country could have been able to withstand the abrupt 70 per cent drop in imports? Would any European country have been able to endure a similar trial? The politicians would have abandoned their principles and capitulated in an instant; but we have dignity, we have a sense of honour and we stick to our principles. [*Applause*] For us these principles are worth more than life itself and we have never sold out our principles, never! [*Applause*]

When we helped the Central American revolutionaries, the United States said that they would remove the blockade if we stopped helping them, and nothing of the kind ever crossed our minds. [*Applause*] On other occasions they said that they would be prepared to remove the blockade if we stopped helping Angola and other African

countries, and the idea of selling out our relations with other countries never crossed our minds. On other occasions, they said they would remove the blockade if we broke off our links with the Soviet Union, and it never occurred to us to do anything of the kind, because we are not a party or a political leadership that sells out its principles. The blockade will never end at that price, because it is a price that we are not prepared to pay.

That situation led us to the special period.

We had been working on some excellent programs before the socialist catastrophe, excellent programs in all fields; we were carrying out a process of rectification of errors and negative tendencies, of old errors and new errors, of old tendencies and new tendencies, and we were working very intensely when that debacle led us into what we could call a double blockade, because as soon as the breakup of the socialist bloc and the breakup of the USSR occurred and even before the breakup of the USSR, the United States was strongly pressuring those countries to stop trading with Cuba, and when the USSR finally disintegrated, the United States put on extreme pressure, and not without success, to cut off trade and economic relations between the countries of the old so-

cialist bloc, the USSR and Cuba.

So our country found itself enveloped in a double blockade and, nevertheless, we had to save the nation, we had to save the Revolution and we had to save socialism — we talk about saving the gains of socialism, because we can't say at this time that we are building socialism, but rather that we are defending what we have done, we are defending our achievements. This is a fundamental objective in a world that has changed in such a radical way, in which all the power of the United States has been turned against us; because, for example, they don't impose conditions on China, a huge country, an immense country, which defends the ideas of socialism; they don't impose conditions on Viet Nam, a marvellous and heroic country. Today there is no blockade against them, but there is a blockade against us. Put yourselves in the place of our Party and our government. And in these such difficult conditions that have never existed before, we must save the nation, save the Revolution and save the achievements of socialism.

What measures would it be necessary to take in this world which exists today and which, of course, won't always exist? Those are illusions held by those who believe that

neoliberalism is already the *nec plus ultra*, that it is the be-all and end-all for capitalism; these are illusions that they have. [Applause] The world will teach us many lessons. What is going to happen with all of this would take a long time to explain, and would be much too long for us to bring up now, but for them it's never-ending.

Now they talk about the globalization of the economy. We'll see what is left from this globalization for the countries of the Third World, with the disappearance of all the current defence mechanisms of the Third World, which must compete with the technology and the immense development of the industrialized capitalist countries. Now the industrialized countries will try more than ever to exploit the natural resources and the cheap work force of the Third World, to accumulate more and more capital. However, it is superdeveloped capitalism, like in Europe, for example, that has more unemployed people all the time, and the more development, the more unemployed there are. What will happen with our countries? There will be a globalization of the differences, of the social injustice, the globalization of poverty.

However, this is the world we've got, with which we must trade and exchange our prod-

ucts, in which we have to survive. That is why we must adapt to that world and adopt those measures which we consider essential, with a very clear objective.

This is not to say that everything that we are doing is solely the result of the new situation. We have made changes as we go along, and even the idea of introducing foreign capital came up before the special period: we had realized that specific areas, specific fields could not be developed because there wasn't the capital or the technology to do so, because the socialist countries didn't have them. However, we have had to open up more, we have had to create what we could call a pretty large opening to foreign investment. That was explained here: in Cuba's circumstances today, without capital, without technology and without markets, we couldn't develop. Hence, all of the measures, changes and reforms that we have been making, in one way or another have the objective, as was stated in this conference, of safeguarding our independence and the Revolution, because the Revolution is the source of everything, and the achievements of socialism, which is to say to preserve socialism or the right to continue constructing socialism when circumstances allow it. [*Prolonged ap-*

plause]

We are making changes, but without giving up our independence and sovereignty; [*applause*] we are making changes, but without giving up the real principle of a government of the people, by the people and for the people, that, translated into revolutionary language, is the government of the workers, by the workers and for the workers. [*Prolonged applause and shouts of "Fidel, Fidel!"*] It's not a government of the bourgeoisie, by the bourgeoisie and for the bourgeoisie; nor a government of the capitalists, by the capitalists and for the capitalists; nor a government of the transnationals, by the transnationals and for the transnationals; nor a government of the imperialists, by the imperialists and for the imperialists. [*Applause*]

That is the big difference, whatever changes and reforms we carry out. If some day we renounced all this, we would be renouncing the lifeblood of the Revolution.

