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Supplement

Cuba

The Communist Party Will Resolutely Support and Back the New President

- Speech by Raúl Castro Ruz -



Raúl Castro Ruz reaffirmed the leading role of the Communist Party of Cuba and its leadership in the country's development.

TML Weekly is reproducing the speech delivered by Army General Raúl Castro Ruz, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, at the close of the Constituent Session of the 9th Legislature of the National Assembly of People's Power, at Havana's International Conference Centre, on April 19, 2018. See *TML Weekly*, April 21, 2018 for a report on the Legislative Session.

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Compañeras and compañeros:

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude for being entrusted to offer the closing remarks of this emotive Constituent Session of the 9th Legislature of the National Assembly of People's

Power, which takes place today, which marks precisely the 57th anniversary of the victory achieved at Playa Girón, under the command of Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz, against the mercenary invasion organized, financed, and landed by the United States.



This historic event is even more relevant because it was the first time that the combatants of the Rebel Army, police, and militia fought to defend the banner of socialism, proclaimed by Fidel on April 16, 1961, during the memorial service for the victims of the air base bombings.

As is known, in the last Ordinary Session of the 8th Legislature, the National Assembly approved the extension of the mandate of deputies to the Cuban Parliament and delegates to Provincial Assemblies, due to the severe damage caused by Hurricane Irma, whose direct impact on almost the entire national territory determined the need to adjust the timetable of the electoral process, which we concluded today, and that has seen massive citizen participation, in another show of support for the Revolution and our socialist democracy.

It is opportune to recognize the work undertaken by the electoral and candidature commissions at all levels, as well as the group of institutions that collaborated for the smooth running of the elections.

The 6th Party Congress, held in April 2011, approved the proposal to limit to a maximum of two consecutive five year periods the holding of fundamental political and state positions. The 7th Congress stated the same two years ago. And although this limit has not yet been introduced in the Constitution, a question that we hope will be established within the framework of its reform, since I assumed my second term as President of the Councils of State and Ministers on February 24, 2013, I expressed that this would be my last, which I reiterated last December when, from this same spot, I affirmed that beginning today Cuba would have a new President.

It was not necessary to wait to undertake a constitutional reform to keep my word and act accordingly; more important was to set the example.

The National Assembly of People's Power elected compañero Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez as President of the Councils of State and Ministers. At the same time, also elected was compañero Salvador Valdés Mesa as First Vice President of the Council of State and later the National Assembly approved his appointment as First Vice President of the Council of Ministers.

Compañero Díaz-Canel has a work career of almost 35 years. After obtaining his Electronic Engineering degree at the Central University of Las Villas, he worked in that profession. He completed military service in anti-aircraft missile units of the [Revolutionary Armed Forces], after which he was a professor at the School of Electrical Engineering of the same university, where he was put forward as a professional cadre of the Young Communist League, gradually being promoted in leadership positions of this organization, until his promotion to professional work within the Party.

From July 1994, to the third or fourth year of the Special Period -- when the most severe stage of the Special Period was at its peak -- he was First Secretary of the Provincial Committee of Villa

Clara for nine years, and held the same responsibility in the province of Holguín for a further six [years], in both cases with satisfactory results.



Raúl recalled the political career of Díaz-Canel, new President of the Councils of State and Ministers of Cuba (third from right).

It was not by chance that after nine years in Villa Clara -- which were sufficient, as he was born there and knew his old province, including in this case Cienfuegos and Sancti Spíritus -- that in a planned fashion he was sent to Holguín, one of the largest provinces in terms of inhabitants and land area, as part of his training, just as we attempted to do with about a dozen young people, the majority of whom reached the Political Bureau. But we failed to consolidate their training, and he was the only survivor -- I would say a little exaggeratedly -- of that group (*Applause*), whose shortcomings I do not criticize. But rather speaking with compañero Machado, I told him that we have to criticize ourselves for not having better organized the training and maturation of those other compañeros, so that they could occupy high responsibilities within the Party and the government.

If in 15 years he [Díaz-Canel] was only in two provinces as leader of the Party, without counting the years he led the youth in his own province, I also told compañero Machado that in 15 years he could have, on about a three year basis, passed through at least five provinces of the country, so that he would know them more fully. I'm not criticizing Machado, I already criticize him too much (*Applause*). And now that I'm directly above him, he better get ready! (*Laughter*).

But what I want to say with this is that even more attention needs to be paid to the training of cadres, so that when they come to occupy other higher positions they have greater knowledge. But his [Díaz-Canel] election now is no accident, it was preconceived, within a group, that the best, according to our modest opinion and that of the Party, has been compañero Díaz-Canel (*Applause*). And we do not doubt that, due to his virtues, his experience, and dedication to the work he has undertaken, he will have absolute success in the task entrusted to him by our supreme body of state power (*Applause*).

He has been a member of the Party Central Committee since 1991 and was promoted to the Political Bureau 15 years ago. He fulfilled an internationalist mission in the Republic of Nicaragua

and graduated from the National Defense College.

In 2009 he was appointed Minister of Higher Education, and in 2012 Vice President of the Council of Ministers for the handling of organizations linked to education, science, sports, and culture.

