

Speech by Cuban President Miguel Díaz Canel at the First Session of the 10th Legislature

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Speech delivered by Miguel Mario Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba and President of the Republic, at the closing of the First Ordinary Period of Sessions of the X Legislature of the National Assembly of People's Power, at the Convention Palace, on July 22, 2023, "Year 65 of the Revolution."

(Shorthand Versions - Presidency of the Republic)

Dear Comrade Army General Raúl Castro Ruz, historic leader of the Cuban Revolution...

Dear deputies...

Guests...

Compatriots:

Seventy years ago today, a representation of the best of Cuban youth gathered dreams, dug into their meager savings or sold what they owned, to embark on a trip to Santiago de Cuba and Bayamo. It was carnival season in the Oriente, but they were not going to celebrate. As martyrs or heroes, without their knowing it, they were going to enter history.

Two of those young men are with us in this session of the National Assembly: Army General Raúl Castro Ruz, leader of the Revolution (Applause), and Commander of the Revolution Ramiro Valdés Menéndez (Applause). First of all, I would like to dedicate my words to them.

This is not only an act of historical justice. It is about recognizing two men who continue to storm fortresses every day, with their foot in the stirrup of difficulties and their rifle pointed at mistakes.

Compañeras and compañeros:

Allow me to say that I feel we have had a good Assembly, including the calls by Lazo and other deputies to put names and surnames, causes and possible solution to our problems, those that have nothing to do directly with the blockade or that reinforce the omnipresent blockade due to inaction, apathy, insensitivity, inability or simple tiredness and lack of faith that it will be possible to overcome the difficulties.

These Assembly sessions have merit. Not only have we addressed, with a sense of urgency and without prejudice, the problems of our difficult daily life, such as food production, electricity generation, water availability, crime, rising inflation, abusive prices, but we have done so without abandoning pending issues of a strategic nature, such as the Policy of Integral Attention to Children, Adolescents and Youth, or the Law of the Military Penal Code.

I am not going to quote speeches in order not to extend myself, but, since the discussion in commissions in which I had the opportunity to participate, I felt that the link of the deputies with the population, that is to say, with the voters, to whom we owe ourselves, has improved. These months of exchange with the people in the streets, in the neighborhoods, in the rural towns have been the proof of what it means to work with one's ear to the ground.

An Assembly in permanent session, disconnected from the people who elected it, could never be called People's Power.

We can never forget that the enemies of the Cuban nation are betting on fracturing national unity, on separating the people from their government, on us getting tired of insisting, on us lowering our guard, on us believing that the path of surrender is preferable to creative resistance.

But the option of surrender was erased from the DNA of Cubans. And not on a whim, not because we are pleased with the sacrifice or because we believe we are a nation chosen for it. It is enough to look at those who surrendered or were subdued by an apparently invincible superior power: they lost the nation, the ideal and the destiny of their countries.

Personally, I cannot imagine Cuba without the moral strength of its Party and without the organization, planning and permanent concern of a government whose main mission is to guarantee health, education, food and public services, some free of charge and others at the lowest possible cost, under the terrible conditions of a reinforced blockade and the inclusion of the country on an infamous list that seeks to

boycott any possibility of economic recovery, closing all access to possible income and financing opportunities.

This policy, which is not limited to the economic and financial sphere, is very perverse. It is known that Cuba's greatest strength lies in its people and in its emblematic resistance, that is why they also attack us by sowing seeds of ungovernability, failed state and citizen insecurity. The plan is to discredit to such a degree that national unity implodes.

Some people from the most extreme positions contribute to this purpose: from the right, calling for the privatization of everything and a change of system, and also from the so-called left, demonizing any space for the market. As always, the extremes touch each other and both positions coincide on one point: the lapidary criticism to the term socialism and to any attempt of solution born from governmental management.

Some get tired of talking about the blockade; others invent theories to the theory, as if the classics had denied dialectics. They forget that their important theoretical contribution did not conceive of socialist construction in a small nation that inherited underdevelopment, blockaded for more than 60 years and z neighbor to the largest empire, which is also their enemy. And then they demand a solution to everything, ignoring olympically the greatest obstacle, which is the blockade.

