

Cuba is the Unsolved Problem of the West

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I believe that Cuba is destined for the same fate as those Communist dictatorships that, years ago, held control over Eastern Europe. Cubans will eventually have the same rights as millions of inhabitants have today who once lived on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain, and our efforts will help this moment to come as soon as possible. Democracy has survived in the West due to the beliefs, steadiness and persistence of democratic nations that resisted the Nazi and Fascist movements. After World War II, the West had to oppose the threat of the Soviet totalitarian regime. In 1989 the Berlin Wall was knocked down and with it communist dictatorships in a large part of Europe. The wall was demolished thanks to the pressure of European democrats and the stronghold of the Atlantic Alliance represented by institutions such as NATO and Radio Free Europe. And furthermore it was thanks to the impulses of people for whom freedom was the most important victory — men and women capable of self-sacrifice, talented leaders such as Václav Havel, Andrei Sakharov or Helena Bonner, and all those anonymous people waking up every day with their dreams of freedom. This enormous shared endeavor should serve as an example and reference for our work and mission in Cuba.

Today thousands of people live in Cuba waiting and asking for our support, people such as Oswaldo Payá, Raúl Rivero or Vladimiro Roca. And there are thousands of others who, due to different reasons, remain unknown and therefore represent a nightmare for Cuban security forces. We know from experience that striving for freedom always agitates the tyrants, and we can see that the Cuban dictatorship is afraid of the thousands of people who, from their deepest souls, demand the right to be able to decide their own future. These people know that the most dangerous and efficient weapons against dictatorship are independent opinions, dignity and the defence of human rights. We must not let these people down, we do not have the right to let them down and we shall not let them down.

Cuba is much more than a distant island or a problem of the US. Cuba represents the unsolved problem of the West. Cuba was a satellite of Moscow during the Soviet Union and today, the same as yesterday, our responsibility is to help the nation and establish a free regime with the same commitment we showed in order to achieve democracy in Europe. The Cuban dictatorship is the last trace of a deep injury that in the last century divided Europe; yet I believe that with the turn of the century, we have also witnessed the end of the Cuban dictatorship.

In 1996 the Spanish Government had the privilege of holding the EU Presidency and proposed to the European Union the adoption of a new common position on Cuba that was unanimously approved. Since then we have persisted in denouncing all abuses in Cuba and set up two clear conditions that the government of the island must

agree to before receiving European assistance: the first being the ceasing of violations of human rights, and the second being the beginning of some kind of political openness that would lead to the transition to democracy. We should not expect a last gesture of dignity from someone like Castro who for more than 40 years had turned a deaf ear to the international clamour asking for change.

The response of the dictator was the response of a man wanting to die without recognizing the failure of his revolution. Those who made their disagreement public suffered stronger repression, as was the case for the seventy five people that ended up in prison last year for offences such as having a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or asking for signatures to support a referendum that is enshrined in the Cuban constitution. No one should be in prison for expressing peacefully and freely his or her opinion whether or not it is a critical opinion; no one should be sentenced without a fair and impartial trial. Nothing can justify the fact that people like Raúl Rivero are in prison solely because of writing critical poetry against the dictator. As inhabitants of the free world we cannot surrender to the pressures and blackmailing of one of the longest dictatorships in history. Democracy can only come to Cuba if we hold a steady common position, produce diplomatic pressure and provide support to Cuban democrats. We shall only be satisfied when Cubans are actually free.

I urge all those who exercise their right to free opinion against any violation of human rights, that they do it also against the incarceration of political prisoners in Cuba. I urge all those who deal with unfair and oppressive situations in any country in the world that they do not forget that in Cuba people are in prison simply for requesting democracy. We must incessantly demand freedom for the Cuban political prisoners and we must feel personally assaulted as long as things like those we have denounced today still occur. With the efforts of all democrats, Cuba will become free sooner rather than later.