

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FIDEL CASTRO RUZ, FIRST SECRETARY OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CUBA AND PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF STATE AND COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, AT THE FIRST WORKING SESSION OF THE ACS SUMMIT, SANTO DOMINGO, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, 17 APRIL 1999 [1]

Data:

17/04/1999

Since you are asking me, although I still have not been able to summarize all that has been discussed here, I will say a few words and I promise to be brief. (Laughter)

While the other colleagues talked I was thinking about the diversity of circumstances that make up the history, the life and the interests of all the countries gathered here, and how difficult it is to find a common language.

It seemed necessary to me to begin by clarifying the meaning that for everyone of us have such concepts as the FTAA [Free-Trade Area of the Americas], NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement], the Caribbean Basin Initiative, ACP [African, Caribbean and Pacific States], Lomé.

Sometimes, I get the impression that we are like those people standing at a corner who want to go somewhere and simply take the first bus that comes by --one today, another one the next day-- and that is how we often end up moving in all directions.

There are conflicting interests --that is beyond question-- and we must begin by conceding that much. Some of those conflicts of interests have come to light again here.

We are lacking a clear vision of the future world. For example, what does the WTO [World Trade Organization] really mean to us? Even when everybody wanted a world organization for a large-scale trade. That movement was born in Havana a long time ago.

How do I see the WTO at this time? Actually, and I say this frankly, I see it as a fearsome instrument for the recolonization and exploitation of the world. How can anyone justify a policy conducive to the removal of the modest preferences barely enjoyed by 70 Lome countries? Because, as a country from the Third World family I am concerned not only about our problems, those of the Caribbean and Latin America, but also about the problems of Africa and other parts of the world. We are part of that globalized world and our destiny cannot be separated from that of all those countries.

Why should numerous small Caribbean economies sustained by the banana be snatched overnight from their means of life? And this to the benefit of a large American transnational which, as everybody knows, has inspired that claim to the WTO. The United States is neither a producer nor an exporter but rather a large consumer of bananas at the lowest possible price.

As Cubans we are part of the Latin American family. I know that Guatemala grows bananas and so do

Honduras, Ecuador, Mexico and other countries, too.

I have often thought about what our position should be on that issue. But, when I pondered over this I did not hesitate in supporting the Caribbean's position. Does that mean that we are distancing from, or are unaware of, the interests of the Central American countries? No, absolutely not. But I see a conflict of interests here.

If you take into account that those Caribbean islands banana exports are barely 1.5 per cent --some more and some less if I am not wrong, it might be even less -- of the world consumption, I wonder why should that become a bone of contention. Those are reconcilable interests and there are a lot of things in which we can, and must, support the Central American countries in many respects. Right now, we are supporting their idea of a comprehensive social and economic development as well as their struggle for the condonation of debts. We are demanding from the developed world the contribution of all the resources needed in Central America after the hurricane. We know the situation, the need for a comprehensive development, not just economic but also a social and human development.

There are many things in which we can support them because we share common interests; I feel this is a conflict that can be resolved. The relative figure of the Caribbean countries' share is negligible in as much as their lands are limited. Also, when I think that there are two or three big American transnationals that control the banana trade in the world, I ask myself why is it necessary to sacrifice tens of thousands of families who, in Jamaica --I have seen them-- and in other Caribbean countries, cultivate two or three hectares of bananas.

Actually, no humane considerations are made at the WTO to adopt such decisions. It is dreadful to see the Lome preferences being abolished because how is Africa going to make a living? How can those preferences be snatched from them? I do not think that is the way. We must unite to demand resources, to file our claims, to make denunciations, to speak up about the realities of the world we live in.

How much is spent on weapons? How much is spent on luxuries? How much is spent on aircraft carriers, battleships, planes, missiles, the conquest of space etc.? On the other hand, how much is spent on development?

The industrialized countries --[Dominican Republic President] Leonel [Fernandez] mentioned this-- are looking after their own best interests. He was talking of matters related to free-trade zones and assembly plants. That is really what, in essence, interests them and, as I see it, they want to turn the Third World into one big free-trade zone where they do not pay anything but wages and low wages at that --not even taxes because they demand tax exemptions. They have got us competing among ourselves to give them the most facilities while charging the lowest taxes. These are common interests not only for the countries of the Caribbean Basin but of the whole Third World, too.

I think, however, that despite these differences in interests, situations and history the best thing we can do is what we are doing here: getting together and discussing.

I realized in [the Ibero-American conference at] Margarita that there was a problem in the Caribbean when I perceived the efforts made by the Dominican Republic with the Central American countries and I realized that Central America and the Caribbean felt really God forsaken.

