

Speech by Díaz-Canel at the closing of the 11th Congress of the Federation of Cuban Women



Photo: Luis Jiménez Echevarría

Speech delivered by Miguel Mario Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba and President of the Republic, at the closing ceremony of the XI Congress of the Federation of Cuban Women, at the Convention Palace, on March 8, 2024, "Year 66 of the Revolution".

(Shorthand Versions - Presidency of the Republic)

Dear Army General Raúl Castro Ruz, leader of the Cuban Revolution;

Comrades of the leadership of the Party, the State and the Government;

Dear members of the Federation:

First of all, our congratulations to Teresa for her well-deserved reelection as Secretary General of the Cuban women's organization, and to the comrades elected to the leadership of the FMC, its National Committee and Secretariat, who are an excellent example of Cuban women (Applause).

Congratulations comrades, congratulations and thank you!

Thank you infinitely for the joy with which you have enlivened your Congress, you, who fearlessly face the most difficult moments of a nation that has been hardened in difficulty, without losing its tenderness.

Thank you for the love of daughters, mothers, grandmothers, which the hatred of the powerful and cowardly neighbor has never been able to extinguish.

Thank you for the creative resistance, which you symbolize like no one else, and which inspires us, constantly renewing the energies of the Revolution.

Thank you for these unique songs, these personal and collective stories of economic empowerment in defense of sustainable development, of participation in food production and in the defense of food sovereignty, of community work and patriotism that you have brought to Havana from every corner of our archipelago, defining Cuban women as conquerors of the impossible!

Once again here we have seen how there are good experiences that inspire us in the certainty that we can overcome the intensified blockade with our own talent, with our own effort, with our own work, as the Cuban women have shown here. Those good experiences are still exceptions, and now we have to make those exceptions multiply and turn them into the rule.

The hatred of those who live off the business of attacking the Revolution can do nothing against the strength of Cuban women, because from the times of Ana Betancourt, Mariana Grajales, Amalia Simoni to the times of Haydeé, Melba, Vilma, Celia, the Pelotón de las Marianas and any of you who are gathered here to talk about your dreams and also your complaints, the tender but firm strength of Cuban women is love.

Although at the time of defending their children, their homeland, their conquests and their rights they can turn into fearsome Cuban lionesses, even in those moments, what moves them is revolutionary love, a powerful feeling that conquers all.

For this fundamental reason it will always be a great honor and a great responsibility to speak to Cuban women. And it is especially so today, when you close your XI Congress, coinciding with International Women's Day, a date marked by the rebellion of women against a discriminatory order prevailing globally, which has not yet disappeared.

We cannot ignore in the tribute of this day that on a day like this in 1908, in New York, 129 textile workers were burned alive in a factory where they were prevented from going out to claim their rights. Their martyrlogy inspired the declaration of International Women's Day.

It was socialist women, led by the proudly communist Clara Zetkin, who succeeded in honoring March 8 in 1910, at the Second Conference of Socialist Women in Copenhagen. They not only vindicated the value of New York women workers, but also promoted an advanced list of demands in which women were

recognized as a social force that could not be ignored, and that should enjoy political and economic rights on an equal footing with men.

More than a century has passed since those events and, although the demands of women's struggles have changed, discrimination and various forms of violence against women still persist, to the shame of all humanity, without solution in capitalist societies.

Today from this Congress we condemn once again, in an energetic manner, the genocide and extermination carried out by Israel with the support of the Government of the United States against the Palestinian people and, in particular, against the women and children of Palestine.

The Cuban Revolution, with its profound emancipating and humanist vocation, since its triumph on January 1, 1959, promoted the development of an inclusive model based on equality and social justice, focusing its public policies on the elimination of all forms of discrimination, particularly those that, for gender reasons, affect women.

It is no coincidence that Cuba was the first country to sign, and the second to ratify, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, thereby assuming the commitment, as a State Party, to comply with this important binding international legal standard.

Only a little more than a year and a half after the revolutionary triumph, on August 23, 1960, the Federation of Cuban Women was founded, and in that act, with the protagonist presence of Fidel, its renowned eternal President was elected, the always beloved heroine of the Cuban Revolution, Vilma Espín Guillois (Applause).

With the Federation, as our people know it, Cuban women would be integrated into a single organization which, since its inception, achieved the incorporation of women into employment and into the programs of social and economic changes of the Revolution, adding in its historical development new tasks and responsibilities at social and community level.

Cuban women would thus come to have a transcendental role in society, earned through effort, example and tenacity. As Fidel said: "No one has made the greatest sacrifices like her (...) nor has she made such a great effort to turn daily effort into a feat". The logic of socialist construction with the Revolution surpassed the logic of capitalism in the emancipation of Cuban women.

