

[Speech by Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro Ruz at the Plaza Aérea del Silencio, in Caracas, Venezuela, on January 23, 1959](#) **[1]**

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Sisters and brothers of Venezuela,

If I could express in one sentence the emotion I have experienced today, I would say that I felt an even greater emotion upon entering Caracas than I did upon entering Havana (APPLAUSE.)

In a certain sense, it was only natural that the Cuban people wanted to show the Rebel Army the affection it showed us. We had been fighting for the people of Cuba for seven years; the people of Cuba looked to us for their liberation, the people of Cuba looked to us for their freedom and, finally, when after long years of sacrifice on their part and on our part, as we were only their leaders in that struggle, when we saw that struggle crowned with victory, it was only logical that the Cubans welcomed us with open arms. However, from Venezuela we have only received favors (APPLAUSE.) Venezuelans have received nothing from us yet, in turn, they encouraged us during the struggle with their sympathy and affection; they made the bolivar reach the Sierra Maestra (APPLAUSE,) they disseminated the broadcasts of Radio Rebelde throughout the Americas, they opened the pages of their newspapers to us and we received a few more things from Venezuela (APPLAUSE.) And after having received all this, after having received many favors from this people in our struggle for freedom, when we arrived in Venezuela we found that they received us with the same affection with which the Cubans received us (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.)

This tribute could not have been more pure, this gesture could not have been more noble, nor could it have been more noble, brothers of Venezuela, to have received from this noble and heroic people a greater favor than the one received by the people of Cuba from the people of Venezuela tonight (APPLAUSE.)

Why did I come to Venezuela? I came to Venezuela, firstly, due to a sense of gratitude. Secondly, due to an elementary duty of reciprocity for all institutions that so generously invited me to live with Venezuela this glorious day of January 23 (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.) But I also came for another reason; because the people of Cuba need the help of the people of Venezuela, because the people of Cuba, in this difficult but glorious moment of its history, needs the moral support of the people of Venezuela (APPLAUSE.) Because our homeland is suffering today the most criminal, dastardly and cowardly campaign ever launched against any people; because the perpetual enemies of the peoples of the Americas; the perpetual enemies of our freedoms; the perpetual enemies of our political and economic independence; the perpetual allies of dictatorships, cannot calmly resign themselves to witnessing the formidable and extraordinary victory of the people of Cuba who, with no other help than the sympathy and solidarity of the brotherly peoples of the continent, with no other weapons than those they were able to wrest from the enemy in every combat, waged for two years a bloody war against a numerous, well-armed army equipped with tanks, cannons, airplanes and all kinds of weapons, modern weapons, those that were said to be invincible. Our people, unarmed, with no tanks, no cannons, no 500-pound bombs, no airplanes, no military training, a defenseless people, without training, without war practices, was able to overthrow, in two years of frontal struggle, the armed forces of a dictatorship that had

60,000 men under arms (APPLAUSE.)

People used to say that a revolution against the army was impossible; that revolutions could be made with the army or without the army, but never against the army, and we made a revolution against the army (APPLAUSE.)

People used to say that a revolution was not possible if there was no economic crisis, if there was no hunger, and yet the Revolution took place (APPLAUSE.)

All those tenets were brought to the ground, all the lies that had been devised to keep the people subdued and discouraged were brought to the ground, the armed forces of the tyranny were destroyed and disarmed, the tanks, the cannons and the airplanes are today in the hands of the rebels (APPLAUSE.) It was what can be called in the full extent of the word, a true revolution, a revolution to begin with (APPLAUSE.)

And how was that revolution made? What was the behavior of the Rebel Army during the war? Hundreds of wounded were abandoned by the enemy on the battlefield and our doctors picked them up, cured them and sent them back. Thousands of prisoners were captured on the battlefields but no prisoner was ever beaten, no prisoner was ever killed. No army in the world ever behaved, no revolution in the world was ever carried out so exemplarily, so chivalrously, as the Cuban Revolution was carried out (APPLAUSE.)

We taught our men that torturing a prisoner was an act of cowardice; that only henchmen tortured. We taught our comrades that to murder prisoners, to murder a combatant when he has surrendered and has been promised his life if he surrenders, was an act of cowardice, and not a single prisoner was ever murdered (APPLAUSE.)

But we went even further: we told the people that when the tyranny fell we did not want a single house looted, because as soon as the Revolution would triumph, the houses of the embezzlers and enemies of the people would belong to the people and had to be looked after (APPLAUSE.)

We told the people that once the tyranny was overthrown, no one should take revenge into their own hands, because revolutions were smeared when after the victory the corpses of the henchmen were dragged through the streets. Is it wrong to drag a henchman? (Exclamations of "No!") No, it is not. But we told the people no to drag anyone so that the perpetual critics of revolutions would have no excuse to attack it because you know that reactionary forces, counterrevolutionary forces begin to vilify the Revolution on the basis of what happens immediately after the triumph and looting and dragging people through the streets are one of the arguments raised (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.)

We told the Cuban people not to drag anyone through the streets and that they had nothing to fear because crimes would not go unpunished; that there would be justice so that there would be no vengeance and the people trusted us. We told them that justice would be served and the people trusted us and dragged no one; the people did not even beat the henchmen they captured, they handed them over to the revolutionary authorities. The people were confident that justice would be served and justice was essential because without justice there can be no democracy; without justice there can be no peace; without justice there can be no freedom (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.)

The most terrible damage to our peoples is the impunity of crime, is the lack of justice, because our peoples have never seen justice (EXCLAMATIONS OF "Go on Fidel!")

It is not for me to analyze the process and the history of Venezuela, no. Suffice to analyze our homeland, because at the end of the day, what is happening in Cuba is what is happening here and what is happening to all the peoples of the Americas. It is for this reason that we feel so well identified; it is for this reason that the same things hurt us; it is for this reason that Venezuelans and Cubans feel the same anxieties (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.)