Five years ago he was elected First Vice President of the Councils of State and Ministers -- and from that moment, a group of compañeros on the Political Bureau already had the absolute certainty that we had hit the nail on the head and that this was the solution, which today is materializing in this very important meeting -- positions, these last ones I mentioned and, above all, that of First Vice President of the Councils of State and Ministers, that he has held alongside his handling of the ideological sphere of the Party Central Committee.

Nor is it by chance, an issue as important as that had to pass through the hands of today's President of the Councils of State and Ministers, and when I am absent -- to which I will refer later, as I continue as First Secretary until the year 2021 -- that he will assume that position of President of the Councils of State and Ministers and First Secretary of the Communist Party (*Applause*). And it has been planned as such, to be maintained in the next proposal of the Assembly, which will also be discussed with the Council of Ministers, in the July session, where also proposed will be the commission of deputies that will be responsible for drafting and presenting to this Assembly the proposed new Constitution, which it will then be necessary to discuss with the population and submit to a referendum.

I anticipate that in the next Constitution, in which there will be no change in our strategic objective, in the work of the Party, this will be maintained and the people will undoubtedly support it, as they did dozens of years ago, in 1976, with an enormous number of votes, 98 per cent. And on that occasion, these two positions will be able to come together again, which as I said are fundamental, so that the First Secretary of the Party and the President of the Councils of State and Ministers will have in his hands all the power and influence to be exercised, even if there is, should there be, a Prime Minister who attends to the government. With which I demonstrate that we have already been discussing for quite some time the formulation that will be presented through this Commission of which I spoke, that will be proposed to you in the month of July.

He should complete his two terms, which we will establish in the Constitution, of five years each. The Party Congress will maintain its dates. I was elected in the 7th Party Congress until the year 2021. I am now 87 years old, I will be on June 3 -- I'm not saying this so you send me a gift, I know it is difficult to get a gift here, albeit modest (*Applause*). Getting a gift here, even a modest one, is more difficult than finding oil (*Laughter*), that is to say, don't send me anything.

When he fulfills his two terms, if he works well, and this is approved by the Central Committee of our Party and the supreme body of state power, which is this Assembly of which we are a part, he should remain. The same thing we are doing now, he has to maintain with his replacement. On finishing his 10 years as President of the Councils of State and Ministers, for the three that remain, until the Congress, he will remain as First (Party) Secretary to enable a secure transition, and sparing us the apprenticeship of the replacement, until he retires to care for the grandchildren that he will by then have -- if he doesn't already -- do you already have grandchildren? Well then, the great-grandchildren, like me, I have three and one is on the way (*Laughter*).

That's what we think.

Naturally, the highest bodies of the Party and the state will be those who will decide, they will make the final decision in these activities I have mentioned.

We live in a place, and in times, where we cannot make mistakes. I'm one of those who read and

study, when time permits, everything I can get hold of regarding very adverse historic events that have occurred in recent international history, in different countries, and we cannot afford to make mistakes, not only due to the geographical location in which we find ourselves, nor for any other reason. There are mistakes that we cannot make, like those that put an end to very important processes for humanity and whose consequences have been paid by many countries; the consequences of the international imbalance that was created, that many countries have paid, including ours, that we continue to pay. Am I making myself understood? (*Responses of: "Yes!"*)

Compañero Díaz-Canel is not an improvisation; over the years he has demonstrated maturity, work capacity, ideological soundness, political awareness, commitment, and loyalty to the Revolution.

His rise to the highest state and governmental responsibility of the nation has not been the result of chance or haste. In his gradual promotion to higher positions, unlike what happened in the past with other cases of young leaders, as I mentioned before, we did not make the mistake of accelerating the process, but rather ensured the transition through different party and governmental responsibilities with intentionality and foresight, so that he would acquire a level of comprehensive training that, together with personal qualities, would allow him to successfully assume the leadership of our state and government, and later the highest responsibility in the Party.

Meanwhile, compañero Valdés Mesa has an extensive career serving the Revolution, whose triumph took him by surprise as an agricultural worker on a farm in the Amancio Rodríguez region, which belonged then to the province of Camagüey. In 1961, he joined the National Revolutionary Militias, participated in the Literacy Campaign, and was active in the Association of Young Rebels, becoming its Secretary General in the aforementioned region. When the Young Communist League was constituted, he was elected its Secretary General at that level, and attended as a delegate the First Congress of this organization.



Raúl also highlighted the work of First Vice President Salvador Valdés Mesa (front centre) as a trade union leader.

Later he participated in the construction of the United Party of the Socialist Revolution of Cuba in various regions of Camagüey, and held leadership positions at the municipal level and in the Party Provincial Committee, from where he became a professional trade union cadre, gradually rising, among others, through the posts of Second Secretary of the Cuban Workers' Federation, CTC, and

Secretary General of the National Union of Agricultural and Forestry Workers.

In 1995, he was appointed Minister of Labor and Social Security, until he was promoted four years later to First Secretary of the Party Provincial Committee in Camagüey.

In the 19th CTC Congress, held in 2006, he was elected its Secretary General, a post he held until 2013, when he was elected as a Vice President of the Council of State.

Without ceasing to work, he graduated in 1983 as an agricultural engineer from the Higher Institute of Agricultural Sciences of Ciego de Ávila.

