

[Speech given by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, to the children who stood on guard outside the United States Interests Section in Havana during the march to demand the return of Elián González, in a meeting held at "José Antonio Echeverría" Social Club, December 23, 1999 \[1\]](#)

Date:

23/12/1999

I do not want to speak for too long, but there are a few things I would like to say to you. Although we do not have much time these days since we must work and struggle continuously.

You know why you are here, right? (Shouts of: "Yes!") I can see that you know.

You know that a little boy like you, younger than you --because he just turned six, and you, who are in fifth, sixth and seventh grades, are older than little Elián-- is being held kidnapped in the United States.

You have heard a lot of statements. You have been told what happened, and I do not have to repeat it here. But just imagine for a minute, what it would be like if any one of you were taken away, if any one of you suffered such a disgrace, a tragedy like it happened to this boy who lost his mother due to the hostility of that nation, of the government of that powerful country that encourages illegal travel, careless about the death of women, children and mothers.

Our country places no limits on families who want to emigrate. The United States grants a certain number of visas every year, because there are always people who dream of moving to another country, and as the United States is a country that has plundered the world, and continues to plunder the world, and exploits the rest of the world, they possess tremendous wealth, and so they can have many poor people there working for them, millions of Mexicans, Haitians, Dominicans, and people from many other nations doing the most difficult work. If they need people to cut sugar cane, or pick tomatoes, or fruit, they use immigrants from these countries to do the hardest, most demanding physical labor.

You know that our country, like any country where there is justice, distributes its wealth among all the people; in a just country there is no selfishness. But, they take advantage of people who are very poor to make them accept the worst jobs. And these poor people receive no social benefits, no health care, no education; the only thing they get is exploitation, and they are forced to work for the rich.

* The Pioneers is an organization involving Cuban students in grammar and junior high schools in activities somewhat similar to those of boy scouts.

When you children take part in some kind of work, or when high school students go to the countryside to pick tomatoes, or vegetables, they are not doing it for themselves or to earn money. They do it to send that food to the hospitals, to homes, to the people. And it is also a way for you to learn, as Martí wanted, from the combination of study and labor.

That is why you pioneers can see that our young people are capable of great feats, because it does not bother them to lay bricks, pull up weeds or work under the sun for two or three hours. That is why Martí

said that work and study must be combined as the best form of education.

That can only happen here, in our country, because over there, the difficult jobs are for the immigrants who come from poor countries. The rich have never done this kind of work; they have never picked a tomato in their lives.

That is why there are often people and families from poor countries, sometimes influenced by the advertising from the so-called consumer societies --that means fake societies-- who dream of going to that rich country and doing any work at all.

The policy pursued by the Revolution is that anyone who wants to leave our country and go somewhere else can do so if they are given permission to enter the other country. Our country does not prevent any family from emigrating because the construction of a revolutionary and just society in socialism is a voluntary and free decision.

Of course, children are not at all to blame for this kind of problem. Children are just children; they are growing and learning, they are not adults, and we respect the right of the family to decide for them. If a family wants to travel to another place in the world, it travels with the children. Nobody is prevented from doing this.

Our country is not at fault either if there are people who leave illegally, and it is dangerous to leave illegally. Why do they leave illegally? Oh! Because the Interests Section that you were guarding would not grant them visas. The Interests Section grants a limited number of visas, and if others who do not get permission want to leave by illegal means, then they do and no obstacles are put in their way.

Many people are not given visas to migrate legally because they are not professionals or have great skills, or because they do not like to work; there are many people like that who are not used to working and are antisocial elements, often with criminal records. And so these people leave by illegal means, without a visa, and they are welcome in the United States. A law is applied to them, which you have heard about recently, that gives those who arrive illegally the right to residence. And as soon as they arrive, they are even given permission to work, if there are jobs available.

Even though we have signed an agreement that provides for 20,000 visas a year so that families who want to migrate can do so legally and safely, with no danger involved whatsoever, which is the purpose of such agreements, there are some who are excluded from the annual quota because they do not qualify, or they do not want to wait, so what do they do? They steal a boat, or build one, or they get on speedboats that come from the United States and at a cost of thousands of dollars paid by relatives living there they try to get to America. On a boat built for six people, they load 15, therefore, on many occasions these boats sink on the way and the people drown.

In other words, those who are not given visas are allowed to travel there any way they can, and the consequences of this are people drowning, families who take children with them in dangerous conditions. I must add, of course, that this should never be done, because nobody has the right to expose a child's life to danger, nobody, not even the child's parents have any right to put his life in jeopardy.