The long years of this gigantic external factor gravitating against the development of the country coincide in time with a strong tendency towards the deepening of neo-liberal capitalism, which has pushed humanity to the highest levels of inequality and social exclusion ever known. Meanwhile, Cuba was and is going against the tide in pursuit of a project of social justice. The most comfortable thing would have been to abandon the battle, join the global current, renounce that project and "every man for himself." But we chose the most difficult path: the most dignified.

At the same time, we must avoid confusion. Social justice does not mean and cannot be reduced to welfare or egalitarianism. It means distributing the wealth created by all, among all, but in a differentiated way, so that those who contribute the most gain the most and those who are unable to contribute receive assistance. For this, it is first necessary to create this wealth, and in this task we are still far from reaching the mark.

As we have already said, the economic, commercial and financial war of the United States -- particularly its extraterritoriality -- the world economic crisis and the slow post-pandemic recovery, together with the impacts of war conflicts, continue to be the main obstacles to the implementation of the strategy to revive the economy in the short, medium and long term. Despite these obstacles, the Report on the Economy and the Budget Settlement in the first half of the year tells us that the measures being implemented, without yet reaching the expected results, indicate a very slight tendency towards recovery.

Each measure has risks in its application, so we insist that its implementation always takes into account the treatment to be given to individuals and families in vulnerable situations in order to avoid negative impacts on them. As explained by Minister Vicente de la O, the National Electric System, even though it is still not working in optimal conditions, has been recovering as part of the Strategy outlined by the country. The situation in the current month of July is much more favorable than the one experienced in 2022; this, in spite of the increase in demand. Thanks to the effort and dedication of the workers of the electric sector, several thermal plants and distributed generation engines have been maintained, which has allowed us to recover capacities and thus reach a summer in better conditions. Our word was kept! (Applause).

But the Strategy does not only look at the short term. The work continues towards the country's energy recovery. From this tribune, our most heartfelt recognition and gratitude goes to all the Cuban electricity companies and to all the organizations, among them the FAR and the Minint, that have supported them (Applause).

The recovery of the tourism industry, which continues to be impacted by the inclusion of Cuba on the U.S. State Department's list of "countries sponsoring terrorism" and others related to logistics, fuel and energy, will not achieve the 3.5 million visitors projected for the year, but shows a growth rate that should exceed all the indicators of 2021-2022, thanks to the recovery of the Destination Cuba, in stable issuing countries during the pre-pandemic stage.

On the other hand, the rescue of the intervention and expansion of the foreign exchange market has begun, which has allowed channeling 110 million to the business system -- sold to the national economy 55.1 and others from loans -- for the production of goods and services in national currency, among which the programs for food production -- rice, beans, eggs, pork -- manufacturing industry, energy and other sectors stand out. This is still insufficient.

As for foreign investment, as a result of official visits in recent months, the bases, projects and mutual investment programs were established in sectors such as energy, agriculture, including sugarcane, and government and business steps were taken for their materialization in the second half of the year, thus creating conditions for the recovery of industrial and refining capacity, with favorable impacts on the energy bill and the export of petroleum derivatives in the area.

The mechanisms and work systems were restructured to recover income from remittances and other services associated with the collection of foreign currency, opening new channels and diversifying existing ones, including those using cryptocurrencies, in compliance with current legislation. These actions should continue to be consolidated during the second half of the year.

Measures and incentives are adopted to further encourage the use of electronic media by linking productive sectors, with the creation of new products and services, as a safe and simple way to make collections and payments without the use of cash, which favors fiscal discipline and the bankability of economic events, including their legitimacy.

As part of the implementation of measures presented to the National Assembly of People's Power to re-launch economic development, multidisciplinary teams of experts from the academic sector, economists, officials and directors of global economic organizations have been working to identify the distortions of the model, defining their causes and structural conditions, which has made it possible to design a gradual strategy to advance in macroeconomic stabilization during the second half of this year and the first half of 2024.

This program should allow us to progressively correct macroeconomic imbalances, the management and allocation of the currency according to the country's development priorities, increase the production of agricultural food and industrial goods, the transformation of subsidies, the development of the foreign exchange market, the recovery of foreign exchange income and the exportable sectors. Proposals are being studied to continue improving the foreign currency allocation mechanism by strengthening the exchange market and the role that the national financial system must play as the central authority in the implementation of the Monetary Policy and the gradual and sustained protection of the national currency.