He has been a member of the Party Central Committee since 1991 and its Political Bureau for 10 years.

Similarly, I think it is fair to honour the selfless attitude of compañero José Ramón Machado Ventura, who on his own initiative, once again -- and I say again because he had done so before, precisely so that Díaz-Canel could occupy the post he held as First Vice President of the Council of State -- offered up his position as a Vice President of the Councils of State and Ministers to make way for the new generation.



Raúl spoke of the revolutionary example of José Ramón Machado Ventura, second secretary of the Party Central Committee.

Machado, to whom I am linked by more than 60 years of revolutionary struggle from the Sierra Maestra and the Frank País Second Eastern Front, of which he was one of the founders, is an

example of modesty, honesty, and unlimited dedication to work, even if he is a little cantankerous, as many of you know. From now on, he will concentrate his efforts on the work of the Party, as Second Secretary of the Central Committee.

Compañera Mercedes López Acea deserves a special mention, a member of the Political Bureau who was relieved of the post of Vice President of the Council of State yesterday afternoon; who after more than eight years of commendable and extremely difficult work as First Secretary of the Party in this complicated capital, a task that is logically made more complex precisely because it is the capital of the country, will soon hold new responsibilities in the Party Central Committee (*Applause*).

The composition of the Council of State elected today by the National Assembly reflects 42 per cent renewal. Likewise, women's representation increases to 48.4 per cent. It's going up. Right, Teresa? But now we must continue, as you yourselves say, to decision-making positions, not just numbers (*Applause*).

Well, that [representation] of women increases to 48.4 per cent, and that [representation] of Black and mixed race deputies reaches 45.2 per cent. And in both respects, we must not retreat even a millimetre, because it has taken many years, since the triumph of the Revolution, starting with Fidel, who was the one who started with these ideas of women's equality. And against the will of many old guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra -- when there was no surplus of weapons, but quite the opposite -- he formed a platoon named Mariana Grajales (*Applause*), and there is even a deputy here, Teté Puebla Viltres, who was one of the officers of that platoon.

This has cost a lot of work, it was not easy, and we still face the battle of proportionality not only in terms of numerical aspects, as I said, but qualitative [aspects], in decision-making places. Women and Blacks, above all, have been trained in the country, this is a sample -- let's review the résumé of each one of them -- but it cost work, that's why I insist: Not one step back! And now what remains are the decision-making positions, not for being this way or that, but due to their quality, due to their training. I myself have been mistaken about some appointments, to achieve the objective without the person appointed meeting all the conditions, and I had, of course, to rectify this later. But I draw your attention to this because it is a subject that we cannot leave to free spontaneity. What do you journalists think? Isn't that right? (*Applause*)

The average age of the Council of State decreased to 54 years, and 77.4 per cent were born after the triumph of the Revolution. The years have passed, and without us realizing it, but they have passed.

Three women were elected vice presidents of the Council of State, two of them Black, not only for being Black, but for their virtues and qualities, which is a further demonstration of the fulfillment of the agreements adopted by the Party Congresses and its First National Conference in 2012 on cadre policy.

This is also demonstrated by the fact that more than half of the deputies to the National Assembly, 53.22 per cent, are women and the representation of Black and mixed race Cubans reached 40.49 per cent, and this must continue.

You see that there are already some Black compañeras and compañeros, still only a few, working as presenters, both on television and on the radio, have you noticed that some of them have already emerged? That was not easy, I myself gave concrete instructions to those responsible for those radio and television organizations, and I said: Do this without affecting anyone, but go step by step resolving it. They have taken some little steps, but not enough from my point of view. Continue as you are, not as slowly, but continue to advance cautiously so that no one can claim

that they were affected because a mixed race or Black Cuban was positioned alongside them. Fortunately, there is already a tall Black man presenting the hydrological section [on the national news broadcast], who holds his hands like this (*Demonstrates*); I don't know why they don't give him a pointer to indicate there (*Applause*), because he doesn't know what to do with his hands and he holds them like that (*Demonstrates*), and he has a map there where the situation is reflected, with a pointer he could indicate it. And there is one [Black] woman in sports, thank goodness that she sometimes appears on the main news; and no one has been removed. I mean, with this I show you that things have to be thought about, not just say them and just like that, they did or they didn't do it; insisting, looking for new methods, avoiding making mistakes so that they can't criticize us in such noble objectives. And we must think once and think again about another solution when we cannot solve the problems. Isn't that right? (*Responses of "Yes!"*) That is why I elaborate and go off the text carefully crafted for such an important occasion, to reflect those experiences, which are very useful, and they are years that one has been seeing, analyzing.

And that detail I told you about the women and the racial question, it's because we have been around for a while... I'm not ashamed to recall, as I have sometimes stated in some private discussions, I mean in unofficial meetings. I was born in the countryside, in Birán, which is now part of Cueto, although it was Mayarí, I am now from Cueto and Holguín, but I was educated in Santiago, which influences me a lot, of course. And I remember, when I was a student -- and before the triumph of the Revolution, just in case we are already forgetting -- only three places, which were Havana -- I'm not saying Havana, remember the original size that it had before the current political/administrative division, I say Havana -- Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo -- I refer to the cities -- where before there was no television; radio had already existed as long as I could remember, but not television, and in small towns, in the different towns, sometimes it was in the municipal capital, there was always the central park, let's call it, it was the first thing that Spanish planners did. Don't the older people here remember Sundays, in some of those places, when the municipal marching band, where it existed, played an open-air concert in the evening? And so you saw the white couples of lovebirds, or falling in love, or friends strolling through the park, and the Blacks and mixed race in the park, but beyond the fence. Was it or wasn't it like that? I know there are many young people here. Did you know that? That lasted until Fidel delivered the first speech, in the month of January or February of 1959 I think.