In our country there was never justice. Justice was applied to the unfortunate; justice was applied to the poor; justice was applied to those who stole not much. Truth be said, a millionaire never went to jail; an embezzler of public funds never went to jail. A series of onerous privileges always existed.

Much was said about being equal before the law but it was a myth; the law fell upon those who had no sponsor, upon those who had no money, upon those who had no privilege (APLAUSE AND CHEERING.) Embezzlers ran for senators and congressmen; they had enough money to bribe consciences, because when there is hunger, when there is no work, when there is misery, political schemers and political merchants can unfortunately profit, and there was always someone in need to take their child to a hospital, or someone in need to send their children to school, or a father of a hungry family to bribe in that moment of need to buy their vote (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.) Hence, whoever stole millions of pesos always found a party nomination and was elected.

From the moment he became a senator or congressman, he went unpunished, he could kill and nothing would happen to him. The courts had to make a request to Congress, and Congress never agreed. Congress never granted any request for any member of the political gang (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.) They could steal and go unpunished. When the judge raised the request, it was always denied. Congress never granted any judicial request against any member of the political gang. If he had stolen before becoming a senator, the law did not apply to him either, because the judicial petition was not granted. But, on the other hand, if the victim was a member of Congress, if a representative killed another representative, then the petitions were granted, because the affected interest, the violated right, was that of a member of the political gang (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.)

To jail went those who stole a chicken, who stole a horse; but the one who stole millions of pesos belonged to the same aristocratic club as the magistrate, where they had lunch together (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.) The government lived by plundering. There was no policeman who went to buy from an establishment and wanted to pay; the officers and sergeants of the army stationed in the rural areas received two salaries, a salary from the State and a higher salary from the company that owned the land. In each sugar mill, the sugar mill administration paid a separate salary to the chief of the military detachment, who was therefore always unconditionally at the service of the company's interests against the peasants and workers (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.) Even worse, the main offender was the authority officer. The law prohibited gambling, but the authority officer protected gambling; the law prohibited drug trafficking, or the sale of drugs and narcotics, and the authority officer was the one who facilitated the business (CHEERING.)

Let me give you a fact: in the Bureau of Investigations, the head of the anti-drug trafficking department was in charge of drug distribution in Havana (LAUGHTER AND CHEERING.) There was no chief of police, no colonel, no general who did not become a millionaire on the backs of gambling, smuggling, and extortion.

That was the history of our homeland and that was the history of our homeland for 50 years. There hasn't been in the world, at least in recent times, a people who have fought more for their freedom and happiness than the Cuban people (APPLAUSE.)

You will remember the history of America, who better than Venezuelans to know the history of America, since Venezuelans made the history of America! (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.)

It was at the time when Napoleon's armies invaded Spain. While Spain was engaged in infighting, all the colonies revolted. It is not that they ceased to be colonies, but the truth is that back then they rose up against the Spanish metropolis. The colonies rose up against the metropolis and fought heroically, but in an immense territory, and a handful of courageous peoples, guided by that extraordinary leader, Simón Bolívar, achieved their political independence in the first decades of the past century (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.)

You may also recall that Bolivar did not forget Cuba; you may also recall that the plan to free the island of Cuba was among his plans, a plan he never materialized because he could not implement it but not because he had forgotten Cuba (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS OF "Long live Fidel!".) The Libertador was unable to add that island to the group of peoples he had freed and our island remained under the yoke of oppression and colonization for almost another century.

Our homeland was left alone; the governments of America left it behind, and alone it had to fight against Spain for 30 years; alone it had to fight the battle that all the other peoples of America had fought together. And when after 30 years of struggle, our people, our liberating armies had virtually defeated the Spanish army, the United States intervened to liberate Cuba, so they said, because -as they declared- the Republic of Cuba should be, de facto and de jure, free and independent. But when the time came to hand over to the Cubans the island for which they had been fighting for 30 years, it turned out that the Mambises could not even enter Santiago de Cuba. The United States remained there for two years occupying the island militarily and finally, Congress came up with a forcibly imposed amendment to the Constitution of the republic, giving it the right to intervene in the internal affairs of Cuba (BOOS.)

The result was that all the informers, all the stooges who had been murdering Cubans during the war, all the henchmen, all the murderers, all those who stole the land from the Cubans while they were fighting, kept the land and stayed on the island cool as cucumber, with no harm done to them because the foreign power protected them. Justice was not served; justice was not served; justice was not served! Hence we did not have a good start in the early years of our semi-republic, better say our caricature of a republic because it was no republic at all. When a country reserves the right to intervene in another, the country can no longer be called independent, because independence does not admit a middle ground, either you are independent or you are not (APPLAUSE.)

Could our country prosper under that regime? (EXCLAMATIONS OF "No!") No. The governments stole, crimes were committed, there were injustices and the people had to endure it because if they protested, if they fought against it, they would be told: "Look, you are going to lose your sovereignty; they are going to intervene". So the people had to bear with resignation all the horrors, all the abuses and all the injustices of the rulers and the exploiters in our country.

Three decades went by under this scenario, which naturally led to the first tyranny suffered by our people in the republic: Machado's tyranny. Our people fought bravely against that tyranny, defeated it with the effort of the masses, the sacrifice of the students, of the workers, of the youth, and when the tyrant left, he decided to flee, something similar to what they would have wanted to happen this time but did not, occurred. General Herrera, then head of the army, remains head of the army and they appoint a run-of-the mill president, whose only purpose is to give the people a tinge of freedom, calm them down and wait for the opportunity to appease them; because when the people become enraged, the reactionary forces, the enemies of their liberties try to appease them by granting some liberties, awaiting the opportunity when they fall into slumber again to once again impose power on them (CHEERING.) That is why people should never slumber, and now more than ever, no people in America should slumber. (EXCLAMATIONS OF "No!")