The U.S. authorities do not care what happens. There is a law; there is a normal way of traveling in complete safety. Would it be fair to put anyone of you on a raft, or on one of those boats that can sink along the way? (Shouts of: "No!") It would not be fair, it would be practically the only case when a child is justified to refuse --and if I were a child I would refuse to be put on one of those boats or rafts, or on something that will fall apart along the way. It is very sad when these things happen.

We have insisted that they stop encouraging people to leave illegally. The law I was telling you about only applies to Cuba, and not to any other country in the world. It gives them the chance to spread propaganda, to tell lies, and as a result, many people have risked or lost their lives.

When we signed the migratory agreements, they promised they would not encourage illegal emigration but they have not kept that promise, as was explained by numerous comrades like Alarcón, who has been discussing all of these agreements. They have not kept that promise and continued to encourage illegal emigration. People are dying, mothers are dying, children are dying, old people are dying because of this law which encourages illegal migration. That is what causes tragic incidents like the one we are discussing now.

In this case --whose full story is not known, yet-- the boat on which little Elián was taken away, on a risky voyage, was prepared by a criminal, a violent and aggressive individual who had never worked a day in his life. He had gone to the United States illegally, stayed there for three or four months, and then came back illegally as well. He was caught, and spent some time in jail, perhaps three or four months. It was very strange: he left illegally, and came back illegally. Who was this man? He said that he had gone but was repentant, that he was sorry, and so he was released from jail and sent back to his home in Cárdenas, so that he could work if he wanted to work, although this individual never worked a day in his life.

That man is mainly responsible for this tragedy. Why? I should explain, so that you understand. He became a stepfather, and some stepfathers are very good, they take care of their stepchildren responsibly. That little boy, who was not even six years old yet, did not know what was happening, and the criminal I have been telling you about is the person mainly responsible for this misadventure. A boat was built in complicity with some crooks, the people willing to do such things, using materials stolen from here and there. They built a flimsy boat. And so this man, who was the boy's stepfather, not his father, and not a stepfather who acted like a real father, but rather an evil individual, was the one who decisively influenced so that little Elián would be on that boat, because he forced and intimidated the boy's mother. As a result, they headed out to sea on that flimsy boat, the mother and the child with other people who had paid 1,000 dollars each.

There were other children, we do not know how many exactly; there was at least one other, who drowned. There is a little girl who was saved by chance. The sea was rough and the boat had to return to shore, after having already set out, to pick up a spare part, and the father or mother left the girl on the shore; they did not take her. But little Elián was not so lucky. Elián was crying loudly at this point, and the stepfather violently ordered the mother to make him quiet down, or else he would do it himself. There are people who witnessed this upsetting scene and are here in our country. On that day, there were actually two helpless passengers forcibly retained on that flimsy boat: the mother and the son.

They left on the morning of November 22. A Cuban coast guard cutter spotted them, and tried to persuade them not to make the trip. This is always done; they do not use force to intercept the boat, because the use of force could lead to an accident, and there were women and children on board. What our coast guards do, within the 12-mile limit of Cuban waters, is to try to persuade the passengers to turn back, explaining the dangers, but avoiding the use of force, because a boat with 14 people on board cannot be grabbed by hand, it cannot be roped with a lasso, like a horse, it is always dangerous. In the end, if our coast guards fail to persuade people to turn back, what they do is to alert the U.S. Coast Guard that a boat is headed their way, in these conditions. They immediately inform the U.S. Coast Guard by e-mail and fax, so that they can lend them support, and accompany them, since the boat is already headed for U.S. territory.

That is what happened this time, the Coast Guard was informed immediately. They say that they went out to look for the boat but could not find it that they sent out two helicopters but the boat was not spotted.

There was no further news between midday on November 22, when the coast guard cutter accompanied them to the 12-mile limit, and November 25. No one knows what happened on the afternoon of the 22nd, or on the 23rd, or on the 24th, or on the morning of the 25th. The news arrived on the afternoon of the 25th --three days had passed-- that a boat with 14 people on board had sunk, that two adults had

survived, and that some fishermen had found a boy tied to an inner tube. That was one of the tragedies, one of the traumatic events. Imagine a little boy; imagine one of you on a sinking boat and surviving because you were tied to an inner tube.

How long was he there? Nobody knows. Two adults also survived, but nobody has questioned them, no reporters have questioned them. The U.S. government does not want to tell us how the boat sank or the day it happened, if only to learn how long the boy was tied up to that inner tube, night and day.

But that little boy is so strong, that little boy has such inner force, such tenacity, that he resisted, and he did not die. If he had died, perhaps we would never have heard of him again. But as fate would have it, some fishermen found him and immediately took him to a hospital for proper treatment.

