



Havana, October 31, 2003

Mr. Vaclav Havel
Former President of the Czech Republic

Dear friend:

I remember with great emotion the few days I spent in Prague during my trip to receive the Sakharov Prize. I remember the meeting we had, and our conversation about Cuba. At that time, according to what people told me, you were very worried because the process to elect the new Czech president had been delayed. Among many differences, for me, this was another: a president who was worried because he could not abandon his post since those who should choose had not reached agreement on a replacement. In my country, however, as in all countries that have been dominated by communism, these positions appear to be lifelong and the "socialist democracy" always guarantees unanimous reelection. As you know, real democracy has "complications" like free elections and the option of various candidates, which true socialism surpasses. In Cuba, these problems do not exist. The Electoral Law establishes a single candidate per congressional seat, who is furthermore proposed as a candidate by candidacy commissions that are formed by "organizations of the masses." But the most striking fact is that the voter only has the opportunity to vote positively, that is, if he votes no, his vote does not count. At the end these positive votes are counted and as you know, the sole candidates are always "elected" and afterwards the same person is always elected as president of the Council of the State. I think that in North Korea, as in the old Albania, there is a similar process, much less complicated than the one that the Czech and Slovaks adopted after November 1989.

I haven't forgot either the Czech friends that chose me, not Cardinal Vlk nor Bishop Malý. During the times of communism both were discriminated against for not being sympathizers with the regime. Afterwards, Bishop Malý, who was your partner during the time of the luminous Charter 77, came to Cuba. He came to bring encouragement to the family members of the "Prisoners of the Spring of Cuba," that have in prison since March of this year. Here he could relate, in his own flesh, his times of being a priest excluded because of his solidarity with the persecuted.

I told my friends in Prague during my short time there that the experience was like traveling through a time machine. It was like that for me because I still live in an environment of a culture of fear that the communist regime generates throughout all of society, when I encountered people of the Czech Republic and Slovakia that suffered this same experience and are now free. It's like traveling to the future and having a demonstration that liberation is possible. With this I do not want to say that we want to copy the Czech model of transition, but that its faith and determination inspires us.

To Bishop Malý, my friend, your trip into the time machine was the opposite experience, toward the past, from freedom towards the world of totalitarianism, of slavery. You did not come to be a tourist, nor with the morbid intent of feeling superior here, where Cubans are discriminated against and humiliated by privileged strangers within their own land. You did not come to amuse yourself by abusing those who are disadvantaged in a place that lives beneath a regime of no rights.

We always think that the liberation of the towns in Europe that were subjugated to communism, including the Russian towns, would begin a Cuban solidarity movement and an understanding of our reality. But many appear to have lost that memory or have been quickly submerged into the free market and haven't become or don't have the time for their disgraced brother, the Cuban community. Thus, those with much valor such as Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, and others who have a good memory and a generous heart, have not accompanied us for many years. No one like you all could better know our reality and interpret it, because you lived it. You are a great help so that Europe and the rest of the world can understand the reality of Cuba. Thank you very much for the letter on September 19 that you sent out, in which ex-president of Poland Lech Walesa and the ex-president of Hungary Arpad Gono, reclaimed liberation of our brothers the "Prisoners of the Spring of Cuba" and for supporting the civic campaign of the Varela Project. I think your initiative to propose the "Cuban democratic fund" is a positive one and that this help will be very useful for the people of Cuba throughout the period of Transition. However, we will arrive at this period though the civic movement that has already begun. It is a movement formed by thousands of Cubans, fighting in spite of discrimination, persecution, the harassment of their families, poverty, and the lack of resources for their peaceful work. It is a movement that needs help now, but a great number of prejudices are mounting; the defamatory propaganda of the regime has succeeded in making the initiatives of help that are needed for the civic movement, scarce and reduced. Although we continue the fight by any means necessary with our primary resources: faith, love for one's country, and the determination to achieve freedom.

Returning to the topic of the Transition. First, in the context of Latin America, this term can be interpreted as the path towards models that have not served any towns at all, if only to help raise poverty and corruption that the majority of people face, and to cause doubt about the authenticity of democracy, at least when it's the only reliable thing. This is not our goal. Another part of the official propaganda and the

systematic method of misinformation, after the fall of the indestructible imperialist Soviet Union, we had to conform, not without a certain efficiency, that gave fear to the Cuban people. That fear came with an idea of chaos and misery that of course, produced the transition that all of Europe faced, now that they weren't dominated by communism (to clarify, Europe was never under communist rule, just as there is no communist rule in Cuba). I believe that the fraud could have confused many.

Let me explain: communism is a regime of exclusion, this is not theory, it comes from decades of experience, demonstrated from its birth, this regime is life and death. At the end, it leaves the majority dispossessed, without property, without money, without resources, without labor unions, without parties, without organizations to defend them. It leaves a judicial system that does not protect one's rights and is twisted. It annuls the culture of work, institutionalizes corruption, and finally, converts the economy into a hybrid system of collective camps and savaged capitalism; this is the "savaged communism". The description would be very long. But also, in the ex-dominated Europe, in every country a group of great capitalists is left reduced, that up until the day before, were powerful leaders or people with great power. Thus, they are the newest rich, that are now the only rich, because under communism everything is only one. Only one party, only one doctrine, only one opinion, only one trade union, only one government and in passing, they become the only rich. In Cuba, they tell the communities "socialism or death", and they are also the only capitalists, the future great leaders. Part of the topic would be to speak of the consequences of cultural genocide and the humanity of the imperial Soviet Union, that disfigured entire societies and that in present day pay with a great deal of hurt, until the communities and country pay with their blood. But of this we speak very little, or we prefer not to speak, because the dictator of lies still has a great inertia or presence.