Twenty days later, the soldiers and army ranks revolted against the officers and overthrew the government that had been established following Machado's fall. Well, the sergeants became colonels, and for a while, for a brief period of time, they appeared to adopt a revolutionary posture. Several civilian, revolutionary elements joined the movement, and there was a revolutionary government for three months, the Guiteras government, or rather, the government where the most prominent figure was Antonio Guiteras, who began by adopting a series of revolutionary measures against the monopolies that exploited the electric utilities. As a result, US Ambassador Jefferson Caffery began to woo Sergeant Batista, who was already a colonel, and after three months Sergeant Batista, following the instructions of the U.S. ambassador, removed the revolutionary government from power and installed a dictatorship that remained 11 years in power.

This is the truth that we are not going to hide from telling here or anywhere else (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.) Let's call a spade a spade.

Then we had World War II. There was a rising worldwide opinion against dictatorship and peoples were once again cajoled. They were told a lot about Hitler, Mussolini, and so on and so forth. They were told that it was a war against tyranny; they were told that it was a war for the rights of the people; that human rights would be respected, that there would be a United Nations Charter where those rights would be enshrined, and so on and so forth and, certainly, in Cuba, in Venezuela, in Peru, in Guatemala, and in different countries, dictatorships retreated under the pressure of world public opinion that was under the effects of deception, and a series of constitutional regimes succeeded with the permission of his "majesty", the armies (CHEERING.)

What happened in Cuba? Well it's very simple, because I'm talking about what happened in Cuba; I do not have to talk about what happened in other countries, which was more or less the same (EXCLAMATIONS OF "Long live Fidel!") In Cuba, a relatively honest election was held. The opposition won -as always happens when a dictatorship goes to the polls-, a constitutional government came to power and was a disappointment. But again, it was a disappointment because politicking can never bring about a revolution; a revolution is what we are doing now (APPLAUSE). But seldom can the people expect anything from politicians. In 1944, the Cuban people believed that tyranny was over, that a revolutionary government would follow; they confused politics with the Revolution, and that was a disappointment.

But the worst thing that happened was that Batista's friends remained in the barracks. Those soldiers and officers who bowed down to Batista, remained in the barracks with their weapons and one day, after eight years, Batista was back, they allowed him to return -because that's the mistake made by the fools who sometimes run States. Four years after having been in exile, he came back with his stolen millions, organized a petty party and, shielded by the law and the Constitution, went into conspiracy. One day he appeared in the barracks before the same soldiers and officers he had left years before, soldiers and officers who were missing the privileges and perks they had received in Batista's time. Batista arrived and the soldiers squared up to him. Goodbye Constitution, goodbye republic, goodbye illusion, goodbye everything that day! (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.)

I am trying to find out if a colleague of mine has the document I wrote six days after March 10. It would be worthwhile to read it to the people of Venezuela. (EXCLAMATIONS OF "Long live Fidel Castro!")

These are mistakes which, naturally, the people have to pay dearly for. Those mistakes cost our homeland 20,000 dead Cubans, because let me tell you that not more than 500 Cubans died on the battlefields; on the other hand, more than 19,000 Cubans died murdered by the tyranny, by those "little angels" that they now say we are executing (EXCLAMATIONS OF "Let them be executed, Fidel, all of them!".)

Naturally, any government that comes to power by force has to govern by terror, but that is not what is happening in Cuba, where the Revolution has come to power with the support of more than 90% of the people, and there is not even a need for police officers in the streets (APPLAUSE.) There is no need to use the slightest coercive force, because the people is the first to be interested in peace, order and doing things right. But when the people are against a government that takes power treacherously and by force, the era of terror begins immediately: no meetings can be allowed, no public events, no independent tribunes, no freedom of the press, nothing is allowed. Theft begins and those who steal are not to be called thieves; torture begins and those who torture are not to be called torturers; nepotism begins, privileges begin, embezzlement begins, shady businesses begin, exploitation at all levels begins, and the people must be silenced and protest must be drowned in blood (CHEERING.)

But of course, I don't need to tell Venezuelans about that, because we Venezuelans and Cubans are twin brothers in misfortune and suffering (EXCLAMATIONS OF "Long live Fidel!")

The era of terror began in Cuba in 1952, 80 days after the general elections; just as the era of terror began in Venezuela in 1948 -few months, more or less, after the general elections-, when the people of Venezuela felt confident; when the people of Venezuela were most optimistic about their liberties and the prospects of a formidable future. A future to which this people had a right because of the extraordinary wealth of its soil; because it is one of the richest states in the world, and if that wealth had been invested for the good of the people, there is no telling what Venezuela would be today; it would be enjoying the highest standard of living in the world (EXCLAMATIONS OF "That's the Yankees, Fidel!".) Then came the despicable traitor Pérez Jiménez and company (ABUCHEOS), and Venezuelans had to endure 10 years that, naturally, under tyranny means 10 centuries under terror, security police, torture and all kinds of acts of abuse, persecution and barbarism. Ten years and no one took pity on the people of Venezuela. The savage Estrada was murdering and torturing, but no congressman stood up in the United States to protest against it (EXCLAMATIONS OF "Long live Fidel Castro! Long live Cuba!")

For 10 years the prisons were filled with hundreds and thousands of political prisoners, with no trial whatsoever; they died there and no press campaign was ever organized against it; international agencies did not organize campaigns all over the world to protest, because if they had done so, Pérez Jiménez's dictatorship would have ended, it would not have lasted even two years (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS OF "Long live Fidel!".) Quite the contrary; Pérez Jiménez got recognition, friendly relations, weapons, affection, love, decorations and all sorts of plaudits because he was, of course, the one who suited the interests of those who organized such campaigns; and the people of Venezuela left alone, absolutely alone, with no one to help them, had to endure those 10 years of horrible oppression and shameful and criminal tyranny until the day when, what happens when people get tired and outraged, and do what the people of Venezuela did, happened. When nobody in the world believed that Pérez Jiménez was going to be overthrown, when nobody in the world believed it because in Venezuela there was a lot of money and many projects were being carried out and the regime seemed to be consolidated, when they least expected it, the anger of the people, the dignity of the people, the courage of the people overthrew the tyranny of Pérez Jiménez (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.)