There was talk of MERCOSUR --an excellent idea that we applaud-- an endeavor with the Andean Pact. It is now very clear to me that all of South America needs to unite. I always ask the leaders --and not just the leaders of the countries but of international organizations-- when are they going to unite and what are the obstacles hindering the unity of MERCOSUR and the Andean Pact.

To many friends from South America -- [Venezuelan President Hugo] Chavez knows this, [Colombian] President [Andres] Pastrana knows this, the president of Brazil knows this --I have said that the Caribbean and Central America feel forgotten. It became obvious at that meeting in Margarita when we

were left on our own and the representative of Puerto Rico spoke and said what was happening. (Someone says that it was Costa Rica.) Indeed, it was Costa Rica. If only we could say Puerto Rico too, because it is as much a Latin American country as any of us and just as Caribbean as any of us. But we already know the reasons why it cannot attend this meeting.

I was saying that the Caribbean cannot be forgotten, that Central America cannot be forgotten. I was not thinking of Cuba. Cuba has been forgotten for a long time, for more than 40 years. Before, we were forgotten; now, we are still forgotten but in a different way because we became independent, really, we became the owners of our destiny. That is the reason why we were expelled from the OAS almost 40 years ago. That is also the reason why there are words here whose meaning I do not understand.

For example, what does "World Bank" mean to us? What does "Inter-American Bank" mean, even if presided over by our esteemed and great friend Mr. Iglesias? What does "Summit of the Americas" mean to us? What is that? You should know a bit more about that than I do because, for some reason, perhaps because you are much better than all of us and holier than all of us and you have not come up from the very depths of hell, you know what the Summit of the Americas is and some of those things. We have practically forgotten all that.

FTAA? What is the FTAA to us? I very much thank [Jamaican Prime Minister Percival J.] Patterson for having recalled and mentioned in a very subtle, very prudent and very discreet way "Why do some have to be excluded?" Actually, there are not "some". The only mistake is to talk in the plural. There is only one excluded (Laughter) and that is Cuba.

Fortunately, in our disgrace we have learned to get by with what we have, to live modestly but with great dignity, to share what we have among ourselves and to share what little we have with others, when possible.

That is why when we were discussing hurricanes and other things we recalled the history of the past few months and the efforts made by our small blockaded country to contribute to facing the difficulties created by the hurricanes. I do not intend to talk about that. Why talk about that? It is not our intention to advertise ourselves, far from it; we rather work quietly.

We work quietly not just in matters that are sometimes known but also in our conversations with Europeans and American leaders; because despite everything some do visit us, you see, some prestigious, intelligent people. And we discuss everything. We discuss from the world's problems and real situation to the possibility that, one day, all those over-inflated stock markets will deflate and there will be a catastrophe in the United States worse than that of 1929. Some mathematical calculations lead you to that conclusion. That will explode one day and that is something worth thinking about, too.

Likewise, we discuss whatever conflict; the situation in Russia and why they are going to drag that country to an explosion; I also remind them that the West has taken out of Russia 300 billion dollars and we know where that money is invested. Europe knows it but they never talk about it. Meanwhile, they haggle with that country over a 20 billion credit, which is a drop in the ocean, knowing as I do the situation there which was the driving force of the crisis that broke out in South-East Asia, a crisis that had already begun in Mexico and was contained at a great effort; then it hit there and later it reached Russia.

When I took part in a meeting with the university students here, in Santo Domingo, that day --I think it was the 19th of August [1998]-- I told them that the Russian economy was about to explode. I did not know that it was exploding at that very moment. A few days later we learned about the trauma, the scare, the depressing fall in 512 points at the famous United States Dow Jones, all in one day, and how as a result of that the Monetary Fund and the World Bank were scared.

You surely have all heard of the self-criticism in New York, in the meetings held on 5-6, October, by the representatives of the International Monetary Fund --and the protests of the World Bank as to its role in

helping social development. You know all that. Then, the threat extended over Brazil and the rest of Latin America.

To avoid elaborating on a number of things, I will simply say that I do not believe in any of the precepts of the International Monetary Fund's catechism; they invite destruction.

I was listening to the economist, the president of Costa Rica [Miguel Angel Rodriguez]. He was complaining that the reserves were diminishing. But they do not diminish, they disappear overnight. Countries like Malaysia, which had a 40 billion reserve and saw it disappear in two days, had to rebel. The reserves of one of those really famous tigers, like [South] Korea, disappeared in a few minutes and those of Thailand disappeared in a few minutes. Those of Brazil would have followed suit if the West and the United States had not realized that it would have marked the beginning of the end, and then be gone to the aid of Brazil and you already know what happened: from 70 billion they dropped to 35 billion. The value of all the privatizations --the telephone system, the big mineral deposits that were even profitable companies-- disappeared in three weeks.