Work is also being done to update the legal norms for non-state economic actors, promoting their role in the country's economic development strategy, national production, import substitution, their contribution to territorial development and the generation of employment.

Although incipient, a greater direct participation of the non-state sector in national production and the linkage with national industries is achieved, generating savings in the contracting of raw materials and intermediate products, in line with the country's development strategy, an action that will be encouraged and strengthened. This activity has developed more dynamically in the food production sector.

Thus, even in the midst of the uncertainty that is present today in the world economy, the Cuban economy will have to face an indispensable Structural Transformations Program, accompanied by a

Macroeconomic Stabilization Program in the next three years, as a guarantee to achieve a favorable environment for financing development in the medium term. After such an intense debate as the one that took place here on food production and commercialization or on abusive or speculative prices and the impact of both problems on the standard of living of the population, I insist on the importance of making use of the measures and resolutions approved and of taking advantage of the options offered by municipal autonomy and the necessary strengthening of the socialist state enterprise. Some local solutions could lead us to the path of national solutions.

This does not mean that I consider all the debates exhausted. We still have an extraordinary reserve of possibilities in the people. A popular discussion, with the participation of students, technicians, economists and accountants who train the authorities and the people as to how prices are formed, would help us a lot to face the problem from the grassroots, with knowledge. To the extent that the delegates, the presidents of the popular councils, the government authorities in the municipality and the people have the necessary information to confront the speculators, I am sure that we will put downward pressure on prices.

But above all, we must devote ourselves to creating wealth, first of all by producing food. The definitive solution will come with the increase of productions and that is the other fight that needs all of us to get involved. As a good young deputy here said, to face COVID-19, science has moved on two tracks: palliatives and containment measures on the one hand, and the search for a vaccine on the other. A similar strategy could be applied to the issue of food and prices, taking into account science and innovation. A young economist said so. I agree with that criterion, among other reasons, because I believe in young people (Applause).

A transparent discussion, with all the crudeness that the moment and our people demand, is an expression of knowledge of reality and an honest concern and willingness to improve society, aware that the prosperity and greater social justice for which we are fighting would be impossible in a society emptied of values.

Let me repeat: the manifestations of crime, social indiscipline and corruption threaten the most sacred aspect of the process of socialist construction, as they deepen the undesirable social inequalities and undermine citizen security, one of the pillars of socialism.

The Cuban State and Government cannot turn their backs on the increase of illicit activities, which are established as a parallel, submerged economy that penetrates like a cancer into the social fabric until it destroys it.

Here we have discussed the issue at length and we have expressed our most energetic rejection of the manifestations of indiscipline and crime. Now the most important thing remains: to act with rigor, articulating all the revolutionary forces with the leadership of the Party, the institutional system, the organizations of the masses and of civil society and our armed institutions together with the people.

I agree with Lazo that only in this way will we be able to adequately confront tax evasion, the illegal currency market, speculation, corruption, loitering, rascality, bureaucracy, lies, vulgarity, indecency, in short, the nuisance caused by anti-social behaviors.

All this, without abandoning actions to mitigate other consequences they cause, from family dysfunction, the ruptures of the link with the study and work by some citizens and the inadequate incorporation into society of those who have served criminal penalties, among others.

We cannot allow those who do not work, do not contribute and move in an environment of illegality to earn more and have better living conditions than those who work honestly, contribute to society and are the protagonists of the daily heroism of the Cuban people (Applause).

In order to achieve this, it will be essential to demand clean and responsible behavior from the representatives of state institutions, society and also from Cuban families. We are going to face it with unity, courage, determination, order, discipline and effectiveness! (Applause)

All the actors of the economy must act in accordance with the law and the regulations established locally or nationally, without stigmatizations or absurd generalizations that end up being as harmful as the problems they are trying to solve.

Everyone is necessary and we must defend the participation of all in the country's economy, but without forgetting that this defense goes through respect for legality. This first session of the current legislature has given continuity to the intense legislative exercise opened by the new Constitution, with the approval of the Military Criminal Code Law which, as we have seen here, is in accordance with our Magna Carta and is of relevant importance in the interest of strengthening order and discipline in our armed institutions, as essential elements for the fulfillment of their missions, in function of protecting and maintaining the independence and sovereignty of the State, its territorial integrity, its security and peace.