That honorable attitude of the people provoked a favorable reaction and won the sympathy of the most progressive circles, and was a source of extraordinary encouragement for the Cuban people. From that day on, people spoke nothing but going on a general strike and that Batista had to be overthrown, just as the Venezuelans had done (APPLAUSE.)

We were not as fortunate as the Venezuelans; we did not organize the strike as well as the Venezuelans did and we failed. Those were very critical days. In the Sierra Maestra we only had 300 rifles, and after that April 9 -which everyone will remember with sadness, because it was a defeat for the Revolution- the armed forces of the dictatorship launched the most powerful offensive they had ever organized. The failure of the strike encouraged them and they launched an offensive against us in the Sierra Maestra. Once again, the victory or defeat of the Revolution was in the hands of a small group of men. , But we rebels, who had been faced with far more difficult situations, entrenched ourselves in the Sierra Maestra and after 75 days, instead of 300 rifles, we had 805 rifles, including bazookas, mortars, machine guns of all kinds, and even a tank that we had seized from the enemy (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS OF "Long live Fidel!, Long live the people's army!")

The offensive served only to arm the Rebel Army that immediately unleashed its counterattack, its counteroffensive, which ended as you well know, but was not, however, easy, because they kept putting obstacles in our way.

We had always held the view that a coup d'état was unacceptable; peoples' problem could not be solved by military coups, because that reduced the peoples to impotence, it reduced them to a cypher in the process of their own history. So we said: "The military established the dictatorship, but the dictatorship will be removed by the people, not the military (APPLAUSE.) If the military wants to fight against the dictatorship, let them join the Rebel Army. No coup d'état!" We warn it well and clearly; because we

already know how coups d'état go: a coup d'état takes place, a series of liberties are restored, the people are appeased, the red cape is removed from the bull in the ring and when the people are appeased, calm, even a little disappointed, because they believe that all their problems will be solved, not realizing that problems cannot be solved except in a true revolution, when they begin to lose heart, that is precisely the moment that the eternal enemies of people's liberties await to pounce once again on public power and establish the dictatorship for another season (EXCLAMATIONS OF "That's the truth!")

We said: "No coup d'état, because if there is a coup d'état we continue the Revolution; we will continue fighting if there is a coup d'état; so you either surrender or you join us!", and we said this when we were just a few hundred fighters.

The struggle went on in Cuba until the regime was totally defeated. In Oriente there were 12,000 soldiers captured by our forces; the province of Las Villas had been taken, the forces in Camagüey force had been captured by our forces in Oriente and Las Villas (APPLAUSE.) Under those circumstances, a general approached us and told us that we had won the war; that he did not want any more bloodshed and, in agreement with the Rebel Army, he proposed a course of action to hand over all power to the rebels. We accepted. The action would take place on December 31 but the general failed to keep his Word. He betrayed us; he betrayed our agreement and led an uprising in Columbia, staged a coup d'état, set himself up as head of the army and appointed a puppet president. But as we said then, that morning he took a somersault into the void. We instructed all the columns to continue the attack, to continue the military operations, and we told the people to launch a general revolutionary strike.

The result was that two governments were toppled on the same day: on January 1, both Batista's government and the one put in place after his were toppled (LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE.) And the general strike did not end until all the military fortresses were in the hands of the Rebel Army. No more problems, the conspiracies were over forever. The army was totally disarmed in Cuba; all weapons were handed over to the Rebel Army. That revolution that had been carried out in that way; that had established a perfect order immediately after the triumph because it was done in collaboration with the people, was an exceptional case of no persons dragged on the streets; that had never happened before in a revolution; that a capital of more than a million inhabitants like Havana was left without police and perfect, absolute order reigned, was an exceptional case. In Havana -I want you to know this- order is watched over by the boy-scouts (APPLAUSE.)

Those who forebode that the triumph of the Revolution would mean anarchy; that the triumph of the Revolution would be torrent of blood, that it would bring about disorder and chaos, were astonished in the face of that great revolutionary event; and they also realized that the Revolution was invulnerable, because that Revolution was a consolidated revolution since all weapons were in the hands of the revolutionaries. They also realized that the men who had made that Revolution were not willing to compromise with vested interests and that they were ready to conduct a real revolution in their homeland.

What was the result? The result was that within three days an international smear campaign was launched against our people. The monopolies controlling the international wire agencies began to broadcast the news to the whole world that we were carrying out mass executions of Batista supporters without prior trial. They did not say that war criminals that had murdered and tortured 20,000 compatriots were on trial. No, they were called Batista's supporters and were being executed en masse without prior trial, and they began to spread that news all over the world in order to estrange the Cuban Revolution from the sympathy of the peoples of the world.

The peoples of the Americas were used to such excesses. It was not unusual for the peoples of the Americas to see the rise of despots who murdered en masse and executed defenseless citizens without prior trial and that is why the lie could be bought; that is why they began to tell the peoples of the Americas that power had been seized by a new clique of criminals, that a new despot was in power and that mass executions were being carried out. They concealed from the people the great truth of that

exemplary Revolution; they did not tell them how the Rebel Army had shown respect for the prisoners of war; they did not tell the people about the life of hundreds of wounded enemy soldiers that were saved by the Rebel Army doctors, to which the International Red Cross can attest (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS OF "Long live Fidel! Long live free Cuba!")

