

Uniting States of Mind in Latin America

Exequiel Silva

It is beyond any doubt that today the West is governed by humanitarian and democratic principles. We can be certain that none of these countries would respond aggressively to an appeal by the international community aimed at the correction of the parameters of human rights, freedom and democracy. This only confirms the fact that the respect and protection of human rights and democracy are universal principles, and that they represent a real concern for every civilized nation in the world.

In this context many of us are astonished that Fidel Castro's government has reacted with such hostility towards different agreements and resolutions of the UN Human Rights Commission which call for the specific application of the universal norms of human rights and for the presence of an UN representative on the island. Moreover, the government insults A deep analysis is not required to understand that the main reason for this attitude is that Castro's regime does not belong to the new international community that adheres to common principles and norms. On the contrary, Castro's regime belongs to an international system governed only by motives of power. We democrats believe that the new international system is defined by an organization of states that follow basic maintenance rules within a global order. Nevertheless, Fidel Castro takes his relationship to the first system only as a form of protection of national interests, deeply rooted in the methods that were typical of the Cold War. And though he is well aware that this war is over, he does this with the intention of prolonging the existence of a totalitarian regime that defines the internal regime on the island.

After many years during which Castro was trying to dominate Latin America with his example, he now speaks with false indignation of the Latin American betrayal. He is speaking about those countries that used to remain silent when it came to the condemnation of the regime, but that today are ready to support UN resolutions.

Indeed, for many years our countries used to maintain a neutral position towards Castro's dictatorship. This was part of our diplomatic tradition, but today, in times of democratic globalization, such an attitude seems like an anachronism rather than the independent position of a continent. From a geopolitical point of view, Latin American countries have only played a secondary role in Castro's ideological perspective. His regime used our region as a diplomatic instrument in his confrontation with the United States and in his systemic aggression. This is the point of the digressions we have heard from Gutenberg Martinez and President Lacalle in which they talked about certain events of a strategic nature; that, at the heart of the matter, we democrats of the world agree with the situation and our position towards Castro's regime.

Yet I feel that such strategic events, such as the embargo, often obscure the real issue. The real dilemma is not the confrontation between the United States and Castro's regime, but the confrontation between Castro's regime and the Cuban people. I believe that we must bear in mind that any strategy that distracts our attention from the real problem cannot be considered positive. Therefore, we have gradually reconsidered what was once seen as a historical Latin American tradition, the results of which are the latest resolutions supported by many Latin American countries. These resolutions have cost us a stream of insults from Castro, especially directed at countries such as Peru, Mexico and Chile.

We know that the problem of Castro's dictatorship will not disappear until the island joins the international

community. This automatically implies a minimum respect to human rights, the force of democracy on the island and it further supposes a change in the internal order. While this change takes place, we must also promote and support the resolutions of the Human Rights Commission, the resolutions of the summits of Latin American presidents and parliaments, and events and meetings such as the ICDC Summit.

The only thing Castro's regime does to conceal his intentions is to attack those he used to consider his allies in response to their supposed condemnation of him. In this way he is trying to hide the internal reality of Cuba. That's why, now more than ever, we as nations have to find the courage to tell Fidel Castro that Latin American democrats and humanists will not compromise with anybody when it comes to human rights.

We, who have lived through horrible dictatorships in Chile, Uruguay, Argentina and other Latin American countries cannot watch the situation in Cuba with our arms folded. We have to fight for the consolidation of the long-awaited democracy, fight for a life in dignity and for the consideration of human beings. We must strive for the fundamental essence of ethical principles, a passion for the truth and a social and political order that establishes equal rights and promotes peaceful coexistence. This was highlighted by Gutenberg Martinez when giving key suggestions from the transition of our country, guidelines which will guarantee the rule of law and fair governance.

We must prepare to adopt policies that stipulate the role of each Latin American nation in the current process of globalization, policies that strengthen programs of regional and continental inclusion, and most importantly policies that support the democratization process in Cuba. It is not possible that some sectors of our countries say that they see nothing wrong in Cuba that is not a consequence of the policy of the United States. Latin American dictatorships such as those in Chile, Argentina or Uruguay are universally known and condemned, as Fernando Arroyo explains in his book. They are known and condemned and therefore one must ask why, after forty years, Castro's dictatorship is still admired by many sectors of the Latin American society and until recently also by many states in Europe. Why do they still look through rose-tinted glasses at a regime that abandoned its inspiring principles a long time ago, and which now systematically violates human rights? Surely political groups in Latin America and even in Europe cannot claim a real democratic conviction unless they categorically and decisively express that fundamental rights are not being respected in Cuba.

For this to happen, and to stop the Cuban regime hiding behind the actions of the US, I think it is crucial that we form a common Latin American position on the Cuban issue, in the same way that Europe has done. I would like to celebrate this European position and I hope it will continue over time. Moreover I hope that with democratic principles as our foundations, we can help the Cuban people to decide their future freely and democratically. When formulating this common position we should establish a schedule that would ensure that a peaceful and democratic transition arrives to Cuba in a reasonable time. We cannot go on hoping that no more people will be imprisoned for their responses and actions. Forums such as the Prague ICDC Summit are good opportunities to initiate this task. We will probably be accused of intervening into Cuba's internal affairs and of not obeying the principle of the free determination of nations. Yet this principle should protect the free determination of nations rather than that of governments, and an authoritarian regime precisely prevents a nation from making free decisions.

Latin America has a great responsibility as it must unite on this issue and make all efforts necessary to make the regime understand that it must comply with its commitments. Such commitments include the agreement signed by Fidel Castro at the Summit of Presidents in Viña del Mar, in which he committed to respecting human rights, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was also signed by Cuba.

We hope that we will find a plan to bring Cuban people the liberties that would allow them to express themselves and to create democratic change and the respect for human rights. I think that if we strengthen our democracies and narrow the inequality gap in our countries, we will be able to protect Cuba from those adventurers who would want to adopt Castro's discourse on Cuba, as President Lacalle has referred to. Let's help the Cuban people think about their transition and let's share our experiences with them. Let's tell the Cuban people that an alternative exists and that they will have all the help and solidarity of the Latin American nations, and that it is them and them alone who will build their future.