Those are truths about the world. Now, nobody is at all sure about what will happen next. Leonel talked about the high-technology industries but in those industries developing in those countries in South-East Asia, in a matter of days, computer chips dropped from two dollars to 10 cents a piece because everybody was producing computers, television sets and even motor cars, as if the existing production capacity were not enough.

You (referring to President Leonel Fernandez) were quite right when you asked where would the customers be found. Well, we know that jeans are produced. They have us manufacture jeans, shoes and handicrafts, all of which use extensive labor force but nobody knows where the customers are.

As for jeans, forty billion can be produced. There is no order in the world economy. I do not know if the Monetary Fund or somebody should have done something or if, one day, there will be a certain coordination. Chaos and anarchy prevail in world development today; everybody produces jeans until 40 billion are produced. But they are going to have an excess of 30 billion from those 40 billion because Africans cannot wear jeans, nor can they use computers, as it is Clinton's dream; he said it at the WTO. I listened to him from only a few meters away.

He reminded us of Karl Marx. (Laughter) Do you know why? Because Karl Marx dreamed of a single class and so does Clinton. But Marx dreamed of a working class and Clinton dreams of a world middle class in the style of California, Los Angeles, San Francisco, that is, everybody with computers, two cars, a house, five telephones. But it is a known fact that Tokyo has more telephones than the whole of Africa and that Manhattan has more telephones than the whole of Africa, with a 700 million population, and without telephones, there are no computers; no computing and no Internet.

It is a known fact that in Latin America only 2 per cent of people have access to Internet. That is for the rich, and when are we going to have that world?

Some days ago, I met with the president of Niger [Ibrahim Bare Mainassara] who, unfortunately, passed away or was killed a very short time ago by accident; it is still not known how. He told me that their infant mortality rate was 213 children for every 1,000 live births every year. Simply incredible!

Some of you or almost all of you will understand, to a greater or lesser degree, what that means. But there were also the figures of 87% illiteracy and only 16% of teaching coverage. When will the people in Niger learn to communicate by telephone, to use the Internet and to become all of them middle-class?

From time to time, I ask some of the rich countries how the problem of AIDS is going to be solved in Africa where, just to keep alive for a few more years those infected with the virus, they need 300 billion dollars a year calculated on the prices of those medications in the United States. That is something only the rich countries can afford.

In the past, people in Cuba used to say "a whites-only luxury". But, in the United States, which is rich, the black people do not have those facilities, nor do the natives or the mixed people. That is for the rich and nobody else. They are rich people's dreams like the conquest of Mars and all that, while many of our peoples do not even have a little school.

The situation has been similar in Niger. We proposed an aid program in health care to Niger. We are also proposing that for a whole area involving the poorest countries in West Africa because we want to prove what can be done with human resources. We do not have any money. Do not ask us for a 10 dollars loan because I can assure you that we do not have that money. However, we have a certain human capital which allows us to cooperate with the countries of the Caribbean and Central America and also with other parts of the world that we cannot forget and with which we must unite.

As we are gathered here together, the Central Americans are fighting the Caribbeans over the banana and the Latin Americans are fighting the rest of the countries that belong to the Lome Convention because the WTO is removing all preferences. What are we left with?

The rich countries are allocating less and less funds for development. There was talk of 0.7 per cent [of the GDP] in happy times, when there was still a cold war and a competition. Now when all that has ended, they do not even talk about 0.8 per cent or 0.7 per cent or even 0.5 per cent. They give barely 0.4 per cent. And the one that gives the least is the richest of all: the United States, which contributes only 0.1 per cent or 0.2 per cent --that is the truth-- while speculation grows to such heights that the everyday buying and selling of currencies amounts to, at least, a trillion; speculation in currencies, speculation in stocks, speculation in everything.

You (Leonel Fernandez) used the word "casino". Yes, this world is an enormous casino and a chaos. I am not saying this to discourage anybody here --no way-- but rather to convey the view that we should, at least, start by getting together in order to work together, to clarify things for each other.

In every one of these meetings things become increasingly clear to me: I learn, I listen, I see problems, concerns, points of view. And it should be said out loud that we must unite, not only here in the Caribbean and Central America but also with South America. They need it as much as we do because, although most of them are big and have better economies, when compared with the rich giants from the point of view of technology and financial resources they have nothing.

We need to unite. We must attach due importance to the Rio meeting with Europe. I think that it is a great step forward since they have remembered us and that we can, at least, seek for some room to maneuver by avoiding total dependence on a single country up north. It is of utmost importance and I think, Leonel, that if an agreement could be reached here whereby working groups start intensively preparing the common positions of Central America, the Caribbean and South America for the European Union meeting, it would be the best thing that we could do between now and June or July. I do not know yet when the meeting will finally be held because it has been changed several times.