They did not say that during two years and one month of war not a single prisoner had been murdered, there had not been a single case of torture or mistreatment of a prisoner of war. They did not say they did not say that in our country there was absolute freedom in all aspects of life; they did not say there was peace and absolute order. They did not mention any of those positive things about the Cuban Revolution that could serve as an example and that would ennoble the people. No, on the contrary, they began to smear the Revolution. Why? Because the Cuban people were exercising the right to impose justice in their own country for the first time, the justice that had never been imposed before (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING)

Men who had been murdering for seven years; men who had murdered women; men who had raped mothers; men who had murdered children; men who had escalated terror and torture to unprecedented levels; men who took photographs of our mutilated compatriots, of our tortured compatriots and then went to sadistically enjoy that spectacle in their orgies and bacchanals; because those photos that we have seized were taken by them and we have seized them in the offices of the leading henchmen who, in their flight, did not even have the time to take them with them (EXCLAMATIONS.) It was not possible for those men, those savages, those subhuman beings to go unpunished. No it wasn't. Why should men who had murdered, in some cases, more than 100 Cubans go unpunished? Why should those who had no mercy for their fellow men, who had no compassion for their fellow men, who sowed mourning, death and pain everywhere for seven years, go unpunished? Why? Why would our people give up on justice being served? Nothing is more harmful to a society than impunity for crime (APPLAUSE.) When the crime goes unpunished, revenge takes the place of justice; the victims' relatives, friends and colleagues, who cannot bear the presence on the streets of the criminals who took their lives, seek to take justice into their own hands and vendettas, anarchy and unrest are sown in society.

Nothing is more harmful to the people than the impunity of crime. It was precisely the impunity of crime what led to the emergence of that murderous gang in our country, that kind of despicable, dastardly, savage man, who has no respect for the rights and feelings of others, who has no sensitivity whatsoever for the pain of others. This type of base man is only bred in those societies where there is no justice.

What did the henchmen say? They told the prisoners while torturing them: "Nothing is going to happen to me, boy; nothing has ever happened to anyone here. Look at Pedraza, with his millions, in spite of the people he killed, he is free and enjoying his wealth and nothing happened to him. Just look at so-and-so, nothing happened to him; just look at the other one, nothing happened to him." That is what those criminals said (EXCLAMATIONS.) That is why they tortured as never before in Cuba, that is why they murdered as never before in Cuba.

The idea that the crime would go unpunished could not under any circumstances be admitted. There is no people on Earth more sensitive than our people; there is no people on this Earth more compassionate than the Cuban people, or more generous than the Cuban people. To understand how the Cuban people are, suffice it to say that there can be no bullfighting spectacle in Cuba simply because the people do not want it; it hurts them to see those animals fall down dead in the bullring (APPLAUSE.)

If in the city of Havana the Minister of Health were to give the order to annihilate all stray dogs, there would be an immediate outcry against that order, because our people are sensitive even to the killing of a dog in the street (APPLAUSE.) However, unusually, our people had suffered so much at the hands of the war criminals, so deep was their pain, so deep was their sadness, so great were their wounds that they unanimously agreed that the henchmen should be executed (CHEERING AND APPLAUSE.)

And that generous people who do not want bullfighting shows, because they are so upset by the death

of those animals in the public square, that people who do not even tolerate the killing of dogs in the streets, unanimously agreed that the henchmen should be executed (CHEERING.) It was not a feeling of hatred; it was not a feeling of revenge. If our people had been driven by hatred and revenge, they would have dragged out and killed all the henchmen on the very first day. No, it was a feeling of justice; it was also the conviction that justice had to be enforced so that executioners and murderers would never again emerge in our country (APPLAUSE.)

Cuban society did not want that in eight, in ten, in 15 years' time the same thing would happen again. It was imperative to extirpate the seed of crime, it was imperative to put an end to crime impunity forever, and that is what the people of Cuba set out to do. How did it do it? In orderly fashion; it did not drag them into the street, but handed them over to the revolutionary courts. And those courts of gentlemen, those army officers who never dirtied their hands by murdering a prisoner, who never abandoned a wounded man, those were the judges, and they began to apply the law of the Rebel Army, and, accordingly, to impose the death penalty on war criminals (APPLAUSE.)

To avoid the slightest mistake, to avoid the slightest injustice, persons who had committed an isolated crime were not condemned to death, only those henchmen who had murdered 10, 12, 20, 30, 100 compatriots were condemned to death, so that there would be no doubt about it. It was done through public courts under the revolutionary laws that had been long approved in the Sierra Maestra. That was the justice being administered. But well before the Cuban Revolution began to implement its social and economic measures, it faced the campaign of its enemies; it faced a surprise attack by the enemies of the Revolution. And they began to attack us with that campaign; they began to tell the world that we were killing Batista's supporters in the streets.

What did we do? What did they want? They wanted, in the first place, to separate public opinion in Cuba from public opinion in the rest of the continent; they wanted to isolate us from you; they wanted to isolate the Peruvians, the Ecuadorians, the Mexicans, the Uruguayans, the Argentines from us; they wanted to take away the only friends we had had in the struggle; they wanted to weaken us first in the eyes of international public opinion, then divide us within the country and then attack us; once we were cut off from international public opinion and divided domestically, they would attack the Revolution; they send a group of Batista's followers or reactionary elements against the Cuban Revolution. What did we do? We took the campaign head-on. We summoned the people of Cuba to a mass rally in support of revolutionary justice. And at that rally, one million Cubans -an unprecedented figure in our history- unanimously supported the Revolutionary Government and revolutionary justice (APPLAUSE.)

We invited journalists from all over the continent and in 72 hours we gathered 380 journalists from all over the continent at that mass rally. And the next day I agreed to be interrogated by those 380 journalists; they were free to ask whatever they pleased, and I would answer all their questions, and I would answer them categorically and with no hesitation at all (APPLAUSE.)

We told them that the Cuban Revolution had nothing to hide; that the Cuban Revolution acted in the open; that its course of action was too upright to fear criticism; that its conduct was too crystal-clear to have to hide any of its actions; and that contrary to what dictatorships that suppressed freedom of the press used to do, contrary to what corrupt governments do hiding their actions from the press and world public opinion, we, fully aware that our actions were honest and upright, submitted ourselves to the verdict of world public opinion. Ask [I told them and they did] about everything and, above all, ask about the trials, which we will explain to you so that peoples do not get fooled by the enemies of our peoples; so that peoples do not be mocked by those enemies; so that peoples are not divided; so that peoples are not alienated, because the purpose of the enemies of the peoples of the Americas is that we remain estranged from one another.

I assure you that today's rally will be just one more reason to win me the hatred of the enemies of the Cuban Revolution, because they do not want peoples to be united. (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS OF "Long live Fidel Castro!")