But the roots were still firm; a country that has to be honoured for the ethnic composition of its people, who rose up in the struggle, in the clamour, in the crucible of our wars of independence, where in that of 1868 -- almost 150 years ago, it will be commemorated in October -- you know who the main leaders were? They were large landowners, even slave owners, who started by giving their slaves their freedom. And when that war, with the famous agreement of the Pact of Zanjón, which was overshadowed -- just as well -- by Antonio Maceo and his officers in the Baraguá Protest, the glorious Baraguá Protest, when that pact was reached already the vast majority of the leaders were Black, and at the beginning of Martí's necessary war in 1895, it was they who led it, fundamentally.

Then came what we know from history, the U.S. participation in the final days of the war, when Spain was already totally defeated, with tens of thousands of Spanish soldiers hospitalized even, tens of thousands! Some with battle wounds, most of them due to tropical diseases, to which the Spanish soldiers were not very accustomed, among whom was my father, and therefore he was evacuated -- he spent the war on the trail from Júcaro and Morón -- where he entered just as the war ended, that is, through Cienfuegos. And he returned the following year. I'm glad that he came, that he returned, and if not him, another would have come, because he fell in love with Cuba. And as I once told a Spanish politician, adding that I was glad, because if not I would have been a *Galleguito* or an old Galician, and member of such a party. But then when the Americans disembarked east of Santiago de Cuba, without any obstacle, because it was protected by the

Liberation Army, the more modern U.S. fleet, in a target practice, sunk the Spanish fleet, which was gathered in Santiago de Cuba, in the Bay. They dismantled the artillery to defend the city, but the order came from Madrid to re-arm and go out to fight the U.S. fleet, without knowing what they were ordering them to do from Madrid: to face a more modern fleet and leave one by one, because of the characteristics of the Bay of Santiago, which is a pocket bay, like most Cuban bays, with the exception of Playa Girón and that of Matanzas, to the north. And Admiral Cervera, head of the Spanish Fleet of the Atlantic, ordered all his officers to dress up, and one said: "Admiral, but we are going to fight." And he told him: "Indeed, that's why, this is the final battle." And so it was, a target one by one.



Raúl Castro Ruz speaks at the closing rally of the 7th Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, April 19, 2016.

Two battles on land of some importance were fought in El Viso, where the Spanish General of the surname Vara del Rey, who was defending it, died fighting and in the capture of the Loma de San Juan, which has now been practically swallowed up by the city. And then came what I call the original sin: the victorious troops of both armies were about to enter Santiago de Cuba, but the U.S. General who was leading his troops forbade the Cubans from participating. It was Calixto García who was there, or nearby.

They stopped him from entering under the pretext of avoiding reprisals, when in fact the Liberation Army was only interested in the guns of captured prisoners, some of whom even joined our troops. But they committed an even greater error, which can be said to be the original sin of what was to come, when they arrived at government headquarters in the city, lowered the Spanish flag and raised only the U.S. standard. This alone was an indication of what was going to happen in the country until Fidel arrived.

Discussions were held between the Spanish and Americans in Paris, at the Palace of Versailles on the outskirts of the French capital, and of course "there was no need for the Cubans to participate."

This equality was achieved in a beautiful crucible that was our Liberation Army at that time...

As for discrimination, all you had to do was go to a sugar mill, even the most modest, and there you'd find the club of U.S. representatives and white collar Cubans, let's say, who worked in some office or held some sort of responsibility, those were the ones that went to that club, while

everyone else went to the barracks.

Under their influence, the Platt Amendment lasted until the Revolution of 1933, but other agreements saw us subjugated once more until January 1, 1959. It wasn't during the early stages but only now that we are managing to reconstruct this beautiful crucible that is our nation. Do you understand what I am saying, what I'm talking about? (*Replies of "Yes"*) I ask you older members, wasn't it so? I'm going to have to turn over here to where some of the older folks are (*Laughter*). Isn't that right, Guillermo García, there was none of that at El Plátano, poverty united us all.

Forgive me from diverging from the text, but modesty aside, I think that I'm enriching it (*Applause*), the press can publish the written text if they like, but they can also talk about what I am speaking of here, because of course, it's being broadcast.

That is to say, naturally I didn't intend to dwell on this point when this speech was being written, it only occurred to me to do so after seeing the results and composition of this new Assembly.

Back to the matter at hand, the members of the Presidency of the National Assembly of People's Power -- two of whom are women -- led by our beloved compañero Esteban Lazo Hernández, were reelected.

Likewise, at the proposal of President Díaz-Canel, the Cuban Parliament approved, in accordance with what is established in Article 75 of the Constitution, to postpone the announcement of the Council of Ministers, in order to have sufficient time to make a prudent assessment of the readjustment of cadres that must be made, and a very wise decision -- in order to conduct the process gradually and be able to speak with ministers individually so that they can prepare their arguments and then make the appropriate decisions -- to present them before the Assembly in July, as we stated.