That will be a historic moment, when we all get together there with Europe, because Europe also feels threatened. It was at war for 500 years but it is uniting now because it cannot live separately. Even Switzerland, which is so individualistic, so independent, wants to join the euro and the European Union. Despite their wealth they would not be able to survive in this century if they did not unite. That is the true lesson. I do not want to elaborate any further but rather tell you that I have listened very attentively and with keen interest to everything that has been said. I think that everyone who took the floor said something interesting.

I believe you will agree with me that we should especially recognize something that has been a source of joy and that is the presence here of the President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez who, supported by an ocean of people, is intent on changing the living conditions in his country --a country that could be more developed today than Sweden for it has a lot more resources. It also has talented people and

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FIDEL CASTRO RUZ

Published on Fidel soldado de las ideas (<http://www.fidelcastro.cu>)

universities. He knows full well --and we all know, he said it-- that critical poverty in Venezuela encompasses more than 80 per cent of the people. The middle class is not marching towards a standardization. The C group of the middle classes has already joined the poor sector. Things are incredible there and he wants to change all that. But his words seemed to me very noble, very honest, very spontaneous.

Chavez brought this up yesterday and he told me this in a few words, really. We had never said a word about it and we have never asked for anything because we do not like asking for things; this we say very sincerely. We have got used to not receiving, to isolation, to apartheid and still to trying to fulfil our moral duties to others, conscious of the fact that we are part of the human species.

Patterson said that [Jose] Marti spoke about the homeland being Latin America but Marti said more than that. He said: "Humanity is my homeland ". That is a much broader concept.

The young President of Venezuela is a convinced follower of Bolivar and he reflected that thought here. But he had told us... He told me yesterday and, if he so allows I will say it and, if not, I will keep quiet. (Laughter) Since you have said it, I feel I have the right to say it. He said that he wanted to include other countries --I do not know which ones they might be, I think there would be quite a few-- but he told me that he wanted Cuba to receive the same benefits as the countries included in the San Jose Agreement. I was amazed, astonished, impressed because it would not have occurred to me to ask him that, really. (Applause)

And I say more, I say let Cuba be the last country that you worry about. If there are others in the Caribbean with fewer resources than Cuba give them priority and let Cuba be the last, until you have better oil prices and you are in a better situation. We are prepared to wait, Chavez; we have been waiting for 40 years. But we are moved by your idea and I am sure it will be welcome by everybody here.

I have been a close observer here. After all, I have been observing for 40 years. At least, I have the privilege of stability. (Laughter) Maybe Patterson also has the privilege of stability and, in Europe [Margaret] Thatcher had stability for 15 or 16 years. [Helmut] Kohl was there for 16 and he wanted 20. (Laughter) I do not want anything, really. It is destiny that has given me a job and I have carried on while there is consensus which is the essential democratic principle. Nobody who does not have the consensus of the people and the support of the people should be in any post or in any responsibility, really. So, this is how I feel, that others have also stayed for some time.

I am criticized because I was put there, or I put myself there, without wanting to. Perhaps, because it occurred to us to make a revolution at the gate of the United States and we waged a very tough war. Stability has helped us to survive but when my comrades so decide, in the first place, or when I cannot go on, rest assured that I will not be bothering you here. Maybe I will come as an almost forgotten guest, as it is usually the case when people have left their posts. But, look, you always reward them with a little applause. (Laughter) I have seen that. That is how we have applauded the Salvadoran here, gladly so. He never applauds me. Did you know? I want you to know, (Laughter) but I always applaud him. Politeness does not signal weakness and we have to struggle for unity.

I want to emphasize that. I really liked the idea of setting up a university for the Caribbean in Venezuela. Then we will have two. Chavez, you may count on our collaboration. We have put Cuba's universities at the service of the Caribbean, and the leaders of the Caribbean know that they there is no limit as to the number of engineers, architects, medical doctors that they can train in our country.

After the hurricanes, in a matter of weeks, a Latin American school of medicine was established. It already has almost 1000 students. On September, around 1800 Latin American students will start their classes. This does not include students from Haiti because the language complicates things, I mean, if we use more than one language. So there will be another school for Haiti in the area closest to their country, in the eastern-most part of Cuba, where they will learn Spanish first.

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FIDEL CASTRO RUZ

Published on Fidel soldado de las ideas (<http://www.fidelcastro.cu>)

Caribbeans are in all the universities in our country and there is no limit. I am really pleased at Chavez' idea because he understands the importance of human capital, of training, in this era to be able to succeed in taking our places in the world.

I am also very appreciative of Patterson for his recollections and his words which I listened to very attentively.

And I deeply thank you all for your patience in listening to me.

Thank you.

(Ovation)

Stenographic version - Council of State

Source URL: <http://www.fidelcastro.cu/it/node/3453>

Links

[1] <http://www.fidelcastro.cu/it/node/3453>