They thought that the Cuban rebels were just a bunch of shooters and that once the tyranny was defeated it would be quite easy to crush them. But they have realized that it is not so easy, because we have knocked the door of the men of conscience of the Americas; we are knocking the door of the peoples of the Americas for their support. Against the vicious lies of the enemies of the peoples, stands the truth of the Revolution! (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING)

We gathered the people and that massive concentration of one million Cubans who raised their hands in support of the execution of the henchmen, was the most resounding rebuttal that could be given to the slanderers and the perpetual detractors of our peoples, whom they consider mean and unworthy peoples. That rally was the strongest support that the Cuban Revolutionary Government could receive. Cuba did not need congressmen to stand up and talk about justice, much less when none of those congressmen stood up to protest when 20,000 of our compatriots were murdered over seven years (APPLAUSE.) Much less could our people agree to be threatened with intervention because we have said that the era of intervention is over for good in the Americas (APPLAUSE.)

A campaign of slander and threats was launched, but in the face of the campaign our people united, stood firm and unanimously said: "Let the executions continue, because the executions are righteous and here no one has what it takes to...! (APPLAUSE)

Men of all ideas and of all walks of life, men of all religions, supported the Revolutionary Government's acts of justice. There are enough men of sensitivity and enough men of courage among our peoples to stand up and condemn a crime when it has been committed. There are enough men of sensitivity, enough men of courage among our peoples to stand up and denounce an injustice when there is an injustice; our peoples most certainly do not have to wait for foreign journalists, who neither feel nor suffer the pains of our peoples, to come and protest against crime and injustice (CHEERING.)

Our journalists are not insensitive, our labor leaders are not insensitive, our intellectuals are not insensitive, our students are not insensitive, our women are not insensitive, our priests, whatever their religion, are not insensitive and, therefore, when not a single Cuban, in the midst of the most absolute regime of freedoms in place, stood up to protest against the executions, on the contrary, men of all ideas and all walks of life supported them, no one had to stand up abroad to present himself/herself as a friend of humanity, as a friend of justice (APPLAUSE.)

Since they did not protest when bombs and planes were sent to the Batista dictatorship to assassinate Cubans; since they did not protest when tanks and cannons were sent to the Batista dictatorship to assassinate Cubans; the least they could do was to shut up and wait for the people of Cuba to act and leave the people of Cuba in peace (APPLAUSE.)

That is the reality, brothers and sisters of Venezuela. And I can speak to you like this because I know that you understand me; because I know that you understand our people; because I am speaking to you in the language that only peoples who have suffered as our peoples have suffered can understand (APPLAUSE.)

Those who have not had to endure persons like Pérez Jiménez and Batista; those who have not had to endure persons like Ventura and Estrada; those who have not had to endure these gangs of murderers, cannot have the slightest idea of the terror and suffering that these peoples have endured (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS OF "Long live Fidel!")

Therefore, even if the attacks continue -and the attacks will continue, and attacks will grow in number and intensity- justice will be served in our homeland, because nothing and no one can override the sovereign will of our homeland (APPLAUSE.)

And what I said there, I repeat here: Even if the world sinks, there will be justice in Cuba!" (APPLAUSE Y EXCLAMATIONS OF: "¡Viva Fidel!")

Therefore, brothers and sisters of Venezuela, this reception that is paid not to a man, but to a people, not to a merit, but to an idea, this selfless homage to those who have done nothing but receive favors from you, this homage that is paid to a just idea, to a just cause, to a brotherly people, is the most touching favor and the greatest favor that our people could have received under any circumstances (APPLAUSE.) Because the fact that no tomatoes or rotten eggs have been thrown at a representative of the Cuban Revolution coming to Venezuela, but rather that hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans are cheering and applauding him, shows where the sentiment of the peoples of the Americas lies; shows that the peoples of the Americas are very much alert; that the peoples of the Americas have not swallowed the lie (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.)

And upon my arrival here in Venezuela, I have had the pride and satisfaction, and the strongest reason to admire this people, seeing that far from having believed in the infamy, this people who has suffered, this people who is suffering from the same wound, has unanimously told me, not with words, but with a gesture, that the murderers should be punished! (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS OF "Down with imperialism, long live Fidel!")

The Americas is also too alert to be fooled. The Americas is far too much on guard to be subdued again. These peoples have become all too aware of their destiny to resign themselves again to the subjugation and wretched abjection in which we have been living for more than a century (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.)

The peoples of the Americas know that their internal strength lies in unity and that their continental strength also lies in unity (APPLAUSE.)

The peoples of the Americas know that if they do not want to be victims of tyranny again, if they do not want to be victims of aggressions again, we must unite even more, we must strengthen people to people ties; and that is why I have come to Venezuela: to bring a message that is not a message of a caste or a group, but a people to people message (APPLAUSE.)

I come, in the name of the people who rose up against tyranny and overthrew it, to bring a message of solidarity to the people who also rose up against tyranny and overthrew it (APPLAUSE.)

I come on behalf of the people who today ask for your help and solidarity, to tell Venezuelans that they can also count on our help and our unconditional solidarity whenever they need it (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.)

And in this solemn act, before these hundreds of thousands of generous faces that have encouraged us with their affection and sympathy; before these brothers and sisters from Venezuela, who are my brothers and sisters, who for me are also Cubans, because here I have felt as if I were in Cuba, I tell them that if Venezuela should ever again find itself under the boot of a tyrant, they can count on the Cubans (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS OF "Long live Fidel!"); count on the fighters of the Sierra Maestra; count on our men and our weapons; that here in Venezuela there are many more mountains than in Cuba, that here in Venezuela there are mountain ranges three times higher than the Sierra Maestra, that here in Venezuela there is also an enraged people, a proud people and a heroic people as in Cuba; that we, who have seen what the Cubans are capable of, venture to say what the Venezuelans are capable of (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.)