As for myself, I will continue to serve as First Secretary of the Party Central Committee, in my second and last term in office, which ends in 2021 when the Eighth Party Congress will be held and the gradual and systematic process of transferring the principal responsibilities to the new generations, is completed.

At that point, my health permitting, I will be just another soldier, beside the people, defending this Revolution (*Applause*).

Just to be clear, I wish to stress that the Communist Party of Cuba, starting with the First Secretary of its Central Committee, will resolutely support the new President of the Councils of State and Ministers as he exercises his constitutional powers, contributing to protecting our most important weapon: the unity of all revolutionaries and the people.

This is the only way. Those of us who had the privilege of fighting against tyranny under the leadership of Fidel, from Moncada, *Granma*, the Rebel Army, and clandestine struggle, through today, feel, just like the heroic people of Cuba, a deep satisfaction in the consolidated work of the Revolution, our most beautiful work which imbues us with a genuine sense of happiness and calm confidence as we witness with our own eyes the transfer of the mission to continue building socialism, and in so doing guarantee independence and national sovereignty, to the new generations.

As early as April 4, 1962, during the closing ceremony of the First Congress of the Association of Young Rebels, compañero Fidel stated: "To believe in the youth, is to see in them, enthusiasm as well as ability; energy as well as responsibility; youth as well as purity, heroism, character, will, love for the homeland, faith in the homeland! love for the Revolution, faith in the Revolution,

confidence in themselves; it is the deep conviction that youth can, that youth are capable, the deep conviction that the greatest tasks can be placed on the shoulders of the youth."

What a broad vision of the youth and their ability to take action.

It is for good reason then that one of the continual aims of the enemies of the Revolution, has been and will continue to be, to confuse, divide, and separate our combative youth from the ideals, history, culture, and work of the Revolution, to sow individualism, greed, the commodification of feelings and stimulate pessimism, a disregard for ethics, human values, solidarity, and the sense of duty, in the new generations.

These plans are doomed to failure, because throughout our history, Cuban youth have been, are, and will continue to be the protagonists in the defence of their Socialist Revolution. The fact that 87.8 per cent of deputies in this Assembly were born after January 1, 1959, is evidence of this.

Cuban youth have proved how right Fidel was when he spoke to them in 1962. Today, we reaffirm this trust, sure that the new generations will be the zealous guardians of the precepts contained in the Comandante en Jefe's outstanding definition of the concept of Revolution.

It is up to the Party, state, and government to fulfill and enforce the policy of purposely promoting in due measure, youth, women, Black and mixed race persons to decision-making positions, in order to create -- well in advance -- a future reserve of the principle leaders of the nation, without repeating the costly mistakes which we have made in this strategic matter.

During the fifth Central Committee Plenum held last March 23-24, we reviewed progress made in the updating of the country's socio-economic model, a process which began in 2011, in fulfillment of the agreements stemming from the Sixth Party Congress. This issue had also been addressed on two previous occasions by the Party Political Bureau.

Despite all the work that has been done, which is by no means little, we thought that by this point -- after we approved or made initial decisions in the Sixth Party Congress and subsequent meetings -- we would have advanced more than we have, if not resolved, all the problems, have everything well organized, planned and underway at different stages of development.

We would already have a new Constitution, which has been delayed for the same reasons, because these key problems have not been solved; nor have we been able to ensure the participation of organizations, bodies, and entities so that working at a grass roots level, they were able to guide, train, and control the appropriate implementation of the approved policies.

When I saw the initial problems we were facing, I stated right here, in a summary of a Parliamentary session I think, that we would work "without haste, but without pause," because haste also led us to commit serious mistakes.

We never led ourselves to believe that it would be a short and easy road. We knew that we were initiating a hugely complex process, given its scope, encompassing all elements of society and requiring us to overcome the colossal obstacle of mentalities founded on decades of paternalism and egalitarianism, with significant consequences for the functioning of the national economy.

Add to this the desire to advance faster than our ability to do things properly would allow, which gave way to improvisations and ingenuity stemming from insufficient comprehensiveness, an incomplete assessment of the costs and benefits and a limited view of the risks associated with applying certain measures which, moreover, lacked the necessary management, control, and monitoring, leading to delays and slow reactions to correcting anomalies in a timely fashion.

I believe that we have learned important lessons from the mistakes made over this period, and that the experience we have gained will allow us to continue to take surer and more deliberate steps, with our feet and ears to the ground, thus avoiding inconvenient setbacks.

We will continue to expand self-employed work -- as I have mentioned in different speeches before this Parliament -- which represents an alternative source of employment within the framework of current law, and far from signifying a process of neo-liberal privatization of social property, will allow the state to free itself of managing activities of a non-strategic nature to the country's development. The experiment with non-agricultural cooperatives will also continue.

Significant results have been achieved in both areas, but also revealed are mistakes in management, control and monitoring, which have led to the emergence of various forms of indiscipline such as tax evasion, in a country where, before these measures were applied, hardly anyone paid taxes; criminal acts and regulatory violations, with the aim of getting rich quick, a problem which was not addressed in a timely manner and resulted in the need to modify various regulations linked to this sector.