Reviewing the achievements of the Federation of Cuban Women, it is obligatory to evoke the legacy and action of Fidel, Raul and Vilma, and with them all the comrades, hundreds, thousands of comrades that it would be impossible to name now, who throughout these years promoted and made irreversible within the Revolution the feminine conquests of our society.

But they also instilled in us the spirit of dissatisfaction, which obliges us to turn this day of homage into a remembrance of all that remains to be done and to advance, which implies, in essence, uprooting all the vestiges of discrimination and violence that still haunt us.

As I have said more than once, we recognize all that the Revolution has done for women, but we cannot remain stopped or complacent. There is still much to be done! We still have to break down cultural barriers or mental schemes that underlie and end up belittling women or lacerating their rights, their dignity, their just place in a society that aspires to the highest possible degree of social justice. We still have a long way to go!

Dear comrades: Between the X and this XI Congress, the National Program for the Advancement of Women was designed and approved, the best expression of the political will of the State, which encourages progress towards gender equality in the country, an approach on which we still observe misunderstanding and prejudices that we must eradicate.

Although the postulates of the Program, in essence, are not new, they do expand the impact of the Revolution in this area, and enhance it in an integral way, so that the process of transformations in which the country is immersed right now, does not cause setbacks in what has been achieved. And wherever this may occur, it should be corrected immediately.

In order to guarantee the implementation of the National Program for the Advancement of Women, an extensive and intense work plan is being deployed, involving all the agencies of the Central State Administration, as well as the various institutions down to the level of provinces and municipalities. The objective is to ensure that the gender approach predominates in the design of public policies and that there is a sensitive follow-up to all issues involving the development of women in society.

The legislative advances that support these policy projections are eloquent: the approval of the Family Code, the Criminal Code, the Criminal Enforcement Law, the Criminal Procedure Law, the Procedural Code, the Comprehensive Strategy for the Prevention of and Attention to Gender Violence, and the Protocol for Action in Situations of Discrimination, Violence and Harassment in the Workplace.

In these legal instruments we have very valuable tools to enforce the rights we have won and to win other pending rights. Confronting gender violence and all types of discrimination is central to the contents of these norms, but also to the actions and measures contemplated in the National Program for the Advancement of Women.

Although the reprehensible scourge of violence against women in Cuba does not reach the brutal expressions that occur in other countries, the cases that appear with unfortunate frequency are enough to outrage us and act, so as not to remain expectant, impassive and tolerant.

The enemies of the Revolution use and manipulate figures conveniently and tendentiously. For the Cuban State, a single case is alarming and unacceptable. These are people, human beings, lives that have been cut short or are being lacerated right now as a result of the validity of degrading patterns, of a patriarchy incompatible with the principles of a socialist society.

A single name of a violated woman should be enough to make us feel indignant and act energetically on a political and legal level, but always aware that this cannot be a one-day struggle, but rather a permanent purpose.

The subversive anti-Cuban platforms try to impose the matrix that feminicide exists in Cuba, a term that indicates alleged state inaction in the face of gender-based violent acts. We can state here, categorically, that this is a media construction, completely foreign to Cuban reality. There can be no impunity in Cuba, much less for crimes motivated by any type of discrimination and, above all, against women!

The legal regulations that I mentioned above have very precise sections that classify as crimes the most diverse figures that can undermine the physical, psychological or moral integrity of women.

The Internal Order system has the primary mission of confronting and bringing to justice all the perpetrators of these events. At the same time, the court system, in accordance with the law, provides high and exemplary sentences for those who commit this type of crime.

To cite just one example, in 2023 the Cuban courts sanctioned 61 individuals responsible for the murder of women. In 93% of the cases the sentences exceeded twenty years, and five subjects are serving life imprisonment.

These are just a couple of facts that illustrate the zero tolerance of the Cuban State towards this type of behavior. However, I think we all agree that it is not enough to confront these crimes with the Police and the courts. It is urgent to improve popular and family education systems at the community level, with a prophylactic and preventive approach.

In particular, preventive action is required in the community, in the neighborhood, with the timely identification of each case prone to gender-based violence. Warning calls, early reporting, attention and treatment as part of the influence on the social and family environment where it manifests must be the priority for the organizations that exist there.

On the other hand, we are not going to give up continuing to be a cultured, educated and educated society, and in those processes that are vital and that involve education and social communication, it is necessary to promote the condemnation of any manifestation of violence or discrimination.

Dear colleagues:

This Congress, from the grassroots level, has promoted deep and very critical discussions of the organization's problems, especially in the current circumstances.

Identifying the weakening of the base structures, that is, of the bloc and the delegation, as one of the main problems, forces the leadership of the Federation of Cuban Women to seek the most urgent and effective ways for its revitalization in the shortest possible time. Not doing so would break the logic of the profound social and mass meaning of this organization that brings together nearly 4 and a half million members throughout the country, but whose action is embodied in more than 14,000 blocks and 82,000 base delegations. That is where the FMC is or not, depending on how it does its job.