The text incorporates principles, conceptions, sanctioning frameworks and punitive alternatives of the Ordinary Penal Code approved in the previous legislature.

It is adapted to the socioeconomic conditions of our country and to the development and characteristics of our armed institutions, precisely defines those conducts which, due to their social harm, must be considered criminal, grants powers to military chiefs to apply disciplinary measures alternatively and in the face of certain facts, as well as strengthens the single command.

The work sessions of the standing committees during this ordinary period ratified the important role they play as an auxiliary body of the Assembly for the fulfillment of its attributions.

But what I am most interested in highlighting is the way in which the most topical issues and their impact on the neighborhoods, the streets and daily life were presented and debated this time. The link of the deputies with the grassroots in the different territories for the verification and verification of the laws, policies and programs selected for analysis has favored deeper, objective reflections and the possibility of contributing suggestions and proposals enriched by the exchanges with the population.

The agreements derived from these meetings should constitute premises for the work of the different bodies and organizations in favor of the transformation and solution of the problems discussed.

Particularly relevant in this session is the debate and approval of the Policy for the Integral Attention to Children, Adolescents and Youth, as part of the will to strengthen the rights of the younger population, since it supports their aspirations and dreams. Its gradual implementation in the midst of the current socio-economic situation will demand the greatest understanding of the population and will therefore require the widest dissemination and debate.

Its origin emerges from the discussions held with young people and representatives of the academic sector, listening to their concerns and proposals. It also responds, in a fundamental way, to the concerns of our compatriots about the growing exodus of young people and the need to guarantee that they can develop their life projects in the country, with an active participation in the destinies of the nation of their parents and grandparents.

This Policy reaffirms the will to develop government management through public policies and that the policy-making process be increasingly participatory and democratic. By addressing the problems of children, adolescents and young people in all spheres of life, the text gives continuity to the revolutionary work and also brings novelty to it, in tune with the demands of the present time. As a work program, it combines rights and duties, in that it offers guarantees and opportunities, but also demands duties and responsibility from the institutions involved and from youth participation.

My fellow compatriots:

I would like to take a break from national issues to explain a little about the objectives and results of the intense international activity of the last few months, which was also preceded by the brilliant presentation on this subject made by our Foreign Minister. The Chairmanship of the Group of 77 plus China, which Cuba has held since January of this year, as a result of the broad international recognition of our principled policy in defense of the interests of developing countries, is demanding from us an extraordinary diplomatic effort that honors us as a nation.

Since the Cuban presidency, events have been successfully held in the areas of education, culture, tourism and the environment, which have managed to encourage debate from the South and have contributed to the defense of the interests of developing countries.

On September 15 and 16, we will host the Summit of Heads of State and Government under the theme "Current Development Challenges: The Role of Science, Technology and Innovation". This is a necessary meeting in the effort to strengthen the capacity of the Group of 77 to take advantage of such important tools for development. We have continued to support with actions our firm position in favor of peace in Colombia. The holding in Cuba of the third cycle of the Peace Dialogue Table between the Government of Colombia and the ELN was a historic milestone.

The international cooperation provided by Cuba continues to develop as an emblematic feature of foreign policy. It is a legitimate and altruistic activity that we maintain despite the dirty campaign of the United States to try to denigrate this effort and deprive hundreds of thousands of people in countries around the world of the quality medical services provided by Cuban professionals.

All the events in which we participate are mechanisms of coordination in which Cuba has a history of active and constructive contribution, as is the norm of our foreign policy. In addition to fulfilling intergovernmental commitments, we had the opportunity to meet directly in each place with Cubans living in those countries and with groups of friends of Cuba, in meetings characterized by expressions of friendship, solidarity and support for the Revolution.

