

*Interview with Cuban President
Miguel Diaz-Canel / Conducted
by Ignacio Ramonet*



Photo: Alejandro Azcuy

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(Shorthand Versions - Presidency of the Republic)

Ignacio Ramonet.- Mr. President, first of all, thank you very much for the kindness you have shown in granting us this interview.

This is going to be an interview with a dozen questions that we are going to divide into three blocks: a block dedicated to domestic politics, to the internal situation in Cuba; a second block on economy, essentially economy in Cuba, obviously; and a third block on international politics.

The first question then of domestic policy is the following:

For many families in Cuba recently, two or three years, daily life has become particularly difficult: there are food shortages, there is inflation, there are deficiencies in public services. The economic, commercial and financial blockade illegally imposed by the United States already existed, and what I want to ask you is what has happened in recent times for things to have deteriorated in such a way.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Well, Ramonet, first of all I thank you for the opportunity you give us to talk with you. It is always very interesting for one to be able to share points of view with you and also hear your comments on these topics. And you have asked me a very interesting question, because many people ask why if there has been a blockade for so long, what is it that distinguishes the blockade at the present time?

I think we must start from the fact that, first of all, today the blockade has a qualitatively different characteristic. Today we are talking about a tightened blockade and, furthermore, this tightening is supported by another component, which is the inclusion of Cuba in a spurious list that the United States Government determines at its whim regarding countries that supposedly support terrorism.

Above all, I am going to make a comparison that I believe is the best way to illustrate what changes from one moment to the next, if we compare what life was like for Cuban men and women until 2019 or until the second half of 2019, and what life has been like after that second half of 2019, which is what also frames or differentiates these two moments.

Firstly, we are a country that has suffered the limitations and adversities imposed on us by the blockade for more than sixty years; an illegal, unjust, anachronistic blockade as a policy and loaded, above all, with an arrogant perspective of the United States Government.

Cuba has never just stood around with our arms crossed and we have developed a capacity for resistance. Even after the experiences we had during COVID-19, I say that it is a creative resistance, because the country has not only been able to resist the attacks of the blockade, but the country under these conditions has advanced, has contributed, has grown as a nation and, furthermore, has developed. That is, it is not about just resisting alone and doing nothing else.

Under all these concepts and all the strategies that the Revolution has had, we have been able to maintain a certain level of economic activity, exports, support for social programs of high impact on our population. And we have lived, although our dreams and aspirations have slowed down. Precisely due to the effects of the blockade, which I tell you categorically is the cause that most slows down our economic development. And I always say: If under a blockade, we have been capable of so many things, what would we have been capable of doing without being blockaded? But those will be hypotheses that must be converted into theses with studies, with verifications, with data analysis, which is not the case of what concerns us now.

In 2019, this country received export income from our exportable and competitive productions in the international market, because there was vitality in the country's economic activity; the country received a significant amount of remittances; received notable income from tourist activity -- remember that we had almost four and a half million tourists in one year -- and we had credits from various financial institutions, government credits from countries with which we have very good relations and also credits from

programs, from agencies, that allowed us to develop and support projects.

On the other hand, we had a stable supply of fuel based on agreements with friendly countries, with brother countries, which meant that under those agreements, we did not have to spend practically anything on fuel from the foreign exchange earnings that we received, because all of that had compensation from services that we provide to those sister countries.

Therefore, in all these conditions we had income in foreign currency that allowed us to import raw materials to develop our main productive processes to the extent that we could have those things with the limitations of the blockade. We could buy food to satisfy the basic basket. We could even buy food and other merchandise that we put in the stores. At that time, there were the stores that operated in CUC, and in the internal market in national currency. Therefore, our internal market had a certain level of supply.

We had foreign currency available with which we could achieve a legal exchange market, controlled by the State, where foreign currency purchase and sale operations could be carried out with its equivalent in national currency. We had an acceptable level of capacity to pay our debt obligations with countries or with companies that have invested in Cuba, including foreign investment. And we also had enough money to purchase spare parts, the most important inputs for our economy.

Therefore, there was a supply in the domestic market and there was an adequate supply/demand relationship that allowed inflation levels to be small.

All this caused feedback: productive processes, good productive activity gave more exportable funds, more income. Tourism was developing, providing more income, and all that was turning around and we reached a certain situation, I would say, of stability, without yet achieving the prosperity to which we aspire. And we were in a process of perfecting our economic and social system, and, on the other hand, also with a whole group of approaches, visions, postulates and guidelines in relation to the National Economic and Social Development Plan until 2030, and we continued on that road.

Ignacio Ramonet.- That was until 2019.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Until the second half of 2019.

In the second half of 2019, the Trump administration applied more than 240 measures that intensified the blockade. And here comes the first concept: intensified blockade. The blockade intensifies, and Title III of the Helms-Burton Act is even applied for the first time, which had never been applied and which has a tremendous impact, above all, of pressure on foreign investors, in which they have already invested, in which they were thinking of investing. And it gives full support to those who were part of the confiscations that the Revolutionary Government carried out in all fairness in the first years of the Revolution.

With these escalation measures, all our sources of income in foreign currency are suddenly cut off. Tourism decreases significantly, because the United States Government denies the right of American citizens to tourism in Cuba; cruise ships are closed, which was an important part of the influx of tourists to Cuba; a huge energy and financial chase is organized. There are more than 92 international banks or financial entities sanctioned or pressured by the United States Government, which is why their financial exchange relations with Cuba have ceased.

Remittances, which were an important source of income for the country, are cut off. Oh, and, on the other hand, they have also put pressure on and applied many sanctions against friendly and brother countries that steadily supplied us with fuel. Therefore, we began to have a fuel deficit. We began to have a deficit in the availability of foreign currency.

With these two elements, on the one hand, the national electro-energy system is destabilized, because we are capable of guaranteeing the operation of thermoelectric plants with national crude oil. But thermoelectric plants do not cover all of the country's electricity demand, especially at peak times, and we have to start up other distributed generation plants that run mainly on diesel and fuel oil. By not having those fuels, we are left with a deficit.

On the other hand, having less availability of foreign currency, we were not able to purchase in time the supplies and spare parts necessary to maintain the entire national electrical energy system, which, furthermore, is a system with a certain level of obsolescence. This increases breakdowns, causes maintenance to be prolonged and all of this conspires against the stability of the national electrical energy system and, in these conditions, we begin to suffer from annoying blackouts. To reduce these blackouts, we even had to close or slightly limit the level of productive activity, a group of activities in the economy.

And as part of these same limitations in foreign currency, we began to not have certain inputs and raw materials for important production processes. And the little currency we have, we have to dedicate to buying fuel, which before we did not have that expense because we had other mechanisms to solve this problem.

Prices increased in the international market, because this is also the multidimensional crisis that the world is suffering.

Ignacio Ramonet.- COVID-19 begins, too.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- There is COVID-19, which we entered into the year 2020. There are the issues of rising prices in the international market as part of the multidimensional crisis. There are the effects of climate change, and we have been affected by intense droughts, by intense rains throughout this time and also by hurricanes of certain intensities that have caused a lot of damage to the economy. All of this created an environment of medicine shortages, food shortages, fuel shortages.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Difficulties in transportation.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- In transportation. And it is also influencing our social programs and the well-being of the people, and is building a very complex reality.

In the first month of 2020, only when there were around eight or ten days left for Trump to leave the White House, he included us on the list of countries that sponsor terrorism.

Ignacio Ramonet.- The inclusion in the list of countries that favor terrorism.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- And then, suddenly, all the banking agencies and all the financial institutions stopped giving us credit. Therefore, today we are a country that lives off the current account, that is, what you earned this week and how you distribute it among a tremendous amount of priorities that the country has that cannot be covered with the income of a single week.

Therefore, the availability of foreign currency for all those things that had increased is beginning to be affected. We no longer have the same capacity to manage in time to cover and honor our commitments to pay dividends to foreign entities, to pay debts to countries or companies which we owe.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Or the Paris Club.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- We cannot develop economic activity with all the intensity and capabilities that we have and that we need to offer goods and services. A tremendous imbalance is created between supply and demand and, then, prices increase and inflation appears on a very large scale.

On the other hand, we do not have the availability of foreign currency to operate a legal state exchange market efficiently and, therefore, an illegal market is created for us.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Parallel, black market.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Parallel, which also manipulates the exchange rate and almost becomes an element that imposes prices and also contributes to the issue of inflation.

