

[Fidel Castro's First Speech at UN, Hours that Made History](#)



The first speech in the UN by the leader of the Cuban Revolution Fidel Castro (1926-2016) lasted almost five hours and is still among the longest given in the multilateral body, and one of the toughest against the philosophy of war.

Fidel arrived on September 19, 1960, in New York City being then the young Cuban Prime Minister, the champion of a newly-formed Revolution that hindered not a few plans of the U.S. government.

In the U.S. highest political circles the hostility against the Cuban Revolution had increased. The leader even denounced the humiliating treatment he received at the Shelburne hotel, the reason why he decided to stay with his delegation at the Theresa hotel, located in one of the poorest neighborhoods of New York: Harlem.

He was excluded from meetings and official events, but he could find support, admiration and a warm welcome in inhabitants of Harlem, mostly African Americans.

At the Theresa hotel, which closed in 1967 and currently houses some offices, he received civil rights defender Malcolm X, met for the first time with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, and had meetings with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Spontaneous demonstrations arose under his room balcony, where he hung a Cuban flag and once

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spoke to thousands of supporters of the Cuban Revolution.

He was also surrounded by provocations and disturbances caused by small groups opposed to the process of change that had just begun on the island.

On September 26, 1960, Fidel arrived at the UN General Assembly getting the forum's attention for almost five hours.

However, the most significant thing of those first Fidel's words before the largest body of the UN was not the length of his speech, but his attack against the brutal philosophy of war.

The denunciation of many actions by the U.S. government against the Cuban Revolution and the use of force through the growing arms race were the central arguments of the speech that provoked repeated ovations and applause.

Fidel criticized how war was used to monopolize underdeveloped countries and steal their resources, and attacked U.S. policy toward Cuba and other nations in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

'From the beginning of human history, wars have arisen, fundamentally, for one reason: some people's desire to deprive others of their riches. Let the philosophy of plunder disappear, and the philosophy of war will have disappeared,' he said. He also showed how the arms race has always been a big business for monopolies, which like the crows 'feed on the corpses brought by wars.'

The hostility of the U.S. authorities towards the Cuban delegation was sustained until the last moment, when they confiscated the aircraft in which Fidel had to return to Havana, and Nikita Khrushchev offered a plane.

In January 1961, President Dwight Eisenhower's administration cut off diplomatic relations with Cuba and in April of the same year, shortly after assuming as President, John F. Kennedy ordered to invade the Bay of Pigs.

The attempt failed and it turned out to be for Cuba the victory of Playa Giron.

FIDEL, HARLEM AND CROWDS IN NEW YORK

Earlier, on April 24, 1959, a crowd had gathered in Central Park to see and hear the Cuban leader speak. There were many people from different Latin American countries and a thousands of Americans, according to press reports.

Fidel arrived in New York in conditions very different from those of his first time in the city, a tourism visit made in 1948 when he was a law student at the University of Havana.

On the second occasion, he introduced himself as one of the main figures of the Cuban Revolution and the media closely followed his journey through the Big Apple. In fact, he offered several press conferences and interviews.

With his usual olive green uniform, he also visited the Empire State Building, toured the Bronx Zoo, visited Wall Street, had a meeting with New York Mayor Robert Wagner, visited the United Nations Headquarters and gave a conference at Columbia University.

The Revolution had only four months in power and the United States had not yet publicly shown its adversity towards the new Cuban government. During his four-day visit, Fidel stayed at the Statler Hilton Hotel, currently the Pennsylvania Hotel, located in downtown Manhattan.

But in September, 1960 the circumstances were different, and the authorities showed an openly hostile

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attitude. In Harlem, Fidel found a friendly environment, surrounded by the poor and African-American community.

When he was excluded from President Dwight Eisenhower's luncheon for Latin American leaders participating in the UN General Assembly, the Cuban leader held an alternative meeting in the cafeteria of the Theresa hotel for a dozen local black employees.

In 1979, Fidel returned to New York for another UN meeting and reiterated the denunciations of the systematic plundering by the great powers in poor countries.

On the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, in 1995, the leader of the Cuban Revolution returned to visit the main headquarters of the multilateral body and his speech provoked again long ovations.

'We demand a world without ruthless blockades that cause the deaths of men, women and children as silent atomic bombs,' he said, referring -among others- to the economic, commercial and financial siege imposed on Cuba by the United States in 1962.

On that occasion, Fidel returned to visit the Theresa Hotel, in Harlem, and went to one of the religious institutions of the largest African-American community in the United States, the Abyssinian Baptist Church.

On the 35th anniversary of my first visit to this neighborhood, he expressed to some 1,300 people gathered in Harlem, the authorities still exclude me from official events and dinners as if we were in the days of the Cold War, reported the New York Times.

Fidel also visited the Jimmy's Bronx Cafe and held a meeting with religious leaders.

In his last visit to the UN, in 2000, the then Cuban President called for turning that body into an institution 'that truly represents all the peoples of the world' and stressed the need for changes in the Security Council.

Likewise, in other UN discussion forums he offered the Cuban solidarity and its doctors to cooperate with African countries and any other.

Fidel also gave a speech at the Riverside Church, in front of an audience of 3,000 people, where he declared his love for the 'real people' of New York and especially, his friends in Harlem.

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