When I was on the plane today -on that plane that the people of Venezuela so generously sent me to bring me to this beloved land- looking at the topography of Venezuela, its forests and its imposing mountains, I said to one of the flight pilots: "Those mountains are the guarantee that you will never lose your freedom again" (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.)

To this people who give us encouragement and moral support, we can only offer them encouragement and moral support, and we can offer them faith, we can offer them confidence in their destiny. May the destiny of Venezuela and the destiny of Cuba and the destiny of all the peoples of the Americas be a

common destiny, since we have had enough of erecting statues to Simón Bolívar and forgetting his ideas! What we have to do is to fulfill Bolívar's ideas! (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS OF "Long live Fidel!")

How long are we going to remain in lethargy? How long are we going to be defenseless pieces of a continent whose liberator conceived it as something more worthy, something greater? How long are we Latin Americans going to live in this petty and ridiculous atmosphere? How long are we going to remain divided? How long are we going to be victims of powerful interests that prey on our peoples? When are we going to launch the great slogan of unity? If the slogan of unity within nations is launched, why not also launch the slogan of unity of nations? (APPLAUSE)

If unity within nations is fruitful and enables people to defend their rights, why should not the unity among nations with the same feelings, the same interests, the same race, the same language, the same sensibility and the same human aspiration be even more fruitful? (APPLAUSE)

Since I have been in Venezuela -and I cannot distinguish a Venezuelan from a Cuban or a Dominican-, when something like what happened to me today happens; so many people telling me: "Now it's Trujillo's turn! Now it's Trujillo's turn! Now it's Trujillo's turn!" (CHEERING), and they would shout it with such enthusiasm that I wondered whether they were Venezuelans or Dominicans; but then I said to myself, it is impossible to have so many Dominicans here; they must be Venezuelans and they are speaking as Dominicans; when we are all thinking alike; when we are all suffering alike; when we are all striving for the same things; when we do not differ in any way, when we are absolutely the same, does it not seem simply absurd that some call themselves Cubans and others call themselves Venezuelans and we regard each other as foreigners when we are actually brothers and sisters, when we understand each other so well? (APPLAUSE)

And who should be the champions of this idea? Venezuelans should; because Venezuelans launched it in the American continent; because Bolívar is the son of Venezuela and Bolívar is the father of the union of the peoples of the Americas (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS OF "Fidel, Fidel, Fidel!")

Bolívar's children have to be the first followers of Bolívar's ideas. And the fact that the Bolivarian sentiment is awake in Venezuela is shown by this concern for Cuba's freedoms, this extraordinary concern for Cuba. What is that, if not a Bolivarian sentiment? What is that, if not a concern for the freedom of other peoples? (APPLAUSE.) And by supporting us in the spectacular way in which they have supported the Cuban cause today, aren't they following Bolívar's ideas? And why don't do what they are doing with Cuba with other peoples? Why not do it in relation to Santo Domingo, Nicaragua and Paraguay, which are the last three strongholds of tyranny? (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING)

Venezuela is the richest country in the Americas; Venezuela has a great people; Venezuela has formidable leaders, both civilian and military; Venezuela is the homeland of El Libertador, where the idea of the union of the peoples of the Americas was conceived (APPLAUSE.) Hence, Venezuela must be the leading country in uniting the peoples of the Americas; we Cubans support them, we Cubans support our brothers and sisters in Venezuela (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS OF "Fidel, Fidel!")

I have spoken of these ideas not because I am moved by any personal ambition, not even the ambition for glory because, after all, ambition for glory is nothing else than pure vanity and, as Martí said, "All the glory of the world fits in a kernel of corn" (APPLAUSE.)

I have spoken of these ideas not because I am moved by any desire for greatness; it is difficult for anyone to become an outstanding person fighting against so many obstacles. We all know what has happened to those who have raised these ideas; they were, sooner or later, assassinated. Therefore, when I speak like this to the people of Venezuela, I do so thinking honestly and deeply that if we want to save the Americas, if we want to save the freedom of each of our societies that, after all, are part of a larger society, the Latin American society; if we want to save the revolution in Cuba, the revolution in Venezuela and the revolution in all the countries of our continent, we have to come together and

support each other strongly, because alone and divided we will fail.

Freedom in the Americas, democracy in the Americas, and constitutionality in the Americas has experienced their ups and downs. Ten years ago it was a time of regression, dictatorships were emerging. The constitutional government of Venezuela was overthrown, the constitutional government of Cuba was overthrown, the constitutional government of Peru was overthrown, and the constitutional governments of other countries were overthrown. There were few countries left where the politically persecuted could take refuge; there was hardly a corner of the Americas that was not under a military jackboot.

Alas! Today the situation is different. The awakening of the peoples of the Americas, the exemplary liberation of Venezuela, followed by the liberation of Cuba, which will be followed by the liberation of other peoples, have put democracy, freedom, human rights and constitutionality on the offensive in the Americas and now there are only three countries where tyranny still reigns. And just as they attacked us, just as they united to foment military conspiracies in our countries, let us now also unite to foster freedom in these oppressed peoples! (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING) Fearing nothing and no one, we should not be afraid; if we unite the forces of public opinion in Latin America, we will be indestructible; fearing nothing and no one, but out of a simple instinct of conservation, because we have all suffered deeply from the past years, the past decades. Out of instinct of conservation, out of instinct of perpetuation of our race, of our interests, we simply have to unite and begin by preaching the idea. And with the word, the action, and, if possible, more deeds than words (APPLAUSE.)

I repeat that the Cubans will be at the side of the Venezuelans and we know that the Venezuelans will do their duty. They already have a constitutional government as a result of free elections and the will of the people (APPLAUSE.) They have military leaders, but these leaders prioritize, like true soldiers, the feelings of their people and their homeland. As is the case of Wolfgang Larrazábal (CHEERING.)

They have civilian leaders such as the elected president of the republic, Rómulo Betancourt (CHEERING;) they have civilian leaders such as the presidents of the different parties who have united in an exemplary manner to defend Venezuelan constitutionality and freedom; they have guides, because if Venezuela did not have intelligent guides, Venezuela would not be united as it is today; Venezuela would not have a solid democracy as it has today. Unite regardless of all passions; unite regardless of the dislikes that may exist between parties (APPLAUSE.)

