

July 14, 2006

To whom it may concern,

Support for the nomination of Oswaldo Paya for the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Human Rights Award

As one of the members of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC), I would like to express my support for the nomination of the Cuban defender of human rights and democracy Oswaldo Payá for the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Human Rights Award. The ICDC was founded in September 2003 through an initiative of the former Czech President, Václav Havel. Members of the ICDC are distinguished politicians and cultural figures from around the world. The ICDC aims to create and support concrete initiatives that will lead to democratic change in Cuba.

The ICDC supports the projects of Oswaldo Payá – in particular the Varela Project and the current Todos Cubanos project – because we feel that his life is an inspiration for all of those working towards a world in which the freedom of religious expression and political choice is possible. Oswaldo Paya's adult life has been a trial of humiliation and oppression at the hands of the Cuban regime and yet Oswaldo Paya has remained true to his democratic ideals and his deep faith.

Oswaldo Paya is a charismatic leader who has chosen to battle the communist regime in Cuba with courage rather than blood. The Valera Project has inspired over 25,000 Cubans to stand up beside Oswaldo Payá and demand that the Cuban regime recognize their desire for freedom. This move required great courage and resulted in many supporters being imprisoned or terrorized for supporting the petition. By working within the bounds of the Cuban constitution, Oswaldo has found an intelligent means to exercise mass civic disobedience.

Following the Varela Project, the National Dialogue project is framing the future transition of the island in which thousands of Cubans living on the island or abroad have commented on the proposed working document on transition. The outcome of this process is the Todos Cubanos (All Cubans) program which proposes the first steps of the future transition to democracy in Cuba but remains open for further discussion when the change comes.

International recognition of the work of Oswald Paya is vital to the success of the Valera Project and the Todos Cubanos project and to insuring the continuation of Oswaldo's struggle for democratic freedom in Cuba. Robert F. Kennedy believed that each individual holds the power to invoke change, that a single voice has the ability to declare an iniquity, and that each time a man stands up for an ideal, acts to improve the lot of others or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope. Oswaldo Payá is such a person and we believe the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Prize will help him and all Cubans who are hoping for democratic change to succeed in their struggle. We believe that if the voice of international support grows loud enough, the Castro regime will be forced to listen and to take action that will make a transition to democracy possible in the future.

Tatiana Yankelevich  
Elena Bonner  
Philip Dimitrov  
Mart Laar  
Andre Glucksman  
Milan Kučan  
Karel Schwarzenberg