As a nation, we are privileged to have groups of Cubans living in various countries who maintain an active behavior in support of the homeland, and also to have groups of people of various nationalities who are very committed to solidarity with Cuba. This is a reality that makes us proud as Cubans and is explained by the prestige of the Revolution, its work for justice and its solidarity and internationalist trajectory.
(Applause)

The participation in different international events and the reception of numerous visits of foreign personalities from all continents demonstrate our determination to continue expanding bilateral ties and cooperation with numerous countries of all regions, to open up commercial possibilities and diverse exchanges and to foster mutual understanding.

It is also a matter of fulfilling the strategic task of breaking the economic siege to which imperialism wishes to condemn us. However, the aggressive U.S. policy continues to have a highly damaging effect on the economy, as the people are well aware. Because of the dominance it has achieved over international financial structures and flows, the U.S. government has the power to damage our external economic relations in almost every country in the world. And this is not by chance, but by design.

To justify that policy, it maintains the practice of fabricating slander and issuing utterly mendacious pronouncements, which it frequently updates with new and increasingly dishonest legends. He is confident of his dominance over the media and is convinced that he has the capacity to deceive public opinion, especially that of his own country.

It does not always succeed. For example, dozens of state legislatures, municipal councils, county boards, school boards and labor organizations, plus other organizations representing civil society in the United States have issued some 93 resolutions against the economic blockade policy and, in particular, calling for Cuba to be excluded from the arbitrary list of State sponsors of terrorism drawn up unilaterally by the State Department.

They thus join the almost unanimous demand of the international community, reflected every year in the General Assembly of the United Nations and in the pronouncements of numerous regional organizations such as CELAC, CARICOM, the African Union and the European Union, just to mention a few.

It is the empire that brings isolation and discredit to its criminal policies. It is sustained by the disproportionate power it concentrates, by its disregard for the will of the international community, and by its unscrupulous willingness to make use of threats and coercion against many governments and against its own citizens.

Our duty is to continue denouncing this ruthless policy and, at the same time, to make progress in the creative effort to recover the economy and put it on a sustainable path, in spite of the blockade. In the brief but intense working visits abroad, in the exchanges with other leaders of the region and the rest of the world in summits, conferences or bilateral meetings, we have found respect, recognition, admiration and gratitude to the people and our history, for the defense of multilateralism, cooperation and solidarity as a principle of the relationship among all nations. We confirmed the value of coherence, dignity, the defense of principles and not giving in to pressure and blackmail. In short, we reaffirm the value of creative resistance! (Applause)

We confirm, above all, the extraordinary legacy of Fidel and Raul, whose unquestionable contributions to international relations, from the Government and from the Party, allowed us to reach this moment with a solid work distinguished by its humanist, internationalist and ethical values. A work inspired by Marti's concept that homeland is humanity.

There is still much to learn and to advance in taking advantage of these sessions as a source of proposals for solutions. The gravity and urgency of the times force us to be more agile and precise in the mission that only we can undertake: to overcome the problems, leaping over the criminal policy of harassment and financial persecution. But in the face of the worst challenges, we confirm once again that it is possible! Cuba is not alone in that fight and we have proven it. We are not the only ones punished for defending sovereignty, independence and multilateralism.

I feel that we will remember this First Session of the 10th Legislature of the National Assembly for a long time: for the complexity of the moment Cuba is going through, for the issues discussed and for the way they were discussed. Here our problems were more visible and also more visible was the effort to reach the horizon of solutions.

We will also remember it for the number of young deputies from different professions and from all over the country who contributed their points of view with sharpness and arguments, passionately defending the country in which they live and work. In them we saw the horizon, we saw the future that our adversaries cannot see.

In these young people we also saw those young people who 70 years ago went to fight for a country free of dependencies and abuses, to fight against a real and bloody dictatorship never condemned or blocked by the empire.

These young people are those young people who saved the country, who raised a cultured and supportive nation, admired and respected all over the world. So there are reasons to celebrate, beyond the shortcomings and challenges, the 70th anniversary of that heroic assault on two military fortresses to change history.

Thanks to the Centennial Generation, to Fidel, Raul and their comrades! Thanks forever! The youngest heirs of your legacy are in the most important fight of this era! (Applause)

On the 26th we will see you in the heroic Santiago de Cuba!

And to conclude, I return to two phrases that are very well known and dear to my conviction: Know, gentlemen imperialists, that we are absolutely not afraid of you!

(Applause and ovation).

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