The blocks and their base delegations are essential for social work, house to house, family to family, woman to woman, which is the essence of ideological work and gains greater strength in the current context.

Preventive, educational and social care work at the community level needs the vision and action of the Federation of Cuban Women and must be the center of the organization's fundamental activity, particularly in the 1,236 communities identified as having a vulnerable situation.

I do not see a more sensitive and generous look than the feminine one when they have to face in their environment the presence of young people disconnected from study and work, of people with addictions, of single mothers with more than two children, of helpless elderly people, who often travel around us, deprived of basic human treatment.

These people, as we have been repeating in recent weeks, cannot be left behind, they have to feel the weight of the concern and attention of all our organizations, with the Federation of Cuban Women at the forefront, due to its massive nature, the nature of their missions and the sensitivity of women to face these challenges.

It is true that the organization alone will not be able to solve everyone's problems, but this requires permanent and integrated work with the rest of the community factors and especially the social workers.

To achieve this and at the same time revitalize the grassroots structures, we must also advance in the preparation of leaders at all levels, another of the problems identified by you.

The Revolution of women in the Revolution was initiated by leaders with solid Marti training and, therefore, a deep humanist, altruistic and supportive vocation. These qualities allowed them to understand and address all the sensitive phenomena and issues of our society, at the local and community level, which for years have been assumed by the Federation of Cuban Women.

In those and in thousands of examples that the emotional memory of our neighborhoods preserves, the most beautiful feminine tradition beats and the main challenge of the current generations of Cubans beats.

The current leaders and members must be constantly nourished by these virtues to promote with the greatest possible impetus the motivation for the work of the Federation in the new generations. That motivation can never be missing in a work as exalting of the human spirit as the objectives and missions pursued by the organization.

To imbue this spirit in the work of the federated women, it is necessary to eradicate formalisms, methods and ways of doing things that were defeated by time and the rapid advancement of technologies. It is necessary to uphold the principles from new platforms and media; connect with girls in their neighborhoods and in their study and work centers. Taking the FMC on time is the first step to guarantee your participation in the organization.

Dear members:

Remember and always carry with you that phrase from Fidel that we have quoted several times today, when he said that you are a Revolution within the Revolution.

Always be a revolution, in the semantic and political sense of that word, constantly revolutionizing, without giving room to routine, accommodation, conformity with what works poorly or does not work, simply.

Keep going out, as Fidel called you from day one, to conquer the world and to continue being at the center of this Revolution, with the enthusiasm and creative spirit of the Cuban woman since the emergence of the nation.

In our tough fight to face and overcome the blockade without waiting for it to be lifted; for guaranteeing the highest degree of social justice possible in the current complex economic environment; to correct the distortions in the implementation of economic measures and to cleanly and decisively confront the negative trends and the growing phenomena of corruption and illegality that the historical enemy of the Revolution fuels with the hope that a social outbreak will be unleashed, we have the will, dignity and courage of Cuban women to continue saving the homeland, the Revolution and socialism with the invincible force of the love of the Cuban woman! (Applause.)

The ethics of the cadres have been and will be a pillar of the Revolution and, as Che said, "its backbone." The cadres come from the ranks of the people, in the midst of difficulties and shortcomings they choose the path of sacrifice, that of doing, creating and transforming. The trust of the people is placed in the paintings, their ethics are the shield where all the actions of influence and subversion of the empire have crashed to try to outrage their example.

The maximum historical leaders, Fidel and Raúl, and the Party Leadership have shown and will continue to show signs of a frontal, transparent and without tolerance combat against the manifestations of lack of ethics and exemplarity of the cadres, always in the name of the people and for the unity of our country (Applause).

Let us act as Army General Raúl Castro Ruz has asked us in his speech on the occasion of the 65th Anniversary of the Revolution, in Santiago de Cuba: "I call upon all our cadres to meditate every day on what more can be done to justify the trust and the exemplary support of our compatriots, even in the midst of so many needs, to not be naive or triumphalist, to avoid bureaucratic responses and any manifestation of routine and insensitivity, to find realistic solutions with what we have, without dreaming that something is going to fall on us from the sky".

Cuban women have a lot to contribute and the Revolution needs a lot from Cuban women, not only resisting, but above all fighting (Applause).

I conclude with the words of recognition and encouragement that the Army General told us at the end of the 10th Congress:

“More than ever we need the strength and morality of our women” (Applause).

Eternal glory to the endearing Vilma! (Exclamations of: “Glory!”)

Socialism or death!

Patria o Muerte! (Homeland or Death!)

Venceremos! (We shall overcome!)

(Ovation.)

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