We have shown solidarity with the world; it's not our task now to talk about this solidarity. As far as our solidarity is concerned, we should do the most and talk the least, because we're not going to make any apology for our conduct.

A few minutes ago, before starting the fi-

nal part of this event, a comrade said: “Look at how many things Cuba has done! When visitors from one country or another talk, when they talk about doctors, students, people that were trained here, in one activity or another, it is clear that in these years our country has carried out many things. For us, solidarity and internationalism are a matter of principle, and a sacred one at that.” [*Applause*]

To provide an example, I’m going to give a few statistics. More than 15,000 Cuban doctors have given free services in dozens of countries in these years of the Revolution, more than 15,000 doctors have fulfilled internationalist missions as doctors; [*applause*] more than 26,000 teachers and professors. I ask if any other small country, and even medium or big countries, has had this record.

Suffice it to say that at one point we had three times more doctors working for free in the Third World than did the World Health Organization, [*applause*] and we didn’t have a lot of resources either, only minimum resources. We only had the honour of our health workers, with their internationalist calling. How many lives have they saved? And I wonder, is it fair to blockade a country that has done this? [*Shouts of “No!”*]

How many hundreds of thousands of children have we educated with our teachers in foreign countries? And we haven't only sent primary and secondary school teachers, but university professors; we have founded medical schools in diverse countries of the world. Is it fair to blockade a country that has done all this, and still does it to a certain degree? Half a million Cubans have completed internationalist missions of different types, half a million Cubans! [*Applause*]

The Africans have been very generous, very noble, and have wanted to recall here Cuba's solidarity and aid in the war against colonialism, the war against foreign aggression, the war against apartheid and racism.

Like I said here, our soldiers were fighting in southern Angola, 40,000 men, 40,000 men! [*Applause*] They were fighting alongside the Angolan troops, who acted and fought heroically. There were Cubans in southern Angola facing up to the South Africans after the battle of Cuito Cuanavale, and when our counter-offensive was launched in southwest Angola, these men were exposed to the possibility of nuclear warfare. We knew it, and the distribution of forces in that offensive took into account the possibility that the enemy could use nuclear

weapons.

At one point we had 25,000 foreign students in our universities. [*Applause*] Cuba was the country with more scholarships per capita than anywhere else in the world, and we didn't brag about it; we just went on our way, fulfilling the task of education as Martí taught us, and we did what we could for other countries.

I think that this extraordinary conference, your noble, generous words of solidarity reflect in part the history of our own Revolution's solidarity. [*Applause*] This has greatly encouraged us and gives us the strength to keep going.

There are a lot of choices in this day and age: the choice of freedom, the choice of sovereignty, the choice of independence, and the choice of social justice.

Social justice is acquiring such force as an idea — in the midst of neoliberalism, which is the negation of every principle of justice — that even some international agencies talk about it. The Inter-American Development Bank talks more and more about the need for social justice in this hemisphere. Even the World Bank is talking about social justice! They're the champions of neoliberalism and they talk about social justice, because they

realize that the differences are so great and are still growing, and they would like to make the dream of neoliberalism come true, of capitalism with social justice. They're afraid that misery, hunger and poverty will undermine the bases of the neoliberalism that they praise so much, and that is why they talk about social justice.

But we know that only the people can achieve social justice, and that neoliberalism and social justice are incompatible, they're irreconcilable; [*applause*] that a superdeveloped world next to an underdeveloped world is incompatible, irreconcilable. We know that the former will get richer and richer, while the latter will get poorer and poorer, and this is an irrefutable reality.

Your presence here shows that just ideas live on, that noble ideas live on, that values live on. And we have to multiply these ideas and values just like Jesus Christ multiplied the loaves and fishes. [*Applause*] The church talks about giving opportunities to the poor, and this seems excellent to us, but I think that today's world needs more than choices: it needs energetic, tenacious and consistent struggle by the poor themselves. [*Applause and shouts of "Fidel, Fidel!"*] I should have said "churches" instead of "the church," con-

sidering that we're not only talking about the Catholic church.

We must wage an unending battle against the causes of poverty, [*applause*] an inexorable offensive against capitalism, against neoliberalism, against imperialism, [*applause*] until the day when we can no longer speak of billions of human beings who are hungry, who don't have schools, hospitals, a roof over their head, or even the most elemental means of living.