Meanwhile, the commitment to ensuring that no citizen would be abandoned to their fate and that, unlike in many other countries, the process of changes to the Cuban Social and Economic Model would under no circumstances mean the application of shock therapies against those most in need who, generally speaking, are the strongest supporters of the Socialist Revolution, largely influenced the pace of change on important matters such as solving the dual currency and exchange rate, which continues to cause us serious head aches and gives rise to new problems.

We could also cite as an example, reforms to wages and pensions, as well as eliminating unnecessary gratuities and excessive subsidies for certain products and services, instead of for individual people with no other means of support.

We have also lacked an adequate systematic public communications policy regarding the changes made, to reach every citizen in a timely fashion with information and clear understandable explanations, because these questions are somewhat difficult to understand in all their aspects, regarding such complex issues, to prevent misunderstandings or information vacuums.

Added to this are the difficult conditions in which we have been obliged to steer the national economy over all these years, during which the U.S. economic blockade has been tightened, with the incessant persecution of the country's financial transactions, limiting access to sources of financial credit for development, as well as the obstacles created to much-needed foreign investment.

I cannot forego noting the extensive damage caused by persistent periods of drought, like that of the last three years, or the increasingly destructive and frequent hurricanes that have battered the entire nation.

On the other hand, undeniably positive are the results obtained in the patient, laborious process of restructuring our foreign debt to our principal creditors, which frees present and, above all, future generations from a huge burden of obligations that hung over the future of the nation like a sword of Damocles, although not the only one. Playing an outstanding role in this activity is a current vice president of the Council of Ministers and Minister of the Economy, compañero Cabrisas (*Applause*), and not only in this, the principal effort, but in other kinds of work related to debts.

Nevertheless, we need to advance carefully, because we only know how to ask and know very little about rationalizing, and I am the one who authorizes the use of reserves and loans from the reserves -- and I know very well what I'm saying. There was a time when available reserves were

depleted because of violations, out of ignorance, and we have now restored them. I'm referring to fuel, that was used without authorization, because of mistaken conceptions stemming from not looking at original documents containing current stipulations.

Many times, when asking for some reserve of any product, it's about considering very simple questions: "Is that much fuel needed on that day? Why?" And they give me a reason that is obviously incorrect -- not real, although it could have some relevance: "If it isn't given..." The response: "This quantity cannot be allocated, because everyday needs appear everywhere." "Well, hospitals are going to be affected." And then I give an even stronger answer, in terms that I shouldn't repeat here, but with a severe warning, "Don't try to deceive me with nonsense of this kind." Affecting hospitals would oblige us to take... but anyway we advanced half of the fuel, that would be returned within the periods we established.

I only cite this example of realities that especially the Council of Ministers knows well.

With constant, prolonged effort, we managed to renegotiate all these debts, some reductions with more convenient terms were achieved, to be able to meet obligations and above all maintain the government's credit standing, and as soon as this huge task was completed, step by step, at times unnoticed, we go back to making commitments with the result that we are again in debt -- not as much as before -- and with the difficulties this creates for planning. And talking about planning, better planning is imperative, knowing how to use what we have and seeing how to resolve the rest. But not inventing along the way: bread today, hunger tomorrow. This is not our path, ours is realism. We speak of the sword of Damocles. Revolutionaries have always lived with a sword of Damocles hanging over our necks, of different origins.

I recall the Special Period, that was when Díaz-Canel -- as I said -- was on the rise, when he assumed leadership of the Party in Santa Clara. In that era, you had to put on an oxygen mask, a snorkel like the fish divers use, at times you had to put it on because the water was over your moustache, and at other times over your nose, and sometimes it covered our eyes, and you had to put the snorkel on, but resist -- that is why we are here today (*Applause*) -- and break through the pessimism that emerges when problems appear, in those with little resolve.

This is not the first time. During the Special Period, back in 1993, 1994 -- it had practically begun in 1990 -- and that slogan appeared, that was said over there on the Isle of Youth, I think, on a July 26, *Sí se puede* (Yes, it can be done). But in order to do so, every problem, every step taken, must be analyzed with all objectivity, without illusions or fooling ourselves.

Now with the current situation, with the neighbour we have, who has returned to the Monroe Doctrine. You already saw what Bruno said the other day to the Vice President of the United States, who couldn't take it and left. I'll talk about this later.

It cannot be allowed that we again fall into a spiral of debt and, to avoid this, we must respect the principle of not making any new commitments that we are not able to honour on time, within the period established.

Current tensions in our external finances are a warning sign in this sense, in terms of what I have been explaining. There is no other alternative beyond better planning, on the basis of a sound foundation, saving, and avoiding any unnecessary expenses, of which there are enough already, to ensure that expected income is obtained, which allow agreed-upon obligations to be met, and at the same time, guarantee resources to invest in the development of prioritized sectors of the national economy.

We are not in an extreme, dramatic situation, like the one the Cuban people were able to endure

and overcome, under the leadership of the Party and of Fidel, in the early 1990s, a stage known as the Special Period. The panorama is very different now; we have a solid foundation to ensure that these circumstances are not repeated. Our economy has been diversified somewhat and is growing. But the duty of revolutionaries is to prepare for the worst possibility with audacity and intelligence -- not for the most convenient -- with permanent optimism and full confidence in victory. Today and always, maintain the unyielding work of defending unity, resist and resist! There is no other solution.