In those conditions, COVID-19 entered. And COVID-19 not only affected Cuba, it affected the entire world. And from our humanistic vision of Revolution, in times of COVID-19 our main objective was to save people's lives. Therefore, an important part of all the efforts and the little currency that entered the country was put into saving the lives of the population: first, on the basis of protocols for confronting the disease, using or repositioning medications and biotechnological products that the Cuban biotechnological industry had already developed for other diseases and that had a certain level of effect on the conditions of COVID-19. And subsequently, as is known, with the enormous effort, the titanic effort and, I would say, the exemplary result of our scientists, who are part of the entire conception that the Commander in Chief had of developing a productive scientific pole in times of the Special Period, with a closed production scheme, where the incorporation of science and innovation as a productive force, and incorporated the production, distribution and marketing processes. If we had not had that development from the nineties until now, we would not have been able to face the way we faced COVID-19.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Then let's talk about COVID-19 and you how you confronted it.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Yes, yes. Later we will talk about that. And, above all, the effort of the Cuban health system.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Sure.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- But, undoubtedly, there all the other phenomena were amplified and have continued these years; because it must also be noted that one of the characteristics of this intensified blockade is that it was applied by a Republican administration, that of Trump; but a Democratic administration has kept it the same, Biden. It has been a cumulative, systematic process for four years, a very complex situation for our people, and, I would say, loaded with tremendous perversity, which I am going to show you when we talk about COVID-19.

Ignacio Ramonet.- I would like, Mr. President, for us to talk about an element that you have just addressed that is very annoying for people in Cuba and that is the blackouts.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- The blackouts.

Ignacio Ramonet.- I think it is one of the problems that bothers many citizens the most. How can you evaluate the energy situation in the country? You just mentioned some elements, but what perspective of solutions can you announce to the citizens of Cuba?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Ramonet, today, at the moment when we are holding this meeting, we are in an extremely complex situation regarding energy issues.

Today, we have an unstable electrical system for several reasons that I am going to explain to you now, and at this time, this week, we have suffered severe blackouts throughout the country. We have not been able to close the national electrical system for more than five days within twenty-four hours, which means that at all times we have had some level of blackouts, and that, successively, undoubtedly damages, complicates the situation, causes discomfort, causes misunderstandings and makes the lives of Cubans more difficult.

There are several aspects here. First, we have an electro-energy system that has a thermoelectric component, generation by thermal energy, which is resolved with the production of national crude oil.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Nacional, which is a heavy crude oil.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Which is a heavy crude oil, with a lot of sulfur. But it needs to be repaired. It needs systematic maintenance. It takes more than 300 million dollars a year to maintain this national electrical energy system, and that availability has not existed. This means that it has breakdowns and technological problems more frequently than should be normal in a system like this.

We have another group of sources of electrical energy generation, which are distributed generation engines, especially for use during peak hours, which require diesel and fuel oil, and we have not always had the levels of diesel and fuel oil that we need.

As part of this entire blockade situation, we, for example, were from October until last month without diesel or fuel oil entering the country, and we were depleting the reserves that the country had -- because we also have a savings program -- that also caused us, due to lack of fuel, severe blackouts, especially during the month of March. At the same time, these generating sets also need spare parts, maintenance which is affected.

We already have a small component with alternative sources, especially with the use of renewable energy sources.

Therefore, under current conditions, electricity generation may fail due to lack of fuel, lack of maintenance, or the coincidence of the two factors.

Today, at this moment, it is not so much the lack of fuel that is affecting us as the technological problems. And on the other hand, we have a maintenance strategy that we have been able to organize in the midst of this circumstance, above all, betting that during the summer, there is the lowest possible level of impact on the population. Therefore, these days we have had the coincidence of several plants that had scheduled maintenance, planned and that are being developed, but simultaneously others have broken down.

Ignacio Ramonet.- And renewable energy, Mr. President, are you betting on renewable energy?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- So, now you were talking to me about the solutions.

We are betting on renewable energy sources, both wind, photovoltaic, biogas, a whole group of concepts; but, above all, photovoltaics, because it is an investment that can be assembled in less time.

Today we have a group of signed agreements, with guarantees, that will allow us to reach more than 2,000 megawatts in less than two years. That would put us in another energy situation, because it would lead to achieving the goal we want, of having more than 20% renewable energy before 2030. We're going to get to 25%, maybe a little more, depending on how these issues might play out.

Therefore, this will give us as a first impact that at the peak of the day, we can have the distributed generation groups not working and we can cover everything with this new energy.

Ah, because one of the elements that I missed explaining to you is that to the same extent that thermoelectric plants go out of operation, the energy distribution groups that are planned, especially for peak hours, have to work during non-peak hours. Therefore, they wear out more than they were intended for and do not always manage to compensate for this deficit.

We have an entire program, which the Minister of Energy and Mines explained a few weeks ago to our entire population. Parks are now successively being assembled and enabled, and our electricity

generation will grow in this way, that is, there will be a substantial change this year, and a consolidation next year.

A part of these parks with photovoltaic energy will accumulate energy, therefore, they can be used in the evening hours. In addition to giving us that possibility, it will reduce the fuel consumption used.

Ignacio Ramonet.- That is used to produce.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Here, there are two solutions then: we can dedicate more fuel to the economy, especially to food production, to agriculture, to productive processes that today are very limited because most of the fuel that we have, since it is deficient, we put in function of electricity generation; and, on the other hand, our fuel purchase expenses will also decrease.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Purchase of hydrocarbons.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- But, in addition, the thermoelectric plants will work in a more comfortable regime, therefore, we will consume less of the national crude oil itself, which is also exportable. And one of the things we are doing, of the measures we have taken, is to take a group of steps to continue increasing the production of national crude oil. With that production of national crude oil to be able to export, and it also helps us to have a source of financing for all these investments that are expensive. These investments are very expensive. Investments in electricity generation.

That is a path, I would say, the most sustainable, because, in addition, it is totally consistent with everything we propose in environmental policy, with all the commitment we have in our programs and in our commitments with the COP conferences, to reduce emissions of CO2 into space. That is, it has complete coherence and guarantees sustainable development.

We are also looking for foreign investments that will allow us to enhance, update and improve the processing of some of our refineries, which would also allow us to process this national crude oil.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Refine it.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Refine it, and achieve other products that would also be exportable or that would serve us for national consumption and we would have to import less of these products for national consumption.

There is also a whole energy saving program that goes from the culture of the population...

Ignacio Ramonet.- To reduce consumption and not waste.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Reduce consumption, do not waste, and, on the other hand, there is a whole development of photovoltaic technologies, let's say more in the domestic sphere, of equipment that works with photovoltaic energy sources. Also the change of luminaires for LED luminaires that consume less and also lasts longer, and this entire combined group of actions will lead us to a better electro-energy situation.

That is well defined, it is well programmed. Unfortunately, to get to that point, we have to go through moments like these. But it is one of the ways in which we can overcome the effects of the blockade in relation to the energy issue.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Mr. President, in any case this situation that you describe and the previous one, with the difficulties, the hardships, has recently caused a sociological phenomenon that was not known in Cuba, which is social protests. On the one hand, many people are emigrating because they cannot stand the current conditions, and, on the other hand, the protests that, although they have not been massive, have been surprising, because this is not common.

So, I would like you to explain to us, first, how do you analyze the nature of these protests and what lessons are you drawing from this situation?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Ramonet, first, I believe that our people have suffered the attacks of the blockade. In addition, as I told you, it is a cumulative effect of the blockade of more than sixty years. My generation, which was born in the first years of the Revolution, is a generation that has lived under the blockade, by the shortcomings caused by the blockade.

Ignacio Ramonet.- The blockade has always been present.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- But my children were born under the blockade and our grandchildren were already born and are living in blockade conditions. Therefore, this has had a direct impact on the Cuban people.

Precisely, conceptually, what does the United States Government and imperial policy defend in relation to destroying the Cuban Revolution?

There is a reference called the Mallory Memorandum, based precisely on a memorandum that a State Department official wrote in the 1960s in an assessment of Cuba. He said that, due to the level of popular support that the Revolution had, the path to overthrow the Revolution was: economic asphyxiation, trying to do everything possible so that the people suffered hardships and deficiencies. And that this would lead to a break with the Revolution and, therefore, provoke social unrest that would give way to destroy the Revolution.

That has been the policy, that has been the reference, the fundamental concept, and that is what they are doing with the intensification of the blockade. In 60 years, they have not been able to break us, and they have increased pressures to break us. They are not going to break us either! I continue to believe in the response capacity, in the heroism of this people and in the creative resistance that I mentioned to you.