This planet is getting close to having six billion inhabitants; in one century the population has increased fourfold. The threats that humanity suffers today are multiple, not only social, but economic, political and military.

Someone here was saying that nowadays they call wars "humanitarian missions" or "peace operations." Wars threaten us from all sides, interventions threaten us from all sides; but the world is also being threatened by destruction of the natural conditions for life, the destruction of the environment, a problem which is getting more and more attention and increasingly moves the conscience of humanity. We will have to make a huge effort in every sense of the word to save humanity from all these risks.

And what is the historical origin of this situation? Could anyone deny that it was colonialism, neocolonialism and imperialism? Could anyone deny that it was capitalism? We are very conscious of all this, despite the setbacks suffered by the progressive movement, the revolutionary movement and the socialist movement.

But we'll say it here and now, dear friends. We will never return to capitalism! [*Applause*] Not to savage capitalism — or as Perez Esquivel likes to call it, cannibal capitalism — or to moderate capitalism, if this exists; we don't want to go back, and we won't go back! [*Applause*]

We know what our duties and obligations are. We've withstood almost five hard years already, when others thought the Cuban Revolution would quickly disappear off the face of the earth. We're working persistently and harder all the time, and even putting more and more emphasis on the subjective, on our own errors, our own deficiencies; emphasizing the subjective so that the objective doesn't become a pretext for deficiencies.

We've still got to raise the consciousness of our people. We still have to explain why we need to reduce the excess currency in circulation and the methods used to continue

gathering up the excess without using shock therapy; we have to look for efficiency in agriculture and industry.

I know that the issue about food production has been a worry of yours, expressed here. I must say that we are obliged to produce food without fertilizers, without pesticides, without weedkillers, often without fuel, resorting to animal traction, faced with the need to feed the 80 per cent of the population living in urban zones. Cuba, unlike Viet Nam or China, has only 20 per cent of the population in the countryside and 80 per cent in the cities. They have the inverse, 75 to 80 per cent in the countryside and 20 to 25 per cent in the cities.

We even have a labour shortage in rural areas. Our agriculture and sugar industry had been mechanized, like many other sectors of the economy. Someone asked whether we should produce sugar or not. We don't have any other choice than to produce sugar, we have to produce it; now, it has become more expensive for the sugar mills and machines to produce less because of a lack of fertilizer and irrigation, for example. In general, we know how to produce food, but we've had to deal with a great scarcity of supplies for food production.

We've had to develop other areas. Tourism has already been mentioned here. It has become a necessity, although it wasn't promoted in the first years of the Revolution, because it has its good side and its bad side. And since we can't live with the hope of being in an ivory tower, we have to get mixed up with the problems of this world. And, based on the idea that virtue is born of the struggle against vice, just as magnificent flowers bloom from cow dung, [*applause*] we have to get used to living with all these types of problems. We have to look for resources in convertible currency to make these supplies available.

The livestock has been left without feed, without irrigated land, without fuel.

The problems we've had to deal with aren't easy, but we're handling it, sharing the little we have among many, rather than a lot among a few. [*Applause*] We've been sharing what we have. And then, under these incredibly difficult conditions — I repeat, there is not a single school without a teacher, not a child without a school, not a patient without a doctor or hospital; we maintain social security, we maintain our cultural development, the development of sports; we even came in fifth place in the Olympic Games in the midst

of the special period. [*Applause*] This gives you an idea of our strength in exceptionally difficult conditions.

Therefore, when we share the little we have among everyone, a lot of things can be done, and there are many countries in the world that have much more than we do and do very few things. [*Applause*]

This event concludes, really, like an unforgettable lesson for all of us, and we hope for a lot, we hope for so much from this battle that you propose to fight shoulder to shoulder with us to end the blockade, to end the hostility against our country, to defend hope. Not because we have been predestined to be anyone's hope. We don't consider ourselves a people bound by destiny; we constitute a small people, a modest people, to whom history has in these particular circumstances assigned the role of what we're defending: our most sacred ideals, our most sacred rights. You all see this as hope.

We understand what it would mean for all the progressive forces, for all the revolutionary forces, for all lovers of peace and justice in the world if the United States succeeded in crushing the Cuban Revolution, and because of this we consider defending the Revolution along with you to be our most sa-

cred duty, even at the cost of death.

Thank you, thank you very much, a million thank yous. [*Applause*]

And let me exclaim one more time:

Socialism or Death!
Patria o Muerte! Venceremos!
Long Live Solidarity!

[*Shouts of "Long Live Solidarity!"*]

[*Ovation*]

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