As was reported some days ago, during the holding of the 5th Plenum of the Party Central Committee, an explanation was presented on studies being conducted about the need to reform the Constitution, in accordance with the transformations occurring in the political, economic, and social order.

To complete this process, this Assembly, in its next ordinary session, must approve a commission of deputies who will be charged with developing and presenting a proposal that will be discussed in the legislature, to later be submitted to the people for consultation, and finally, as established in the Constitution, the final text is approved in a referendum.

This is the appropriate moment to clarify, once again, that we do not intend to modify the irrevocable nature of socialism in our political and social system, or the leading role of the Communist Party of Cuba, as the organized vanguard, and the highest leadership force in society and the state, as established in Article 5 of the current Constitution, and that we will propose be maintained in the same Article.

Moving to foreign policy issues, I cannot overlook the 8th Summit of the Americas, recently held in Peru, that was marked, beginning months ago, by the renovated neo-colonial, hegemonic attitude of the United States government, which has ostensibly reaffirmed its commitment to the Monroe Doctrine. The most notorious expression of this was seen in the arbitrary, unjust exclusion of Venezuela from the event.

It was known that the United States was intent upon mounting a propagandistic spectacle against the Cuban Revolution, making use of the remnants of the mercenary counterrevolution.

Cuba went to Lima by right, with our heads held high. We demonstrated our willingness to dialogue and debate, in conditions of equality and respect, in any venue whatsoever. Likewise confirmed was the determination of Cubans to defend our principles, values, and legitimate place.

The Cuban delegation, that of Bolivia and other countries, prevented the appearance of a united front against the Bolivarian Revolution, and reiterated the demand for a new system of relations between the two Americas.

The comments of our Foreign Minister, *compañero* Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, in the name of the Cuban government, with frank language, clear ideas, and firmness, constituted a resounding response to the insults and fallacies contained in the outdated, interventionist speech of the U.S. Vice President present there. Members of civil society from our country unleashed a battle against the neo-colonial exclusion supported by the [Organization of American States (OAS)], and forcefully defended their recognition as the genuine representatives of the Cuban people. They raised their voices for Cuba and for the peoples of Our America. The provocation was defeated.

I take advantage of the occasion, in the name of this heroic people, to reiterate congratulations to all members of the Cuban delegation who participated in the event.

The countries of Our America will not be able to confront new challenges without advancing

toward unity within diversity to exercise our rights, including that of adopting the political, economic, social system chosen by our peoples, as stated in the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, approved in our capital, as you know.

We also emphasize our commitment to the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America.



Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla speaking at the 8th Summit of the Americas in Lima, Peru, April 2018.

We are the region with the greatest inequality in the world in the distribution of wealth; the gap between rich and poor is enormous and growing; poverty is increasing, despite efforts over the past decade by progressive and popular governments, which made progress in terms of social justice.

Today, an attempt is being made to divide us and destroy the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. Being dusted off is the instrument of U.S. policy that has always been the discredited OAS, and groups of countries are being created under the pretext of protecting democracy to contribute to the perpetuation of imperialist domination.

Aggression against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is currently the central element in the efforts of imperialism to overturn popular governments on the continent, erase social gains made and liquidate progressive models and alternatives to neo-liberal capitalism that are being attempted.

We emphasize our full solidarity with Venezuela, its legitimate government and the civic-military union led by President Nicolás Maduro Moros, who is preserving the legacy of President Hugo Chávez Frías.

We reaffirm our support for other peoples and governments facing pressure from imperialism to reverse the gains made, as is the case in Bolivia and Nicaragua.

After the parliamentary coup against President Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, now consummated there is the arbitrary, unjust imprisonment of compañero Lula, whose freedom we demand, now condemned to political prison to prevent his participation in the coming Presidential elections, despite the fact that according to polls conducted by different institutions in Brazil, no one could defeat Lula, if the vote were held today.

That is why he is a prisoner; that is why he is being slandered with the accusation they filed against him, that led to his imprisonment.

We reiterate our support to the Puerto Rican people's right to self-determination and independence.

The nations of the Caribbean, especially Haiti, can always count, as they have to date, on the solidarity and collaboration of Cuba.

On December 17, 2014, we announced, simultaneously with then-President Barack Obama, the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States.

With the strictest respect and sovereign equality, work began on the solution of bilateral problems and even cooperation in various areas of mutual interest. It was demonstrated that despite the deep differences between the two governments, a civilized co-existence was possible and advantageous.

The strategic objective of overthrowing the Revolution did not change, but the political climate between the two countries experienced unquestionable progress that produced benefits for both peoples.

However, since the current President came to power, a deliberate step back has been taken in relations between Cuba and the United States, and an aggressive, threatening tone prevails in this administration's statements.

This was made evident with special emphasis on the insulting Presidential memorandum of June 2017, drafted and announced in the confines of the worst elements of the anti-Cuban far right in South Florida that profits from tension between our countries.

The economic blockade has been tightened, financial persecution reinforced, and the occupation continues of a portion of Guantánamo's territory, with a military base and an international detention and torture centre.