Now, in these particular times, with this intensification of the blockade, we have sometimes had the coincidence of several factors on this population: prolonged blackouts, transportation problems, problems guaranteeing the basic basket, problems with food, problems with medications.

When there are blackouts, one's water supply is affected, because the water supply sources also work with electricity. By the way, we have made a very important investment now in transforming pumping systems into photovoltaic systems as well, and it is part of the things we are doing to overcome this situation.

At a certain point, there have been in some places and with a certain participation, I would say, in greater numbers, more massive in the events of July 11th; less massive on March 17th, although the media presented it as very big and as part of the other component of this aggressive policy towards Cuba of maximum pressure. This, on one hand, is economic asphyxiation with the tightening of the blockade, and on the other hand, it is the media intoxication where they try to discredit the Cuban Revolution. And where there is a virtual Cuba and a real Cuba. So, there have been, in several places, popular demands.

What characteristics have the demands had? Most of these demands have taken place in a situation of peaceful claims, where the majority of the people have asked for an explanation. Look, these are not demands for a break with the Revolution. People have gone to Government institutions or Party institutions.

Ignacio Ramonet.- That was clearly seen in Santiago.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- In Santiago.

They have gone to ask for an explanation, to ask for confirmation if the situation is due to certain circumstances, and who are the ones who have come forward? Who are those who have been talking to that people, because they are part of that people? It has been precisely the leaders of the Party, the leaders of the Government and the administrations in those places, and without police repression, without repression of any kind.

Also, in these demands there have been small groups that have not behaved in that peaceful manner and it is one of the things that tries to distort the media intoxication that the empire also promotes. Many of these people have been financed by subversive projects of the United States Government and systematically receive money to take advantage of situations like that and demonstrate against the Revolution. For demonstrating against the Revolution, they do not have a repressive response either.

Ignacio Ramonet.- The Cuban Constitution guarantees the right to demonstrate.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- They do not have a repressive response. They can have a popular response because the population... It has even happened, there are people in these demands who say: "Wait, our thing is to talk with the Government and talk with the Party," and they have confronted and have not allowed them to shout counterrevolutionary slogans or other types of things. But even that opinion that someone who is not with the Revolution may have is not repressed. What happens is that many times, because it is part of the same platform of subversion, those who protest in this way against the Revolution, who are in the minority, in these protests commit acts of vandalism and attack State property, social property, disrupt public order, then that does require a response that is not due to ideology. It is a judicial response, a legal response as they would do in any other country, because they are disrupting public order, they are disturbing citizen tranquility, they are committing misdeeds or are committing acts of vandalism.

What happens is that this is not presented like this by the international media. It is presented in another way, because there is a script, a script for Unconventional Warfare that proposes: first, social outbreak, demands or protests; second, the assembly of police repression; third, the assembly of political prisoners, that is, repression with "political prisoners" in quotation marks; then demonstrate that because of these things there is a failed State. And then the supposed humanitarian aid and regime change. That is the script and the script of the Unconventional War that today is applied against Cuba, which is applied against Nicaragua, which is applied against Venezuela.

So, there is a distortion there and, I would say, those types of protests that have existed in Cuba, as you say, which is a relatively new fact – the world has also changed and our society has changed, also the conditions that cause the resurgence. Of the blockade changing our lives – they are attended to, they are explained. It does not cause a rupture between the people and the Revolution, because, in addition, we also have a work system where we are visiting places, we are constantly talking to the people, information is given about these problems.

Why isn't there talk about the protests in the United States, which generally end with police brutality, especially against Black people or poor people? Why isn't police brutality talked about during the protests that have occurred in recent days in the United States, on the university campuses, which were peaceful, totally peaceful, in favor of the Palestinian cause and against the genocide committed by Israel, supported by the United States, against the Palestinian people? And what has been the response that the United States Government has given to these events? Police repression, mistreatment of students, mistreatment even of teachers, with boots on people's necks. We have seen scenes of a teacher, now an elderly person, subdued, reduced, humiliated and thrown to the ground. That doesn't happen in Cuba!

Why were the protests that took place in other European countries in which protesters were also shot or in which in less than two days there were more than 3,000 arrested and which were peaceful protests not criticized? Why are those from Cuba the ones that are amplified and why are they the ones that take on those dimensions?

For example, I tell you, on March 17th, that we were in direct contact with the three places where social protests occurred. Around seven at night, everything was in complete order, and, furthermore, that day in the country, there were dissimilar activities in which people were participating as part of a Sunday, and still at one in the morning the intoxicating media platforms were saying that throughout Cuba there was a massive protest: a total lie, a slander, an invention.

Ramonet, what can you expect from a government of the main power in the world that to attack a country, its only sin may be that it wants self-determination, independence, sovereignty and that it wants to build a different model. What does the Government of the United States want to impose on you, as part of its hegemonic policy, and that power resorts to a brutal blockade for so many years and that to overthrow the Revolution it has to resort to lies? It's so perverse. Those policies are so vulgar.

I say, if we are so wrong, if we are so inefficient, if we really are so failed, don't apply any sanctions to me, let me fall. But no, I know that the example of Cuba, and I tell you this without any expression of boasting, much less, without any Cuban chauvinism. We know that we represent an example for Latin America, the Caribbean and for the world, because one constantly sees how many people in the world have expressed solidarity with Cuba. And that is not for pleasure. That is because there is an example, because there is trust, because there is a light that guides, with which we assume a tremendous commitment. Because we cannot disappoint those people. That is the only thing that explains why such a powerful government has to resort to these practices to try to subdue a small country.

Ignacio Ramonet.- You started, to a certain extent, before COVID-19 spread to the world.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- We prepared before the first case was confirmed. That meant training our staff in the experiences that were in the world, studying the disease and other things that I am going to explain to you now, which are also experiences and that come from that. But the concept that most encompasses what we did and the learning is that vision of the Army General Raul Castro, who said: "Prepare a strategy, prepare a program, prepare a plan to confront the disease."

The second, international cooperation. We immediately sent Cuban medical brigades to more than 46 countries, where at that time, in some, the epicenter of the disease was.

Ignacio Ramonet.- In Italy, in Lombardy.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Italy, for example, in Lombardy. That allowed us to support those people, help, cooperate.

Ignacio Ramonet.- And to learn.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- But we also learned, yes.

I remember that we had the practice that every time a brigade returned, we met with them and they gave us all those experiences, and we incorporated all those experiences into the plan.

Third, develop a network of molecular research laboratories, of molecular biology, which become important elements to be able to process all the samples, which in cases of these epidemics are massive at a certain time, especially when the pandemic peaks. But when there are no pandemic peaks, they become the possibility of having references, data with samples to know at what levels the disease has spread.

The role of epidemiology as a science within the Health System, because many of these diseases must also be faced with concepts...

Ignacio Ramonet.- They have a particular logic.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- An epidemiological logic: how transmission is cut, how it is avoided, how it works; the comprehensive work of all organizations in society and in particular the link, in the Cuban case, of the Health System – which is a robust system, we have to say. In the midst of the current situation, notice that we are facing COVID-19, as I told you, in the midst of the intensified blockade and already included in the list of countries sponsoring terrorism. The linkage and articulation of the Health System with the Cuban drug regulatory agency, CECMED, and with the biopharmaceutical industry, because that shortens the deadlines for clinical trials, it gives the capacity for clinical trials, it gives the capacity to generate new medicines or to propose the use of existing medicines to perfect the protocols for caring for the disease.

The Management System based on Science and Innovation. That was a fundamental role, we systematized a meeting, which we still hold, every Tuesday at two in the afternoon or three in the afternoon, generally, with the experts, scientists and institutions that worked on confronting the COVID-19, a whole group of scientific research came from there. There was a program of more than one thousand scientific investigations, scientific research topics; evaluation of the results of these investigations, and from there came the generation of our vaccines.

I remember that when we began to have the pandemic peak with the Delta strain, and that we saw that the vaccine distribution mechanisms in the world were totally unequal and favored the rich and not the poor...

Ignacio Ramonet.- Furthermore, they had to be bought.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- We had to buy them, and we asked our scientists: “We need Cuban vaccines to have sovereignty and face this.” And after three months there was the first vaccine candidate, later we know the story: five vaccine candidates, today three are vaccines well proven in efficiency and effectiveness. Two others are still in clinical trials, and they are going to be very promising vaccines, and since we started applying... Ah!, which is another lesson: you may have the ability to generate vaccines, which is not very common. No more than ten countries were able to generate their own vaccines, none from the South.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Some powers did not achieve it.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- There were powers that did not achieve it, and we shared and transferred that technology to other countries and we shared it with other nations.