Fraud is in presenting what is the destructive fruit and atypical of communism and its inertial outcomes, like the evils of new democracies. It's like saying to a slave: "look at the consequences of your liberation, it's better if you stay here".

In the first place, my interpretation of the transition in the ex-dominated Europe is that it is far off from the imagination of the regime's official propaganda. But I also think that there exists, at the end of communism, the dangers of some conforming to the flock of ex-slaves: if you participate in the economy of the market, you too can become a businessman.

This is ironic because the Cubans (those who landed in Cuba), the majority of them also didn't have money, or property, or resources, or training, or anything; we don't have anything. The new businessmen can be the only and richest of this time. The only ones who have and are able to have things, consecrate them, thus, within the "market economy", the new form of oppression where the majority, now marginalized, remain in a similar situation. With that, I would like to say, that changes in Cuba are not

prolonging the disadvantages of the majority, because you cannot build a new society upon the basis of these disadvantages. And in totalitarianism, the disadvantages of the majority are total. That is why we cannot refuse the concept of transition, we remember the process that the Cubans have put in motion is for Liberation. In that way we are radicals. Peaceful radicals because we do not accept violence as a recourse for change, because hate does not motivate us, rather it is the love for our fellow Cuban brothers. This period in Cuban history, this period that is ending, has been very complex when it comes to humanity, and another result is that this regime will continue confronting Cubans in one way or another because it is what has happened up until now. Thus we continue submitting ourselves to hate and the injustices that come from totalitarianism. The pardons and reconciliation are essential in this process of liberation, because one must understand that for us, the peaceful path is not simply a method, but a goal. To overcome violence, hate and the offences forever. We firmly believe that this sentiment is alive in the majority of Cubans. Although those that form part of the powerful are trapped us in a system that does not respect their own rights, although they are given privileges. I still keep thinking about Czechoslovakia. You all achieved changed, achieved liberation, you did it and you do things in your own way, that is what is very important.

In Cuba, we also do it, and we are doing it, among Cubans, among everyone, those that live within and those that live in exile, who are an inseparable part of our people.

The Varela Project is already a citizen's movement for peaceful changes. It is realized with the power of those that take the path toward personal liberation and overcome fear, and it is also a path to solidarity between one's own peoples that have already demanded rights for all. There is the foundation for change that we look for, with the participation of citizens in political life, the economy and the country's culture, as free people. This is the first change that the Varela Project is aiming for. It is not the only one, we must still prepare ourselves for Cuba's transition and this is already what we are doing. This will be the transition to democracy, to social justice, to development and peace. For this, more than any other model, will be for the individual, the family and the community.

Poverty and the differences in Cuba are caused by a lack of rights. For this reason, this transition process will liberate all the potential creativity and work of Cubans. Economic freedom implies the right to own businesses, jobs and to make agreements freely. But as I have tried to explain these rights are not possible without the process of democratization of the economy, that it implies opportunities and possibilities for everyone. In this stage far from privatizing the basic services, such as education, health, and others, we have the intention to make them more efficient. That the citizens gradually receive them as a right, not as a concession from those that govern them, that up until now exert unconditional policies on the citizens as the cost of these services. What they do not tell you is that these services sustain themselves with the work and contributions of those same citizens.

I believe that there is a consensus in Cuba that the transition will open doors for Cubans that they are currently excluded from, such as economic freedom, and at the same time maintain and those free services and make them service truly efficient. This is a challenge for our society, but we are sure that as free Cuban women and men, we can realize a transition and a future where democracy, social justice and where everyone can exercise their rights, can become a reality.

Cubans never chose this regime without rights. "The Prisoners of the Spring in Cuba" are completing their sentences of 26 years, for peacefully defending the rights of all Cubans. The majority are members of the Citizens Committee and of the Varela Project. Others are independent journalists and leaders of civic groups. They are jailed in cells that are 1.6 meters wide by 3 meters long, many with closed in walls, full of insects and rats, with food rations like those in a concentration camp, with visits only available every three months and with frequent humiliations. However, this regime of destruction has not destroyed their faith and from the prisons they enlighten us with their words of courage. We wait for the voices of their liberation to lift the entire world. These Prisoners of the Spring in Cuba the testimony that "from the powerful to those without power:"

I know that you understand very well this moment of danger and hope that lives within us Cubans. Now the Cuban peoples need solidarity with this civic campaign for peaceful changes that have been concretized by the Varela Project and continue to extend itself in the midst of repression that now does not have the ability to paralyze us.

My dear friend Vaclav, I would like to extend our wishes of solidarity to the Czech people as well as our gratitude to all our friends who have supported us with their voices and work towards a peaceful fight.

Thank you for your support in nominating me for the Nobel Prize, many Cubans saw it as support for the cause of liberty in Cuba, which is also for the cause of peace.

Please receive my fraternal embrace,

Oswaldo José Payá Sardiñas