I have not mentioned names to be criticized or to be applauded, I am not for any party in Venezuela; I am for Venezuela! (APPLAUSE) And Venezuela must come first, above all its men, above all parties.

Someone told me today, quite rightly: As long as we are united, we are safe; Venezuela's misfortune would be to be divided (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS OF "Unity, unity!")

A united Venezuela; a Venezuela that is increasingly mature; a Venezuela that is increasingly alert; a Venezuela that counts on Cuba; a Venezuela with its people; a Venezuela with its wealth; a Venezuela with its mountains; a Venezuela that has a formidable and brilliant future in the Americas (APPLAUSE); that Venezuela has its freedom guaranteed.

I hope and express here my most fervent wish that our Venezuelan brothers and sisters — the brothers and sisters who brought freedom to all the peoples of the continent and should therefore be the first to enjoy a guaranteed freedom, because when rights and freedoms are not guaranteed, we cannot speak of freedoms or rights, because when there is fear of losing them, there is no freedom or rights — and this country will never again be victims of ambition and betrayal (APPLAUSE.) I express my most fervent wish, on behalf of the Cuban people, that this worthy people of Venezuela, that all its worthy men, civilians or military, well rather than civilians or military I would say armed citizens or unarmed citizens — to do away with that distinction —, brothers and sisters without caste or sectarian or group interests; I repeat, I express my most fervent wish that all the worthy men of Venezuela march together to ensure Venezuela's freedom, to ensure the rights of the Venezuelan people so that the freedom they enjoy may

be a guaranteed freedom without the fear of losing it; so that the rights they enjoy may be guaranteed rights without the risk of losing them.

I am sure that Venezuela will not lose these rights. You only have to see this people today, you only have to see this people today to realize that a people as formidable as this one, to realize that a people as worthy as this one, is unlikely to let its rights be taken away from it (APPLAUSE.) In fact, I believe there is no one that would dare to take away the rights of the Venezuelan people (APPLAUSE and EXCLAMATIONS OF "No!") And I will go further; I believe that they would much less dare to take them away now, when it has been proven that there are no powers strong enough against a people determined to fight, that there is no weapon modern enough and powerful enough to defeat a people fighting for its rights (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING); that there is no one who dares to take away the rights of the people of Venezuela when it has been proven that it is false that people are impotent; that it is false that people are capable of surrendering when they are fighting with weapons in their hands, and that no army in the world is capable of keeping a people under oppression if that people decides to fight for their freedom, as the Cuban people did and as I am sure the Venezuelans would do if that happens (APPLAUSE.)

Brothers and sisters of Venezuela, I think I've spoken enough already (EXCLAMATIONS OF "No!") That's enough for today (EXCLAMATIONS OF "No!"). If there is one thing you can be sure of, it is that I have spoken from the heart; I have let my feelings speak (APPLAUSE;) I do not know if by letting my feelings speak freely I have transgressed any rule that a guest is obliged to observe (EXCLAMATIONS OF "No!")

I do not intend to set guidelines for the Venezuelan people, because the Venezuelan people have always set guidelines for other peoples. I have just spoken to you in the same way I have spoken to my fellow countrymen. I carry in my mind the image of these events. I carry in my heart the impact of the crowds I have seen gathering here and there. I carry within me all that faith that the crowds are capable of infusing into men. More than words, I have spoken about deeds. I repeat here the deeds that we Cubans are doing and the words also, when needed, as the Cubans have done, as the Venezuelans have done.

In conclusion, I was telling you that I have done nothing more than to feel myself and act as if I were among my own people. It is hard to believe that I have left Cuba, because I have witnessed here the same things I have seen in Cuba, the same affection, the same enthusiasm (APPLAUSE).

I have spoken to you as I speak to the Cubans, with the same confidence, with the same sincerity and with the same ease.

I can only say to my brothers and sisters in Venezuela that Cuba will never be able to repay you for this gesture of solidarity; that Cuba will never be able to repay you for the formidable and great moral support that the people of Venezuela has shown towards us today (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING), and that I will never ever find words to express to the people of Venezuela my appreciation for the encouragement I have received here.

I feel today the strength I did not feel yesterday; and if yesterday I felt enthusiastic; if I felt enthusiastic even in the most difficult moments of this struggle when we were only a handful of men; if we felt strong enough to confront the powerful interests that do not want the Cuban Revolution standing on its own two feet, because they fear the Cuban Revolution, above all, because of the power of its example for the other peoples of the Americas, I will never find words to thank the Venezuelan people for the support provided to that nation, the one that is there, further north; the one that is closer to those interests that threaten it (CHEERING,) and the strength you have infused in me to continue forward tirelessly and without losing heart. And I only promise this good and generous people, to whom I have given nothing and from whom we Cubans have received everything, to do for other peoples what you have done for us (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING), and not consider ourselves entitled to rest in peace as long as there is a single man in Latin America living under the shame of tyranny (APPLAUSE.)

With the strongest emotion of my life, because for me entering Caracas was more moving than entering

Speech by Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro Ruz at the Plaza Aérea del Silencio, in Caracas,

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Havana; because here I have received everything from those who have received nothing from me, all the honors, far superior to those I deserve and that I have not considered as honors paid to a man, but as honors paid to a cause; as honors paid to the brave fighters who have fallen in these years of struggle more than honors to those of us who are still fighting; with the strongest emotion of my life, I bid farewell to this imposing crowd, to my brothers and sisters of Venezuela (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS OF "No!")

I hope that if they can ever be expressed or understood in their full meaning, in the name of the Cuban people, in the name of the principles we are defending, in the name of those peoples who are waiting for your help and ours, from the bottom of my heart I say to my brothers and sisters in Venezuela, who have done nothing but to give to us without receiving anything from us, thank you very much, brothers and sisters of Venezuela; thank you very much! (APPLAUSE AND CHEERING.)

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