It is having that ability to make your vaccines, but having the ability to be able to face a mass vaccination campaign in a short time. We administered 40 million doses of vaccines in less than two years. For that we had an organized system at the social level, at the community level, because people were not only vaccinated in the polyclinics. There were institutions such as schools, where vaccination clinics were organized and where health personnel were, working together with the social institutions to carry out this vaccination campaign.

Ignacio Ramonet.- And that in the midst of this intensified blockade that you described previously.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- There is one piece of information that I do not have, I think that for us in those conditions it was impossible to calculate it. When I saw and studied – at that time, we studied what was happening in the world with COVID-19 – the billions that were given to pharmaceutical companies to develop research, I assure you that we could not put more than 50 million into our scientific institutions.

Of course, you tell me: “That can't be.” But that is what I explained to you before, all the knowledge.

Ignacio Ramonet.- The whole apparatus works here...

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- All the past development was a product of the visionary idea of the Commander in Chief, Fidel Castro, which later had a transformation with Army General Raul Castro. What had been a budgeted system of the Scientific Pole also became a powerful system, a closed circle business for the production of medicines and in particular biotechnological medicines.

Ignacio Ramonet.- And for export, too.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- If all that preparation had not existed, we would not have been able to face that. And vaccines saved the country! When we had vaccinated more than 60% of the population with a single dose, the pandemic peak immediately fell.

Ignacio Ramonet.- It went down the curve of the...

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- After we opened the country's borders, the Ómicron strain appeared, which caused higher pandemic peaks in the world. In Cuba, one-third of the previous pandemic peaked and it only lasted two or three weeks, because the level of immunity that our people had with the effects of the vaccine was high.

Ignacio Ramonet.- It was big.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- So, those are other things we learned.

The role of social sciences, because when you face an issue like an epidemic...

Ignacio Ramonet.- COVID-19, the same epidemic.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- ... that you can not only see it as a health problem, there are psychological effects, society moves differently, in other conditions, in conditions of isolation or physical distancing. How you care for people with less possibilities, more vulnerable. All of this led to proposals.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Then, also mortality, with all its effects.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- All of this involved analysis and proposals from the social sciences, which were integrated into this entire system.

Honest, clear, timely and systematic information. Every day, there was a space in our media where one of our most brilliant epidemiologists became an opinion leader.

Ignacio Ramonet.- He became a popular personality.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Every day, he explained what was happening, how many deaths there were, how many cases of admissions there were, how rates were rising or falling and how the symptoms were.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Cuba demonstrated or confirmed at that time that despite all the difficulties, which we have talked about here, it was a power in terms of health. What announcements could you make to humanity about the contributions that Cuban scientists could announce?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- At this moment, based on this knowledge, what have we proposed? A compendium was prepared with the experiences and what we have learned, and we are designing an exercise, which we are going to do at the national level, to include this knowledge in our Health System.

Second, the program with the concept of one health is being defended, and has already been presented in these same meetings that we systematically hold, which links everything related to diagnosis, emergency treatment and the entire comprehensive analysis of diseases.

Among the things we learned, there are things that confirmed ideas for us. For example, the role of primary care, also designed by Fidel with the concept of the family doctor.

Ignacio Ramonet.- From the neighborhood, from the family.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- COVID-19 confirmed how useful primary care is, and now we are updating what we learned from COVID-19 within primary care.

We continue to develop diagnostic capacity. In addition to using PCRs and, at the time of COVID-19, we designed with our scientific institutions our own diagnostic mechanisms and diagnostic techniques that they also supported.

We have continued and can share with the world the studies of the consequences left by COVID-19. The issue was not just confronting the disease, it was not saving lives, it is how we guarantee quality of life to those who were patients of COVID-19, and there is a group of research.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Those who survived the disease.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- We have maintained the development of the science and innovation system that we apply in COVID-19, that is why we continue to hold meetings where certain topics are analyzed and updated weekly.

I want to tell you that there are important advances. The time will come to announce them. We will wait for the clinical results. But there are important advances in the study of many diseases and, above all, therapeutic solutions with biotechnological drugs and advanced techniques for diseases, for different types of cancer. We are working – our population has aged – on the issues of Alzheimer's, Parkinson's disease, studies on an important group of degenerative diseases. That is, there is a wide range of scientific results that I believe will have an impact at a national level, to continue strengthening the quality of Cuban health, but also at the international level.

At this time, with licenses that the United States Government has given within the tightening of the blockade, we are carrying out, together with U.S. institutions, two important clinical trials. One, of a vaccine against lung cancer that we have already tested in Cuba, which has very good results. And second, the study of a clinical trial that has recently been authorized in relation to Heberprot-P, which is a medicine that helps people who suffer from diabetes; the treatment of diabetic foot ulcers, at impressive levels; how it manages to cure the diabetic foot ulcer and avoids one of the most unpleasant things for a person, which is amputation. Today in the world, an amputation costs thousands of dollars in any country and, in addition, there are many patients with diabetes, many patients whose solution to the progressive advance of this disease is unfortunately amputation. They are also important results.

Ignacio Ramonet.- These words, I think, are going to be widely commented on. That is, they are going to give a lot of hope to many people in the world, and we hope that Cuban science achieves these results, Mr. President.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- We hope that Cuban science will be able to unravel these mysteries. And we are also working on research to develop a vaccine against dengue.

Ignacio Ramonet.- There is a Japanese vaccine against dengue.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Here what we are working on is a vaccine. There are around four strains, there are several strains of dengue. We are developing a vaccine which does not work only on one strain, but works on all the types of dengue that exist.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Excellent!

Mr. President, the last question of this block on economics and technology.

You are a defender of the use of technology, and we all know that technology, artificial intelligence, digitalization, are transforming our societies. You have opted in particular for the computerization of Cuban society. Could you tell us how this project is progressing and what the computerization of society brings to Cuban citizens?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- We defined three priorities of Government Management, which are: at first, Computerization of Society, which now we have advanced in the concept and have taken it to Digital Transformation of Society. It seems the same but not the same, the issue is not only about taking everything to digital platforms but about having a concept of life and a way of acting digitally. In other words, we defend digital transformation as a pillar of Government Management in conjunction with science and innovation and social communication. They are the three pillars of Government and are very closely related.

Ignacio Ramonet.- In the financial sector, it is also very important.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Note that one of the elements that I highlighted as learning was the social or institutional communication that was done with COVID-19.

So, I would say that the digital transformation of society is a reality. We have 7.7 million people registered with mobile telephony and around 8 million who access the Internet, we have expanded mobile networks although we still need to achieve more coverage. This also has to do with the fact that it requires investments in technology and goes through all these problems, but we have managed to maintain a level.

Ignacio Ramonet.- That is expensive.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Today, we are above the world average.

There has been a very up-to-date debate on the topics of digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and digital economy. As part of this whole debate, we founded the Union of Computer Scientists of Cuba a few years ago, where all the people, the experts on these topics, are gathered. And there is also a lot of debate promoted and also outings to support the digital transformation processes.

In the coming weeks, the update of the Country's Digital Transformation Policy, the Country's Digital Agenda and the Policy for the Use of Artificial Intelligence will be presented to the Council of Ministers, with a holistic approach. That is, we do not see only artificial intelligence for the results it can give us in the productive processes of services to the population in terms of efficiency, but also in ethical aspects and a whole group of elements that must be taken into account around artificial intelligence.

We are carrying out the digital transformation and we will also bring the contribution of artificial intelligence to the following areas: to the area of the productive sector of goods and services, because digital transformation and artificial intelligence can help us a lot in achieving efficiency in production and manufacturing processes. Above all, when we have to face a demographic dynamic where the country is increasingly aging, therefore, we have to seek to make our production and service processes more efficient, so that with fewer people we have more productivity to serve the population. Most of the people, and hence automation, computerization, digitalization are tools that give good results.

Digitalization is also being brought to the field of public administration, because an important element in which we are developing in digital transformation is Electronic Government, which means that there is interaction between citizens and all government activity. This also guarantees greater spaces for participation by citizens in government management. We have achieved, for example, that all the country's municipalities, all the provinces, all the ministries and most of the institutions have digital portals

or web platforms with which they interact with the people.

In recent times, the draft laws that have been brought before the National Assembly for debate have previously been able to be located on digital platforms. The criteria of the population have been collected with interaction and that has taken us to the National Assembly with modifications which strengthen and perfect this regulatory creation process.

