

President of Argentina awards the Order of the Liberator José de San Martín to Pepe Mujica

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President Alberto Fernandez decorates former President Jose Mujica, Buenos Aires, October 27, 2021. Photo: Casa Rosada, Argentine Presidency

Buenos Aires, October 28 (RHC)-- The former president of Uruguay José Mujica received from the hands of Argentinian President Alberto Fernández, the Order of the Liberator José de San Martín -- the highest recognition that the country grants to a foreign citizen.

"It is no small thing to have as a friend a president of Argentina who looks like a shepherd of sheep and driver of a herd of lions. It is his turn to steer the ship in very difficult times," Mujica said, ratifying his affection for this country in particular and Latin America in general.

He also stressed that he will always be on the side of those who, with successes and mistakes, "put all their meat on the grill" for the dream that in the region there will be a little more social justice and fewer differences.

"I will always support the noblest causes of our peoples but, Argentines, please, love each other a little more. Disagree all you want but build, fight for a 'we.' You are a vital part of our Latin America and you have to be aware of the world that is coming upon us," he warned.

Always averse to protocols, Mujica withdrew the decoration as soon as Fernandez placed it around his neck. "You will forgive me friends, but this medal weighs a lot," he said amid laughter from those who attended the tribute held at the Casa Rosada, the presidential headquarters.

Afterwards, he defined himself as "a countryman with a few readings," who is overwhelmed by this kind of ceremony. "An oddball" who has developed in solitude a philosophy similar to that of the Aymara people, since he is convinced that "poor is the one who has no community, the human who has no companions, the one who can live in the crowd but is asleep in solitude."

At 86 years of age, he also referred insistently to death. "I don't want to give death a chance. It will come looking for me one of these days. But I'm not going to make it easy, because with all its vicissitudes, life is beautiful," he said.

He also assured that he is "an old man in retirement" who had the foresight to open the field so that there are still people fighting. "Besides, I don't want to die because I like red wine and I don't trust that I will be able to drink it on the other side," he joked.

In presenting him with the award, Fernandez recalled that Pepe Mujica is a fundamental character in Latin American politics not only for having been president of Uruguay, but also for his commitment, resistance and ability to overcome adverse moments.

"We all know Pepe's life. It was his convictions that kept him on his feet and what made Uruguayans elect him president. He is a role model, someone who never gave in to his convictions, with the capacity for dialogue and openness to listen as politics needs," he added.

Mujica's figure, he said, allowed Argentina and Uruguay to unite at a time when both countries were estranged, in addition to the fact that he became a central actor for the growth and unity of Latin America.

"Pepe is an example of democracy. No one like him can give expression in the flesh of what is suffered with lack of democracy. He has known how to make politics of open doors and meeting points," he said.

The former president, he added, invites the rest of the world leaders to reflect on a daily basis, particularly with his criticisms of the consumer society based on postulates loaded with love, affection and openness.

"That does not mean that we all think alike. It means that we can turn what may sound out of tune into a symphony where we can all nuance the differences and that dissent becomes harmony," he said.

In addition to receiving the award, Mujica traveled to Buenos Aires to participate in a tribute to former President Néstor Kirchner 11 years after his death.

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