

Non-governmental Policy towards Cuba

Carlos González

In order that any change be attained within the social climate of Cuba by democratic means, the birth of a civil society is necessary. The leading political regime has done its best to divide people as had been done in the ex-communist countries of Eastern Europe. The regime has used terror to silence anyone who isn't in clear agreement with the official line and who expresses their opinions. For that reason, the reconstruction of a society whose social ties have been destroyed will be a long-term task.

In this sense, the role of different groups, foundations, charitable, cultural, religious, sporting and boy-scout organizations will be essential as a complement to the emerging governmental structures. These structures will probably concentrate on other aspects of the reconstruction of the country and, based on the experiences of development in other countries which also have undergone a process of transition, in many cases new. Even if there are laws in Cuba today that forbid and punish by imprisonment the free assembly of individuals and which makes the creation of such independent associations impossible, a large number of activist groups do exist. They are all illegal and in great danger yet they are preparing to take this huge task upon themselves. These people must now receive our moral and material assistance in order to be prepared for when the restriction begins to wane.

The Prague Memorandum, approved at the September ICDC summit, mentions in one of its paragraphs the creation of a 'network of non-governmental organisations which have declared their solidarity with democracy in Cuba.' And this is the aim we all must work towards; all of us, be that Europeans, Latin-Americans, North Americans and others who inspired by our experience can add something into the discussion and must try to reach a common goal. The Czech, Polish and Slovak NGOs, coming from countries which have similar experiences to those of Cuba, and who have managed to shed the communist rein, or countries like Chile which have successfully managed to get rid of dictatorial regimes peacefully, have a lot to offer. It is in this sense that I have come up with some suggestions:

One of the most effective mechanisms in this respect, which has brought excellent results for People in need at least, is to send experts who are experienced in NGO creation in their own countries to Cuba. This will permit an exchange of experiences between the leaders of internal opposition. This would facilitate 'creating' strategies and mechanisms in order to later transmit them to those inside and so on. Another step in the same direction, which is by no means less significant, is sending expert written materials dealing with topics like transition, ex-dissidents, and protagonists of change (in their own countries) which should show Cuban democrats what are the possible errors within the transformational process towards democracy.

On the official level, NGOs should co-operate closely with Senators and Parliament Members from their own countries. Of course, this co-operation can only take place within the limits of possibility. Many representatives of various NGOs agree that sometimes there is willingness on the part of official bodies to support our programs, but often they are uninformed or disoriented. And that is where we should step in.

Last, but not least, the NGO network should further serve as a kind of platform to process the humanitarian aid heading towards Cuba. In order to succeed in this aspect, it is necessary to create efficient communication channels between internal activists who are, at the end of the day, the ones who can best inform us of the needs of the people. Today, many different European and American organizations are working in accordance with their

own agenda. I am suggesting the creation of a kind of manual, which would serve to co-ordinate the following: the international adoption of political prisoners, financial assistance to their families and campaigns denouncing abuses exerted by the Castro regime through international forums and international means of communication.

To summarize, it is necessary to start sharing forces on the international level, to take maximum advantage of the specific experience of each country and thus make the assistance more efficient. As one Chilean politician, Gutenberg Martínez, said in Prague, 'transitions are prepared, not improvised'. That is true and today it is our obligation to work together and support those who will tomorrow lead the Cuban transition.