We will soon make it public, the latest results are being evaluated. We are going to present the Cuban Citizen Portal. It will be a platform where Cuban citizens can build ones profile and thereby access a very important multitude of procedures without having to go through offices, without paper and it will make life much more feasible.

In fact, many of these procedures are already on the platforms of certain organizations and institutions, but now you will have on a single platform with your profile the possibility of all these procedures and, in addition, a lot of information to the population as part of that. One can look for any doubt one has about a process, about a procedure, about a law, about a certain problem. They can work on it, and it will be another step forward.

We are supporting this entire process of digital transformation and use of artificial intelligence with the development of cybersecurity, to avoid cyber attacks, to have security on all these platforms.

In a very creative way, they are one of the things that we are constantly impressed by and especially by the activity of young people. Our country today has a whole number of computer applications, mobile applications developed locally by Cubans, that work perfectly. We already have the variant in our store, which is an application called Apklis, where you can download Cuban applications from other places, but they are there. There are several Cuban applications, many of them are becoming a reference.

We have Cuban operating systems, we have designs and productions that are still limited due to financing problems, Cuban computer equipment, laptops, tablets, PCs.

Ignacio Ramonet.- There is robotization.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- We also have experiences with robotization. We can give one of those examples when COVID-19 hit. We wanted to expand the intensive care rooms to prevent hospitals from collapsing. Every time we went to a company to buy lung ventilators they denied us, due to the blockade laws. We gave the task to a group of young scientists from one of our institutions, and the prototypes were achieved and today there are high-performance lung ventilators, with levels of digitalization. I can tell you, it was brilliant, excellent. We confirmed its use, its quality by the best experts in intensive care, anesthesia in our country, by highly qualified medical personnel. And I tell you that this is part of the pride that one feels as a Cuban. That one demands something from our scientific personnel. Among them are many young people, and that there are immediate responses, but elevated responses, that is, responses that are at the level of any development at an international level.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Artificial intelligence, are you developing your own applications?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Yes, we have our own platforms that are being developed, our own applications, our own designs to incorporate them into production processes and service processes.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Are you working on quantum computing?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Yes. Of course, the acquisition of quantum computers already involves all these problems, but we have the preparation.

Ignacio Ramonet.- You have the specialists.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- We have the preparation, we have trained specialists. There is a whole level of knowledge and updating and international exchange.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Do you think that work could be done within the framework of Latin American integration on these particular issues?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- I think so. That was one of the things we proposed.

Now when we were at the anniversary of ALBA and the ALBA Summit in Venezuela, we raised the need to create platforms that would integrate Latin America and the Caribbean, the ALBA countries in relation to the issue of digitalization and artificial intelligence.

We, modestly, said that we were willing to cooperate with the developments we have in the country.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Even with teaching units, right? Above all, specialized universities.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Teaching units, preparation, participating in joint projects. Also making our applications available to the rest of the countries. That is one of the things that is already having an effect.

We have begun a process of banking, that is, of digitalization of Cuban banking, which has to do with these things that we are achieving.

Ignacio Ramonet.- This also financially helps with doing away with material currency, which must be manufactured, transported, bought.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Cash. We also have many applications in process geo-referencing systems, process geo-location; the work for harvest estimates through the use of these technologies.

There is an enormous desire for knowledge and development in young Cuban scientists and Cuban professionals.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Here we are going to take a break, Mr. President.

Mr. President, we are going to address the second block of our interview, which are questions about the economy, we are going to ask essentially four questions.

The first is the following: I would like to know what evaluation you make of the current state of the Cuban economy and what measures your Government is taking to face some of the current challenges. In addition to the blockade, obviously, such as, for example, inflation, which you already addressed part of it; the partial dollarization that is occurring, and also the lack of significant foreign direct investments that are occurring.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Ramonet, I think that part of the question, as an answer, was advanced when we described what the blockade meant, because it is precisely that blockade that gives rise to the new economic situation, which is the one described.

In other words, to summarize, to focus more then on what we are going to do to overcome this situation, we must say that it is an economy that today operates in conditions of complexity and where there is a whole group of economic imbalances.

So, to face that, what are we proposing? First, a Macroeconomic Stabilization Program has been designed that will be developed over an extended period, say, until 2030, and that will have to be constantly adjusted to achieve the macroeconomic balances that the country needs in the shortest

possible time. It addresses the problems of inflation, the problems of the exchange market and, of course, the exchange rate; addresses monetary policy, fiscal policy, incentives for national production and exports. It also carries elements of salaries, pensions, employment and all the reorganization that we must make of the economic system, and the policies that have to do with the use of our finances, with the allocation of resources, with the role of the state company, with the relationship between the state company and the rest of the economic actors.

Now, it starts from several premises. One premise is that we are looking for ways in which we stimulate national production, because by stimulating national production we gain economic sovereignty; By stimulating national production we can also satisfy the country's internal needs, so that the internal market becomes a source of development.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Do you think above all about agriculture, for example, for food sovereignty?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- We are talking precisely about that, yes.

We can produce an important part of the food the country needs and import less food. Today, we have to have more than 2 billion dollars to import food, and just because you invest it, you don't always import the same amount or more. On the contrary, you import less because prices go up and freight costs go up.

Furthermore, from this increase in national production and the efficiency of that national production, we also achieve competitiveness in exports to earn foreign currency and make our national production sustainable.

We are taking this concept of stimulation of national production and, above all, of agriculture, not to the country scale, but rather to the country scale being built from the local scale: how each municipality has a municipal self-sufficiency, how each province has a self-sufficiency program for the province, and that all those efforts and all that construction from the community, from the neighborhood, by the municipality, the province, reach the country and stabilize the food situation of the country.

For that we have developed a Food Sovereignty Policy and there is a Food Sovereignty Law.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Is it giving results? Do you see the results?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- We have an experience. Since January, we have been visiting all the provinces of the country every month. And in each province we are visiting a different municipality each month.

What have we observed? We have observed good experiences where labor and worker groups, with the leadership they have, do things differently, and in conditions of intensified blockade, just like all the others, find answers for what we have to achieve, including many of them at the level of food production. I have seen very interesting things in that sense.

Ignacio Ramonet.- That could be extended to other places in the country.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Yes, but let's say that today they are exceptions.

So, we have other places that we have also visited where the performances are not adequate, and where the groups are perhaps more overwhelmed by the weight of the restrictions of the blockade and not by the thought that we want to develop, which is the thought of creative resistance: "Because of the blockade, I am affected in this and this, but in conditions of blockade I can do this, this, and this and overcome and advance."

What we want is for those to be inspiring, those inspired by the example of those who do things differently, acquire that experience and go on to perform better. And then what is the exception today becomes the rule.

But there is one interesting thing, because, I tell you, these convictions and these criteria that I am sharing with you are not a call nor is it our propaganda. It is that one has it as a conviction precisely because of what he is appreciating in those visits to each place around the island.

So, for example, in the March and April tours, what did we begin to observe? That places that closed in 2023, last year, with unproductive, unprofitable, inefficient performances, are beginning to leave this situation behind and are beginning to get closer to this. Now what do we have to achieve? That this transformation be sustainable over time. I think the answers are there. We ourselves have the answers.

What are we telling them later when we share with the directorates of the provinces? You have to bring this one who doesn't do it well to the concepts of this one who does well. They have the experience right there.

It is very stimulating to see how in every part of the country there are things that still do not have the productive levels of activities, of contributions that we need, but there are also possibilities in these examples.

Ignacio Ramonet.- The necessary law reforms have been made by the State to facilitate new production.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- We still have to guarantee that the state company can operate under the same conditions under which the non-state sector works. But today the state company has a group of powers that have been given to it, which has always not been possible. They are used well. To the same extent that it is taken advantage of with a more advanced, more flexible business culture, it will undoubtedly have an impact.

So, a fundamental concept: science and innovation. A poor country like ours, with few natural resources but with a lot of talent, has a construction that the Commander in Chief [Fidel Castro] founded, that the Army General [Raul Castro] gave continuity to and that continues to expand and update in the midst of these conditions: that the responses to our problems must be found in scientific research, taking all of this to innovation. That is why we have opted for a Government Management System based on Science and Innovation to apply in all areas. It was how we faced COVID-19 and now we are taking it to the field of agriculture, to the field of industry, to the issue of food production.