Programs of political subversion are funded with millions of dollars by the U.S. government. The recruitment and financing of mercenaries, and illegal radio and television broadcasts continue.

Using a crude pretext, the majority of diplomatic functionaries at our embassy in Washington were expelled, and U.S. diplomatic staff was reduced in Havana, including the consul, with the consequent impact on bilateral migratory agreements and problems for thousands of Cuban who require these services.

The majority of U.S. citizens and Cuban émigrés are opposed to maintaining the blockade and favour improving bilateral relations.

Paradoxically, individuals and groups who today appear to have greater influence on the U.S. President are proponents of aggressive, hostile behaviour toward Cuba.

We will confront all attempts to manipulate the human rights issue and slander our country. We do not need to take lessons from anyone, much less the United States government.

We have struggled for almost 150 years for national independence and have defended the Revolution at the price of much bloodshed and have faced the greatest dangers. We reaffirm today the conviction that any strategy meant to destroy the Revolution, be it through confrontation or seduction, will be faced with the categorical rejection of the Cuban people, and will fail.

We live under an unjust, exclusionary international order, in which the United States attempts to preserve, at all costs, its absolute domination, despite the international tendency to move toward a multi-polar system.

With this objective, it provokes new wars, including non-conventional ones, accentuating the danger of a nuclear conflagration, expanding the use of force and threats to do so, and the indiscriminate application of unilateral sanctions against those that do not bow down to their designs. It imposes an arms race, the militarization of outer space and cyberspace, and presents a growing threat to international peace and security.

The expansion of NATO to Russia's borders causes serious dangers that are aggravated by the imposition of arbitrary sanctions, which we denounce. The United States insists on continuous threats and punitive measures, violations of international trade norms directed against China and the European Union, its ally, with which we recently signed a dialogue and cooperation agreement. The consequences will be dire for all, especially nations of the South.

U.S. imperialism creates conflicts that generate waves of refugees; implements racist, repressive, discriminatory policies against immigrants; constructs walls; militarizes borders; promotes even more wasteful and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption; and creates obstacles to cooperation in confronting climate change.

The U.S. uses its transnationals and hegemonic technological platforms to impose one way of thinking, to manipulate human conduct, invade our cultures, erase our historical memory and national identity, as well as control and corrupt our political and electoral systems.

This past April 13, in violation of the principles of international law and the United Nations Charter, the United States and some of its NATO allies militarily attacked Syria, with no evidence of the use of chemical weapons on the part of the government of this country. Unfortunately, these unilateral actions have become an unacceptable practice, used in several Middle Eastern countries and now, repeatedly, against Syria, which merits condemnation from the international community. We express our solidarity with the people and government of Syria.

It cannot be forgotten that in March 2003, only 15 years ago, then-President W. Bush, launched an invasion of Iraq under the pretext of the existence of weapons of mass destruction, which was revealed as false within a few years.

Cuba supports efforts to defend peace, convinced that only dialogue, negotiation and international cooperation will allow us to find a solution to the serious problems of the world.

We are grateful for the solidarity of all countries, almost without exception, in our struggle against the economic, commercial, financial blockade.

Bilateral relations with the Russian Federation, based on mutual benefit, have substantially increased across all spheres. We will always appreciate and remember the support we received from the peoples which were part of the former Soviet Union, and especially the people of Russia, in the difficult years following the triumph of our revolutionary process.

Likewise, relations with the People's Republic of China continue to advance in the spheres of trade, economy, politics, and cooperation, representing important contribution to our country's development. A few weeks ago we received a visit from compañero Nguyen Phu Trong, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, in another expression of the successful development of the ties which unite us and which enabled us to identify new opportunities for collaboration.

Meanwhile, Cuba's historic ties with African countries, the African Union, and Asia continue to grow.

We shall continue to defend the legitimate demands of the countries of the South, their right to development, and the democratization of international relations.

All the just causes, especially that of the Palestinian and Sahrawi peoples, and struggles for social justice, will also have the support of the Cuban people.

The complex international context described reaffirms the absolute validity of that expressed by the Comandante en Jefe of the Cuban Revolution in his Central Report to the First Party Congress in 1975: "As long as imperialism exists, the Party, state, and people will pay maximum attention to our defence services. Revolutionary vigilance will never be neglected. History teaches with great eloquence that those who forget this principle do not survive the mistake."

Compañeras and compañeros:

In just 11 days our *pioneros*, students, workers, campesinos, artists and intellectuals, members of the glorious Revolutionary Armed Forces and Ministry of the Interior, the entire people, will march together through our streets and squares to commemorate International Workers' Day. Once again we will show the world that the majority of Cubans support their Revolution, Party and socialism, and although I was scheduled to travel to another province in the interior of the country, considering the importance of this moment, I have decided to accompany the current President of the Councils of State and Ministers in the May Day parade in Havana (*Applause*). I will visit the other province and more, later, because supposedly I'll have less work, too.

¡Hasta la victoria siempre! (Onward to victory, always)

Shouts of: "*¡Viva Raúl!*"

(*Standing ovation*).

(*Council of State transcript. The translation has been slightly edited for publication. Photos: Estudio Revolucion, R. Alcolea, Peruvian Foreign Office.*)



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