

Jan.19, 2004

Mr. Vaclav Havel
Former President,
Czech Republic

Esteemed friend:

I once again received a letter from you and your words bring me to deep and profound reflections about the reforms that for you have become realities, and for us, represent the immediate future.

Certainly, we are in the final phase of the totalitarian era in Cuba, however we know that what we do now, or rather the way in which we execute the changes will determine the future of our society.

There are certain contrasts. One of these is that Cubans know that this regime has no future and from whom we can no longer expect anything, however still many people -although not everyone- behaves as if the regime were going to last many more years. These attitudes are the fruits of the culture of fear imposed over several decades of intolerance that accompany the regime, as well as the verbal aggression of the directors and the media against anything that could insinuate change. The intention is to induce paralysis, similar to how it is imposed on passengers aboard a hijacked airplane, whose only perspective is as unstable as dripping gasoline.

Metaphors are always limited in their ability to represent reality and it is not accurate to take them literally, but we can say that continuing with this one, that the hijacking is an end as inhuman as the one that this situation causes. That airplane is our house, and in her flies for the life of our people, the solution to this drama. The hijackers are now trapped in such a way that there is no way out for them, and in such a way that the passengers will not be lost.

There is a way out nevertheless, an exit that would also be the entrance of a new era.

Desperation is the other factor of the paralysis. It is because of this that thousands of Cubans signed the Varela project, whereby a petition is made asking for referendum to achieve the fundamental rights. The project is making the first substantial step towards peaceful change: citizens that liberate themselves from the fear, and with no disguises, identify themselves totally, and ask for the referendum.

This is taking place in the middle of the situation described above. The repression no longer paralyzes everyone. For many years, the Cuban people were made to believe that the only options were to emigrate, or to submit, and also that this regime is eternal and so evolved a system of conditioned defenselessness. Now the majority of those who know the Varela Project discovered two truths. The first is that pacific change is possible and that life does not begin and end with the regime. The second is that we the citizens can be the protagonists of this change, that if there is something that can be done, and there are already thousands of Cubans that dare to take the plunge. It is the trumpet call of liberation. For this reason, the

regime has undertaken the massive effort to stop Cubans from knowing of the Varela Project as well as to impede the promoters thereof.

The repression, beyond being against change, it is against peaceful change. The change that we seek however is that change which includes reconciliation amongst Cubans, a change that can leave Cubans in control of their destiny and with the capacity to put into practice a program of democratization, development, and social justice. In many other countries, the people still don't believe that in Cuba, the people are capable of overcoming this situation by themselves and so they say that nothing can be done as long as Fidel Castro lives on, as if his death were the solution, excluding any possibilities of the protagonism of the Cuban people. The international solidarity with our civic campaign for the Varela Project referendum and national dialogue should grow now. Armed conflicts in Latin America and in other regions, have finished in dialogue supported by international organizations, foundations, churches, and by many people around the world. When the subject is Cuba however, there are suddenly many conditionalities, many outlooks from ideological points of view, lectures from an anti-American point of view that come to justify complicity with oppression, as well as political and economic interests that impede solidarity. We are not asking for, nor do we want intervention, we are calling for solidarity with the referendum, and the national dialogue.

Would it not be equally noble and humanitarian to support this dialogue in order to overcome oppression and avoid possible confrontation amongst Cubans, as it would be to support dialogue to end confrontation? What in this case does the government not want in the dialogue inside of Cuba?

For me and for all Cubans involved in the struggle for democracy, it is a privilege to have a friend like yourself, whom who know possesses a deep and profound understanding of our reality, and that is sensitive to what happens to Cubans. Once again I am grateful for your solidarity, and I hope that one day you will be able to come to our country where you have the respect and admiration of many, and where your ideas have helped to open new horizons to those who know them.

A strong hug

Oswaldo Paya Sardiñas