There is also attention to people and families in vulnerable conditions. Each of the measures that we are going to apply has to have a treatment so that vulnerable people and families in vulnerable situations are not affected, because our purpose is not to create more inequalities. On the contrary, it is to reduce the gap of inequalities, and that we are capable of producing, aware that the wealth that we are able to generate is what we can distribute and that we are going to be distributed with social justice.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Mr. President, among the changes that have occurred in the economy in Cuba in recent years is the emergence of a market economy space, right? In particular, this has expanded recently with the development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, which here are called MSMEs. What is your evaluation of this phenomenon that is transforming the economic fabric of Cuba?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- In this sense, I believe that some clarifications must be made.

First, we have a planned economy that takes into account market signals, but it is not an economy that is based on a pure market economy. There is a concept of social justice where market laws are not those that drive economic development, because above all we think a lot in terms of people. And the efficiency of the Cuban economy is sometimes criticized from a purely economic conception. But I say that this blockaded economy, which still does not satisfy all our needs, maintains important social achievements that today in Cuba are assumed as a right; but in many places, they have still not been achieved. So, I believe that there is also a certain level of injustice when assessing exactly the behavior of the Cuban economy. On the one hand, it is a planned economy but one that takes into account and recognizes

market signals and market laws.

On the other hand, the MSME sector. First, there are state MSMEs and there are non-state, private MSMEs, that is, it is not just a field of the private sector. And the private sector existed in Cuba. Here it has expanded, because an important part of agricultural production is in the hands of private farmers and agricultural cooperatives.

There was self-employment. What happens is that by not having the development of MSMEs. In self-employment, the work itself was confused and it already generated certain articulations or certain relationships that were more than self-employment, and they became organizations.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Yes, there were already small companies with employees.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Companies of those that, although they were not recognized, worked like this. In other words, what I believe is that we updated the situation we had, and that something has been proposed that is very coherent, which is to take advantage of all the potential that the country has. So, it is a state company that must play a fundamental role within socialist construction, but that has a private sector as a complement to economic activity.

Ignacio Ramonet.- What does this private market sector currently represent?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Today when people talk about the dynamics of MSMEs, they say: "No, but they are growing a lot." They are growing. It is a relatively new process, and let's say that we already have around 10 thousand MSMEs; but one of our concepts, as part of socialist construction, is that the main means of production are in the hands of the State and are represented by state companies. Therefore, the greatest weight of the economy is in the state sector, without denying this important contribution of the non-state sector.

I think it has also been a relatively new area in the improvement of our economic-social system. Now what we have is to correct some distortions that exist in the relations between the state company and the state entities with the non-state entities, in such a way that everyone, as part of a set of economic actors in our society, contributes and is inserted in the National Economic and Social Development Plan. And that is why, by exchanging with that non-state sector, exchanging with the Cuban business sector, we are now updating a whole group of regulations so that this works with more coherence. And that it really enhances the country's economy from the contribution of the state and from the contribution of this non-state sector.

Here we are also insisting that many of these companies be formed from the concept of high-tech companies and innovative companies, and we can have them in the state sector. Because one of the characteristics of MSMEs, whether state or private, is that they are companies that, due to their conception, due to the way in which they operate, adapt more quickly to changes, and have more capabilities for innovation.

Ignacio Ramonet.- They are also smaller.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- They are smaller. They operate in a more flexible way and, therefore, the contributions and dynamics that they can bring to the economy are very important.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Do you think that this sector is going to continue expanding?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- I believe that this sector will continue to expand. It will continue to be part of our network of economic actors, and it will be a sector that will not be an enemy of the Revolution. It is a sector that will contribute because, in addition, it is a sector that has been created under the conditions of the Revolution. Although there is a very direct intention, which we know, of the Government of the United

States to try to convert this sector into a sector of opposition to the Revolution.

Now there is an enormous contradiction: there are senators, congressmen, opinion leaders in the United States who say that we must support not the state sector, but that we must put money into it to turn MSMEs into agents of change. There are others who say that MSMEs, since they are monstrosities of the Cuban State to achieve a certain facade, must be cut. Even they themselves have a contradiction, a contradiction that is not generated in Cuba. They are part of a business fabric necessary to continue advancing in socialist construction, involved and committed to the National Plan for Economic and Social Development, and attentive to the fact that there are no distortions in that endeavor.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Mr. President, we are going to talk about COVID-19, although you already said some important words before; but let us remember that Cuba, thanks to its scientists, thanks to its biopharmaceutical industries, was one of the few countries in the world that was able to vaccinate its entire population with its own vaccines, an exceptional feat in the framework, above all, of a country blockaded and with limited resources. What lessons did you learn from that crisis? And, also very important, what new contributions could Cuba make to the world in terms of health?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Ramonet, first I think we have to talk about how the world was shaken by COVID-19, and that the world should draw lessons from COVID-19. I believe that the first lesson that the world should learn from COVID-19 is that more resources, more financing, and more money must be dedicated to achieving powerful health systems in all countries.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Public.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Public, resilient and for everyone and not a minority.

On the other hand, international cooperation on COVID-19 is important and not selfish. I, perhaps a little idealistically – it has to do with the convictions that one has, with the training within the Revolution – hoped that after COVID-19, the world would be more supportive, the world would cooperate more and the world was going to complement each other better. But the opposite has happened: the world has gone to war, to increased sanctions, to blockades, to the construction of walls to solve international problems.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Hate speeches, the extreme right.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Hate speeches, the whole issue of social networks where there are reputational murders, bullying, viciousness, lies, slander and, above all, what you highlighted: that hate speech, that vulgar speech, that banal speech that does not help a better relationship at the international level.

This shows us that we need a New International Economic Order that is inclusive, that guarantees equity and that is fair.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Let it be supportive.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- That it be supportive, which is the opposite of the current International Economic Order.

What did we learn from COVID-19? A first lesson has to do with the learning we have from Army General Raúl Castro. COVID-19 was around the world, the first news of COVID-19 was already beginning, there were no cases in Cuba yet – we are talking about January 2020 – and the Army General told us: We must immediately study what is happening in the world and prepare a national plan to confront the epidemic. In other words, we learned that we had to have the capacity to design a comprehensive work program or a strategy to confront COVID-19 that involved all State institutions, social institutions, and the non-state sector of the economy. And, in the end, as a country we assumed a plan/country that would allow us to get ahead and prepare conditions to face that situation. That is what we first learned. Because of that

plan, because of that strategy, we were able to get ahead.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Mr. President, we are going to address the third block of this interview, it is about international politics.

For years now, Cuba has won a great victory in the United Nations General Assembly against the illegal United States blockade against its country. But clearly that victory has not led to concrete results. The United States does not give in and does not lift the blockade. What new initiatives could you announce to move towards lifting the blockade? I ask you, for example, have you tried to speak directly with President Biden?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Ramonet, the vision that you have on the subject is true, and it also calls for some reflections. How is it possible that the main power in the world, or the most powerful in the world, does not receive any support, a minimum support, only from the State of Israel? The rest of the countries vote in favor of Cuba in relation to the Cuban resolution against the blockade, which is presented year after year in the United Nations General Assembly. Last year was the 31st meeting in which the majority condemned the blockade. And there is no response? That only demonstrates the arrogance of the empire, and demonstrates – something that I would say is more serious and from which everyone should learn from – the contempt for what the rest of the world thinks. It is the contempt for our people, when the whole world sees it as a shameful fact that a small country is subject to a criminal and genocidal blockade, such as the blockade of the United States Government against Cuba, that they turn a deaf ear to that claim.

And, note, this claim is not only expressed in the vote in the United Nations. It is the increasingly number of countries, organizations of countries, regional blocs and international institutions that, year after year, also approve resolutions against the blockade or measures condemning the blockade. More and more leaders of countries are speaking out against the blockade at the United Nations General Assembly. For example, at the last United Nations General Assembly where the issue of the blockade was debated, 44 leaders of the world's countries spoke out...

Ignacio Ramonet.- Of all kinds of ideologies.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- From all types of ideologies. They spoke out against the blockade, for example. The African Union, the Group of 77, CELAC, ALBA, all are regional blocs. A group of institutions, including institutions that give recommendations to the Report of the Secretary General of the United Nations, supporting Cuba's position against the blockade. And there are more and more events, I would say daily, of protest activities against the blockade that take place day after day, week after week, weekend after weekend, in the world. We have registered more than 2,000 demonstrations of support for Cuba, in this sense, last year alone, and in the months that have passed this year, there have been countless demonstrations of support against the blockade.

We have conveyed, through direct and indirect means, to the current administration of the Government of the United States, that we are willing to sit at a table under equal conditions, without impositions and without conditions, to talk about all the issues that have to be discussed. All issues with the relationship between Cuba and the United States, all the topics they want to discuss, but without conditions and under equal conditions.

