

# International Solidarity is the Antidote to Fear

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The Cuban slogan or rather the slogan of the Castro totalitarian regime states that countries of the international community do not have the right to make declarations with regard to the situation in Cuba, based on the principle of non-intervention. However, the argument concerning the self-determination of countries and nations is not synonymous or equal to the self-determination of governments. Sovereignty lies with the nation, the people and the voice of the people that can be expressed and shown in free, democratic and open elections. Furthermore, in a country where you have a precise number of candidates to choose from for a certain number of posts, with all candidates chosen by a single political party, the Communist Party, the sovereignty of the nation, is not respected. In such a situation, it is not only our right but also our moral duty to defend the rights of the Cuban nation to express their sovereignty in free and democratic elections. The other key argument against the slogan of the dictatorial regime of Fidel Castro is that today, human rights are not the legacy of one concrete state. Rather, if human rights are not respected in a country, if there is no independent legislative power that controls the acts of the Government, if there is no judicial power to ensure fair and impartial justice in an objective manner, then the international community has the right, and consequently the inevitable duty, to condemn such violations of human rights and to strive for them to be respected.

International solidarity is fundamental for the prevention of repression carried out by the security apparatus of totalitarian and dictatorship regimes. Due to our experience of a dictatorship in Chile, we can recognize the assistance that international solidarity, in particular the presence of Fernando Bolio, a special UN representative for human rights, provided in the saving of many lives. Thanks to this, today we have a democracy with full respect for human rights. International solidarity is the antidote to fear; it is the necessary recognition of those people that cannot express their opinion, those that today are in prison simply for the expression of their opinions.

Furthermore, our experience also nourishes our hope that there is no political regime that could be irrevocable. During the 70s and 80s some people argued that dictatorships and totalitarian regimes were irrevocable, yet this theory was consequently disproved, in particular in relation to Latin America. There was one person who proclaimed that there is no human or political structure that is be rigid, forever or irrevocable. This person was His Holiness John Paul II, who based his argument on one fundamental affirmation — the supremacy of human dignity. Human dignity may be asleep but once it is awoken, it expresses itself clearly and succinctly, and we can see this in the respect for democracy and human rights. Therefore our commitment to help transform Cuba into a democratic country is very important.

The basic collective objective should be that our activities aid the creation of the conditions required for the Cuban nation to be able to decide about its future, its political regime and government, and so that decisions are made internally, rather than from outside the country. Undoubtedly, the International Committee has to provide coordination and support for a plan to be developed that aims to facilitate and help the Cuban people to decide about their future.

There are a number of measures to be taken which would facilitate this. First of all, a web page could be created as a counterbalance to the propaganda of misinformation and distortion of reality produced by the central apparatus of the Castro dictatorship and the Communist Party. This web-site would inform about human rights activists, political prisoners and their families. Secondly, an international network of statesmen could be

established with which to support democracy in Cuba. This network could coordinate joint activities with the objective of installing democracy in Cuba. As of today, three hundred Members of Parliament have signed the letter asking for our Embassies to open their doors to Cuban dissidents. We can jointly submit different draft agreements in our parliaments.

We have already implemented a number of activities which we would like to detail here, and furthermore present some possibilities of what could be approved in the future. First of all, we presented in our House of Deputies a proposal, which was unanimously approved, that during the next IberoAmerican Summit to be held in Costa Rica our President will request an evaluation of the fulfilment of commitments taken by the IberoAmerican countries. In particular, this will focus on the commitment taken in Vina del Mar in 1996 by all presidents including Fidel Castro to respect democracy, plurality, freedom of expression, the right of assembly, freedom of conscience and economic freedom.

We think that it is important to urge our governments to adopt a clear position and to open our Embassies to the dissidents. We highly appreciate and admire the European position and we believe that Latin America shall have the same position and open its Embassies to the dissidents to provide them with status quo, moral support and to show a moral victory over the Fidel Castro dictatorship.

Additionally, we think it is very important to express our opinion clearly in the UN, and in resolutions, with regards to allowing the entry into Cuba of a special Human Rights representative appointed by the UN Human Rights Committee. This representative has been assigned each year yet is continually denied entry into Cuba by the regime of Fidel Castro. This issue is widely discussed in the UN Human Rights Committee and shall be supported. The last resolution was approved only by a majority of one vote: twenty-one votes for and twenty against. We in the House of Deputies of Chile promoted, in line with the Deputy Exequiel Silva, a draft agreement urging the President of the Republic, Ricardo Lagos, the leader of our coalition and socialist president, to condemn the regime of Fidel Castro and to ask once more for the permitted entry of the special representative. During a fierce discussion, I personally collided with the leaders of the Communist and Socialist party in a TV discussion and in the House of Deputies. They have based their arguments on what the US does and does not do. We strongly argue that human rights involve an ethical dimension that must be respected in the case of both left and right-wing dictatorships. Moreover, we argue that we cannot practice double standards. When Pinochet put Clodomiro Almeida, a socialist leader, in prison for his opinions based on Article 8 of the Constitution from 1980, we — the democrats and opponents of Pinochet — went to the streets to protest. Many communists and socialists who were against Pinochet today defend Fidel Castro and this is unacceptable and ambiguous double standards.

We have also submitted proposals to the Latin American Parliament (PARLATINO), asking for the cooperation of its Human Rights Committee to carry out its activities in Havana to monitor the situation of human rights in Cuba, and Latin America more generally. Once again Fidel Castro's government did not allow the Committee to work. My personal responsibility was over a draft agreement that we submitted to the inter-parliamentary union. This document incited an intervention urging that this institution made a declaration about the human rights situation in Cuba.

I would also like to highlight that I think it is very important that parliaments make a decision about the adoption of all political prisoners that are in prison in Cuba today. This would involve monitoring their situation and inquiring about their health and finances as therefore we can exercise moral pressure on the regime of Fidel Castro.

We also feel it is vital to set up an international network of NGOs that have expressed solidarity with Cuba, with the aim of providing humanitarian support and raising democratic awareness in a country that no longer knows democracy. Therefore it is important to educate citizens and to make contact with trade unions, churches, workers and university students. As President Lacalle said, it is essential to create an international network of intellectuals and artists as this would do a great deal of harm to the Castro regime. It would contradict Castro's belief that he has the support of left-wing intellectuals, a statement which does unfortunately hold some truth at the present time. Therefore we think it is very important to establish such an institution that would join Saramago, Galeano and many other intellectuals that have supported democracy in Cuba. To conclude, I would

like to say as both Gutenberg Martínez and President Havel have said: for transition in Cuba cannot be improvised and must rather be prepared. Therefore it is essential to establish a committee of experts to gather lessons learnt from the transitions in Latin America and Europe in order to help the Cuban nation to have a future.

And finally I think it is important and that it is possibly the most important activity, to set up a presidential group to support Cuban democracy. The essays here include three former Latin American presidents: President Aylwin, President Lacalle and President Monge. We have former prime ministers, we have examples of transition from communism to democracy and a person we admire not only as a playwright but also as a statesman, former President Václav Havel. It is very important that former presidents take the lead in this cause. The fact that one of the leaders is President Aylwin is of utmost importance, as he is a man who has been the mouthpiece of those without a voice and who has been the leader of the opposition against Pinochet, the leader of a model transition that didn't spill a drop of blood and reduced poverty to less than fifty percent.