

**KEY ADDRESS BY DR. FIDEL CASTRO RUZ, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF CUBA, AT THE OPEN FORUM HELD IN SANCTI SPIRITUS
PROVINCE. MAY 25, 2002**

Dear compatriots:

I will use just a few minutes to greet you and to say a few words, this time basically addressed to the American people.

Our struggle is not, and will never be, aimed against the American people. Perhaps, no other country receives Americans with the respect and hospitality displayed by Cuba.

We are men and women of ideas and not a community of bigots. In Cuba we have never cultivated hatred against the American people or blamed them for the aggressions perpetrated by the governments of that country. That would have run contrary to our political doctrines and our internationalist conscience, both well-proven throughout many years, and increasingly rooted in our ideas.

If "Humanity is Homeland", as Marti said, we are citizens of the world and brothers and sisters of all peoples on Earth; their children, their youth, their elders, their men and women are also ours, regardless of everyone's economic, political, religious and cultural beliefs.

Relations between the Cuban people and the American people, although very much influenced for decades by a barrage of distorted and manipulated propaganda, have been improving every day, particularly after 80% of Americans supported the return of the kidnapped child to his family and homeland.

I have always felt, based on my reflection on the most recent history of that country, that the American people can support a bad cause --as it has done on not few occasions-- but only when it has been misled. Albeit in the case of the Vietnam war, the painful daily images of the dead American youths that were brought home highly contributed to build an awareness about how useless, unfair and absurd that war was, the situation with the child was different. However, when the American people learned, through its own media, of the cruel injustice being committed against that little child, it did not hesitate and took sides with justice. That, Cuba will never forget!

It hurts deeply to see the efforts made to mislead that essentially noble people with the diabolical fabrication that the laboratories where our dedicated scientists create, develop and produce new medicines and therapy treatments, that prevent or cure diseases, spare suffering and save countless lives, are developing bio-weapons' research and production programs. At times, there is also talk about Cuba's capacity to produce them.

All throughout history, any scientific or technical development has served for good or evil. In our country, however, no one has ever thought of producing such weapons. Our scientists have been educated for the sacred mission of

protecting life and not for destroying it.

Cuba has twice as many doctors per capita as all of the highest developed nations. No country has given, or is giving, more support to other peoples' health care services, free of charge, than Cuba and no other has saved more lives. Thus, our people do not have, nor could it have, any inclination to become a bio-weapons producer.

Sentiments are more important than knowledge, and above all, truth should be sacred.

Two weeks after the infamous slander, Cuba was arbitrarily included in a list of states sponsors of terrorism. Rather than concerned over the moral or political damage that could derive from such an evil accusation, we are hurt to think that any American could be misled into believing that any damage to himself, his family or his people could come from Cuba.

Neither a single drop of blood has been shed in the United States, nor has an atom of wealth been lost there in the 43 years of the Cuban Revolution, due to a terrorist action originated in Cuba. The opposite is true, since thousands of lives have been lost as well as huge amounts of money due to material damages caused by actions against our homeland originated in the U.S. territory. The American people deserves to be informed about this, instead of being saturated with lies and slanders.

The only truth is that the American people could receive from Cuba vaccines, medications and medical procedures that could surely save numerous lives, or help them recover their well-being and health, once the absurd ban on trade is lifted. If this modest cooperation is possible, it is due to the fact that Cuba got rid of illiteracy a long time ago and it has attained a high educational level.

Cuba is increasingly becoming a country with not only great intellectual and artistic talents but also with many educators, scientists and hundreds of thousands of people capable of producing wealth with their learned minds. This is but a proof of what can be done despite the inherited underdevelopment and the longest economic and financial blockade that any people has ever endured!

We also hurt to see the American people suffering in a climate of terror that disrupts its life, limits its creative capacity, interferes with its normal life and impinges on its economy.

I do not wish to use this moment to make any criticism on what could have been done, but was not, to prevent the horrendous crime of September 11; I do not know the facts well enough.

Still, as a leader in a country that has had to defend itself, for more than four decades, from thousands of terrorist actions I can assure you that the constant stirring up of panic is not the right way to proceed since it can psychologically affect the people and turn life in that immense country into an unbearable nightmare.

The risks of grave terrorist actions have existed and still exist in the

United States as they do anywhere in the world, before or after September 11. Alienated persons overexcited by the prevailing climate of tension could even realize them. The leaders of nations should no be dragged into making mistakes for fear of facing reality. At the present time, many and very diverse realities threaten the human society.

Of all the preventive measures that can be adopted against terrorism, some are basic such as: educating the people by keeping them informed of such realities and the dangers they bring; carrying to them a message of serenity and confidence; and, providing them with the necessary knowledge to obtain their maximum and most effective cooperation in this struggle.

The Cubans, who are used to wage battles together as a people, do not conceive of any victory without the people's participation and support.

It is the primary duty of the overburdened leaders of our complex world -- among many other obligations and without forgetting hunger, poverty, underdevelopment, the diseases that decimate entire regions, the climate changes and other calamities-- to meditate and reflect on the causes and the sources of the dangerous pandemic of terrorism and to apply really effective methods to fight it.

Under the present difficulties and in the struggle against the scourge of terrorism, the American people can count on this friendly, fraternal and generous people.

Long live the political and economic system that has turned Cuba into an example of justice, full sovereignty, true freedom, dignity and heroism!

Long live the patriotic, united and learned people that no power on Earth will ever break!

We shall overcome!