Because, at the end of the day, in the blockade there is a relationship, let's say, unilateral: Cuba has not affected the United States, Cuba has not taken any measures against the Government of the United States. The Government of the United States was the one that unilaterally imposed the blockade.

Therefore, the Government of the United States is the one that unilaterally has to remove the blockade. We do not ask for favors nor do we have to make any gesture to have the blockade removed. It is simply a right of the Cuban people. A right of the Cuban people to be able to develop in an environment of

peace, equality, without coercive measures, without impositions, and we are willing to sit down and talk. But the United States Government has never responded to that.

Ignacio Ramonet.- This current administration?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- This current administration.

We are convinced that this current administration has no will to change the situation towards Cuba, especially because it has greatly prioritized its policy towards the interests of a minority, which is the Cuban-American mafia, which resides in Florida, and that distances the possibilities of having a relationship like we want to have. With ideological differences, which we will always have, but a civilized relationship between neighbors, where there could be cooperation, economic, commercial, scientific, financial, cultural exchange, in all areas of life. It could be a normal relationship, like the United States has with other groups of countries that do not share its positions either.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Countries that were also great adversaries.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Great adversaries. So, why this cruelty to Cuba?

And we have expressed our will, because, furthermore, we make a difference. We have nothing against the American people. This is an issue with the Government of the United States.

Ignacio Ramonet.- How do you explain that President Biden, who was Obama's vice president for two terms and Obama had changed the atmosphere a little, let's say, of relations, relations were reestablished, has that position?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- It is inexplicable.

Obama began to build a different relationship.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Biden's wife was in Cuba. She had very good experiences, because she is a teacher. How does she explain that?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- That only says that in the United States, the issue is not about parties, a Democrat acts the same as a Republican. There is a military-industrial complex, there is another construction of power behind it, in the shadows, which is what decides the positions of the Government of the United States, which are the imperial positions. And there is this situation that is the subordination of a group of interests, especially for electoral issues, to the positions of the Cuban-American mafia.

Ignacio Ramonet.- And do you have any hope that the next elections will change this situation, modify this situation?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- I wish they would change and I hope we could have the space to discuss all our positions face to face and that there would be another type of relationship and that the blockade would be lifted. But my conviction is that we have to overcome the blockade by ourselves, with our capacity, with our work, with our talent, with our intelligence and with our effort, and that would be the best response to this stubbornness of maintaining this genocidal blockade for so many years against our people.

Ignacio Ramonet.- In particular, what is surprising is that Biden has maintained the list of countries that help terrorism, which Trump adopted minutes before leaving the White House.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Everything. He has maintained everything.

But, in addition, the Biden administration has had very perverse expressions and actions against Cuba. I told you about lung ventilators in COVID-19. During COVID-19, our medicinal oxygen production plant is

affected, and when we went out to buy medicinal oxygen in countries in the area, where we could have the necessary product in the country in less time, the United States Government put pressure to companies that could supply us with medicinal oxygen so that that oxygen did not reach Cuba. That is a totally criminal action. Imagine in the middle of a pandemic, with intensive care rooms, with people who have respiratory problems, that these people were denied service. They were being condemned to death. We had to make a tremendous effort, where we had the help of other countries to overcome that situation.

That is something that is not forgotten, Ramonet. It was such a perverse action. The way they manipulated the COVID-19 situation in Cuba, when they had a more complex situation than we did. We handled the response to COVID-19 better than the United States Government itself, which has money and wealth. They called SOS Cuba, all the media manipulation, all the events of July 11th.

Today, they have so much cynicism that they are able to affirm that they have not gone to another moment in the relationship with Cuba because of what happened on July 11th. That is tremendous cynicism and it is a tremendous lie with which they want to justify their position to the world.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Above all what you say about oxygen, they claim that the blockade does not apply to food or medicine. And obviously that shows that it is not true either.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Yes, it's a lie. The blockade affects everything.

Ignacio Ramonet.- There may be hope in this information that we have, that is circulating at the moment, and that is that President Biden would announce in the primaries who would be his Vice President, which would no longer be Kamala Harris, but would be Michelle Obama. Do you think that, if it were true, if it were confirmed, would it leave some hope?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- I think that today everything is purely speculative. I think that today in the situation in the United States, in the internal situation of the country, it does not allow us to objectively predict which side is favorable or not for the vote of the people that, in addition, today is very hard hit by the events of the internal economy of the United States. Every domestic topic, such as the issue of abortion, international issues such as Palestine, the issue of the war in Ukraine. In other words, there is a whole group of situations that are in the opinion of the American people, in the life of the American people, and I do not believe that today one can accurately say which side a vote of the American people may be on. There are many undecided people. There are positions within the parties themselves that isolate themselves from that position. In any case, the announcement of a person like Michelle Obama could have a different reading.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Mr. President, you are returning from Moscow where, in addition to participating in the ceremony commemorating the Victory over Nazism, you were also participating in the inauguration of President Putin and spoke at the Plenary Session of the Supreme Economic Council Eurasian. Are you looking for new economic alliances? Does Cuba consider integrating, in one way or another, into the BRICS platform?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- This was a very interesting trip, because it was a trip of anniversaries. I would say it in a way, right? And of interesting, important events.

First, we arrived in Moscow at the time when President Putin was at the inauguration ceremony. We were not invited there and we did not participate. That is, it was a very internal ceremony.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Private.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Very private about the country, but we were present on this trip to Russia at the invitation of President Putin.

So, we participated in the Supreme Council of the Eurasian Economic Union for the first time in person, because all the other participations we had had in the Supreme Council were in the years of COVID-19 and we had done it virtually through video-conferencing. Therefore, it is not about entering into a new alliance. It is an alliance in which we have been in for a long time. And when the Supreme Council was in session, ten years had passed since the constitution of the Eurasian Economic Union. Therefore, it was also a moment to take stock of the results of that regional integration in which we have the status of Observer Country. And it was the same date where they were commemorating the 64th anniversary of the establishment of relations between the Soviet Union and Cuba, which are the relations that have now continued with the Russian Federation, but with an important element: the member countries of the Eurasian Union -- and that was an observation that Lukashenko, the president of Belarus, made to me -- they were former republics of the Soviet Union. Therefore Lukashenko tells me: "This anniversary then belongs to everyone, because we were all also part of the Soviet Union."

Ignacio Ramonet.- Member states of the Soviet Union.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- I believe that in these ten years, the Eurasian Union has demonstrated a capacity for important economic-commercial dynamics, and the gross domestic product among these countries in the region has grown a lot. And it defends very fair principles in relation to economic development and complementarity between these countries.

For us, it is a space of opportunities, because we can contribute above all in topics such as biotechnology and the pharmaceutical industry. We can take advantage of that space after our medicines are recognized by the regulatory agencies of those countries, and enter a market that also is more affordable for us, since they also have intentions and needs for these medicines and for the transfer of technologies and for making joint investments. It also opens a space for investors from these countries to participate in economic and social development programs in our country. And the topic of food sovereignty is very present to share with them, which is one of the points of the entire Union; the issue of environmental sustainability. That is, sustainable development and respect for the environment and the development of a culture of sustainability, which is also a principle that we take into account in our development; food sovereignty and the development of renewable energy sources. Therefore, it is an important space for us.

I believe that the BRICS is one of the alternatives that exist in the world today, of a bloc of countries that opens an expectation of breaking U.S. hegemony in international relations. Therefore, the BRICS become an alternative, inclusive space. And the BRICS are open to the countries of the South.

Ignacio Ramonet.- They just expanded on January 1st.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- The BRICS have just expanded, they have shown a willingness to establish relations with the African continent, with Latin America and the Caribbean. It is established on a relationship of more consensus, more equity, and respect. On the other hand, the BRICS are also proposing an alternative to the dollar, and are promoting trade with each country's own currencies or compensated trade through the exchange of products and services generated by each of the countries.

Ignacio Ramonet.- They also have a Development Bank chaired by Dilma Rousseff.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- They have a Development Bank chaired by Dilma, who is a recognized leader and with a political vision towards the problems of the South. And the five countries that they led, founders of the BRICS, are countries that maintain an excellent relationship with Cuba. We are studying, we are observing, we also discussed it now in the meeting with President Putin, that Cuba has the aspiration of being able to enter the BRICS.

Ignacio Ramonet.- The next summit will be in Russia, precisely in October, in Kazan, do you plan to attend, Mr. President?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Everything now depends on how events unfold.

Ignacio Ramonet.- It seems that they want to create a new type of member, which would be the partner or associate member, there would be room for Cuba.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- There would be room for Cuba and it also depends on the consensus reached with the countries that lead the BRICS. But, for example, they were very consistent and allowed Cuba to participate in the South Africa Summit not only as a country, but also representing the Group of 77 and China. Because at that time, we were President pro tempore, and it must be said that they gave full attention to the approaches of the Group of 77 and China that Cuba presented on their behalf. And also to the Cuban position. I believe that it is a very favorable environment for South-South relations, and that it opens a new perspective for that New International Economic Order which is necessary.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Mr. President, we come to the end of this interview. The last question is about Latin America.

The crises are multiplying in Latin America and the Caribbean, there was that assault on the Mexican Embassy in Ecuador; the U.S. Southern Command is creating military bases in Guyana, posing a threat to Venezuela and its historic claim to the Essequibo; in Argentina, President Javier Milei is destroying decades of social progress; in Haiti, there is no end to the difficulties. What reading do you make of these situations? And what can Cuba contribute to promote sovereignty, peace and progress in this region?

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- This is an expression of all the contradictions that exist at a global level and that are also manifested at a regional level in the case of Latin America and the Caribbean. I think it is also an expression of the empire's persistence in maintaining the Monroe Doctrine, with that imperialist concept of America for Americans, which is not Latin America and the Caribbean for all of us who live on the continent. It is Latin America and the Caribbean subordinated to North America and the power of the empire. Therefore, this is also an expression of the U.S. vision of contempt for our people, and of the U.S. vision of Latin America and the Caribbean as its backyard.

Now, a Latin America and the Caribbean that, on the one hand, has a group of governments that have maintained revolutionary processes subjected to the greatest setbacks, pressures, sanctions, insults, attacks and interference, such as they are: Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua.

A whole group of progressive governments that also give a favorable correlation of the leftist forces in the Latin American region. There we have: the Plurinational State of Bolivia; Lula, in Brazil; Lopez Obrador Xiomara, in Honduras; Boric, in Chile; Petro, in Colombia -- which help to ensure stability and ease of cooperation and exchange. But the United States does not sit still with this and is constantly trying to mobilize right-wing forces with, I would say, also very dirty mechanisms to provoke instability in these countries, to prevent left-wing processes or left-wing governments from remaining in place. And to encourage that where the left has lost power and the right-wing is established, that the right does not lose power.

Ignacio Ramonet.- That it be maintained.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- And that this right-wing is a right totally surrendered to the Government of the United States and the design of the United States, and also fueling conflicts on certain issues that have a historical component; encouraging ruptures, slandering, fueling divisions to cause disunity in the region.

What this says is that today there are some governments that facilitate all North American policy on the continent, even governments that are favoring the presence of NATO troops in Latin America and the Caribbean. Governments that are denying the right to the sovereignty and self-determination of territories of their own country in which wars have existed and where there are heroes and martyrs who died for the independence of those territories, for the sovereignty of those territories. And what they do is flatter the

powers that they became metropolises of those geographical spaces that belong to the region, in something that one can consider totally absurd, irrational and unpatriotic. Governments that, in addition, have a media projection where they express their principles, but totally offensive, expletives against those who think differently, against those who think of doing things in a different way or against those who defend another way of building the world. I always aspire and we will give all our efforts to that better world that is possible and to which Fidel summoned us.

We have ethics. We do not speak behind anyone's back. We do not insult. When we have to defend a position, we defend it head on and when we have to discuss a position we discuss it head on. But we are not given to the media show, to expletives, to insults, to that type, I would say, of political vulgarity that others in the world lend themselves to.

As a Cuban position, we will always maintain and defend, with the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, respect for the sovereignty and independence of those countries. Respect for self-determination over the sociopolitical system that they assume, and the willingness to, regardless of systems and ideologies, have the most respectful, most supportive, most cooperative relationship with any of these countries. And we have this with the majority.

We never break relations with Latin American countries and we try to resolve, through dialogue, through discussion, through argumentation, any issue in which we may have some disagreement, in which we may have divergent positions.

I believe that Cuba's displays of solidarity with Latin America and the Caribbean are eloquent of its coherence with these convictions. We have sent doctors and teachers, internationalist collaborators also in engineering and in other fields of the economy and society to several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

We do not send soldiers or armed forces to Haiti, nor do we carry out invasions. In Haiti, we have medical brigades. Today, in the midst of this situation in Haiti, when many are thinking about intervention in Haiti or interference in Haiti's internal affairs, we have a medical brigade providing service to the Haitian people, a people that I believe deserve the greatest respect for everything it has suffered as a consequence of being the first nation in the region to develop a revolution.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Who became independent.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- A dignified people. A people that has been subjected to interventions for a long time. A people that had to pay a debt for their freedom, which is totally unfair. In other words, there must be an objection towards Haiti, as there must be an objection about slavery towards the people of the Caribbean, who are constantly subjected to pressure from the Government of the United States to break unity with the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean.

We have a relationship of gratitude, in addition, of a tremendous friendship and brotherhood with the Government of López Obrador and with Mexico. The relationship between Cuba and Mexico is an endearing, historical relationship. It is a relationship of brothers. It is a family relationship. Mexico was the only country that did not break relations with Cuba when the United States Government convened the entire OAS to break relations with Cuba.

We defend the cause of Venezuela, the Chavista Revolution, civil-military unity and we support President Maduro, whom they have even tried to assassinate.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Of murdering several times.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Something that is unusual.

We support the Sandinista Revolution. We call for the self-determination of Puerto Rico. We defend the principles of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. We see with great interest the role that Xiomara plays in Honduras, and also the role at the head of CELAC. We maintain a very close relationship with Lula.

Ignacio Ramonet.- With the CARICOM countries.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- With the CARICOM countries, ultimately, with all of Latin America and the Caribbean. But always on the basis of respect, solidarity, friendship and dialogue to resolve any situation.

On the other hand, we plan to defend the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, which was approved precisely at a CELAC summit in Havana.

We also defend Latin American and Caribbean integration that responds to the dreams of our heroes, responds to the highest ideals of Latin American integration. And I am thinking at this moment of Martí and Bolívar. Martí, who always spoke with so much respect about Our America and defined very well what Our America was; and Bolívar, who waged an entire struggle to achieve the independence of many Latin American countries.

I believe that leading by example is the greatest support we can give to Latin American unity.

Ignacio Ramonet.- That Fidel always defended.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- That Fidel always defended. He taught us to defend it. And Raúl has also defended it.

Ramonet, when one talks about dreams, aspirations, we have such a common history, such a common culture, totally wonderful, industrious, intelligent, creative people. I tell you, Latin American pre-Columbian cultures have nothing to envy of Mesopotamian cultures or the cultures of ancient Greece.

Those were known first, but when one goes back in history, one sees that ours in their development, in how they measured time, how they channeled the waters, how they produced, their development, were as developed as those, and they are parts of our roots. And you can see them in any of the Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Our cultural wealth, the advanced thinking that exists in Latin America and the Caribbean, the approaches of Latin American thinkers, of Latin American philosophers, of the Latin American academic sector, are advanced positions, of much study, of much coherence, of much defense. We look at the roots of Latin American and Caribbean identity, and we see it is a continent with resources, which unfortunately today is where the greatest degree of inequality is manifested.

I am convinced that with all those virtues, with all that wealth – and this is my dream – the Latin American continent could have such an integration that it could be an example for the entire world of what it can contribute to the human condition, to the future. Dreams of emancipation, of placing the human being at the true center of everything that is done for the world. I believe that this moment will come sooner rather than later, because our people demand a lot of justice and because they have experienced many complex situations. They have experienced attacks, they have experienced contempt, they have experienced interventions, they have experienced practices of inequality. They have been excluded from processes and they have been excluded from possibilities.

There is much illiteracy still to be resolved in Latin America and the Caribbean. There is much to advance in gender issues. Much must be achieved for the emancipation of the wonderful Latin American and Caribbean women. There is much to achieve in equality for all our peoples and in social justice.

But there is the historical potential, the cultural potential.

Ignacio Ramonet.- There is desire.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- The desire to do so, and I believe that we will continue to advance in integration and that is the message, the conviction, the support and the example that Cuba can give.

A Latin American country can never feels that Cuba is a danger to them; on the contrary, in Cuba they will always find support, understanding and the willingness to integrate and move forward.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Thank you very much for your time, Mr. President.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- No, thanks to you. It's a pleasure to have been with you.

Ignacio Ramonet.- Thank you.

Miguel M. Díaz-Canel.- Next time, I'll ask you questions (Laughter and applause).

(Source: Granma)

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