The U.S. authorities in Florida must know who organized this misadventure, how it was done and the day the boat sank, because they have the testimony of the two surviving adults. There was already talk of alien smuggling in a Miami newspaper before we had any details. The organizer of the expedition, a thug with a long record of common crimes who, according to our files, had been in prison several times was an aggressive individual who abused physically the boy's mother on numerous occasions. She made an honest living by working, and supported the family single-handedly. He exploited her, and shamefully lived off of her. It is quite possible, and several people who were very close to her are absolutely certain, that he resorted to his usual physical abuse to intimidate the boy's mother into making that trip.

The survivors, who must know disturbing details about everything that happened, have not been shown. Where are they being kept? Nobody knows. But, obviously, they have spoken to the authorities and told them something. A newspaper that is certainly no friend of Cuba reported that those people had paid around 1,000 dollars each to be on that boat.

Therefore, this was not only a matter of an illegal departure organized by a common criminal who never worked a day in his life, but also an alien smuggling operation, which is a violation of international law, including the law of the United States of America. I am not sure if you understand what I am saying. Do you understand? (The children say yes.)

You are actually the first people to know this part of the story, which had not been discussed until now. It had not been discussed because we did not want to hurt anyone's feelings. There is a dead mother who was a victim of this thug. We have tried to find out if she wanted to leave the country but as far as we know she had never applied to leave the country legally. And she could have been granted an U.S. visa for she had relatives there, she was a worker who supported a household, and so she would have met all the requirements. But, actually, there is not the slightest evidence that the mother wished to go to the United States, and she could have done it legally accompanied by her son, if the father gave his consent, because for a mother to travel with a child, the father must give his consent. The one who would not have received a visa, because of his criminal record, was the man who posed as a stepfather.

It is always hard when a child leaves, but we respect the rights of parents, which is something that the U.S. authorities do not do with the children of Cubans. Although it hurts us greatly, we respect the rights of the father or mother, and we do not in any way obstruct the right of a family to legally take their children out of the country, because that is the right of paternal authority, when the children are minors. We prove our respect for this right every day, every month, every year, because every day, every month, every year, there are parents and families who travel to the United States with their children by legal and safe means. It hurts because these children are attending school here, and nobody knows what awaits them there, those things you have denounced. It hurts because every child who leaves is one pioneer less in a school, one empty desk in a classroom.

Cuba respects this right of parents as something sacred, and we do not regret it, as much as it hurts when a child born in this country is uprooted from his/her homeland. We do not interfere with the family's decision for the future of its children, or with what they themselves do as adults. We protect

them with 13 vaccines, so that they do not die of preventable diseases, for them to grow up healthy and intelligent like you. We try to ensure that they are well nourished that they do not lack for medicines, that they are able to drink milk every day.

This is the only country in the world where every child up to a certain age is guaranteed, without exception, a liter of milk every day. That is why our young people look so healthy. You can see it in their faces, in their physiques, in their teeth, because of the painstaking care our society provides for children. You can see it when they are adolescents, when they are university students. All you have to do is look at these faces. If they have some physical defect, it is corrected. If they have some sort of problem that prevents them from walking properly, they go to an orthopedic hospital, and the problem is corrected; they might have to use some sort of bothersome device, but the problem is corrected. Any physical defect that makes a child different from the others is corrected. Their teeth are fixed, everything is fixed, and everything possible is done to ensure that children grow up not only to be cultured, educated and healthy, but also beautiful, boys and girls alike.

This is something that visitors to this country find amazing, the faces, the overall beauty of our students and our young people. We fulfill this duty. If these young people, when they grow up, want to leave the country and go somewhere else, because their heads have been filled with the millions of tall tales used to fool so many people through the advertising of consumer societies, that hurts but we respect the right to emigrate, and we respect the parents' rights.

On the other hand, over there, for no reason whatsoever, simply because they feel like it, they are holding this child, failing to respect the father's right of paternal authority, his right as the only surviving parent. The child lost his mother, and now he has only his father, who has been a loving father, and has always truly cared for him. This stands out clear in all the documents and everyone in Cárdenas knows it, every child in his son's school, all the teachers, all the neighbors. But the boy has not been returned to his father. Instead, he was handed over to a distant relative who had only seen the child once in his life, and he has been taken over by the whole gang of Cuba's enemies there, the biggest thugs in that country, the author of the Torricelli Act, aimed at starving our people to death, including children. He has been taken over by the intransigent authors, promoters and defenders of the cruel blockade that brings so much hardship on our people.

They talk about a child who arrived there, and how they want him to be happy. What hypocrisy, when at the same time they are waging a relentless economic war against us, trying to starve our people to death, including our children.

How difficult it is for us at times to obtain medicines, to obtain food; we have to look for them in faraway places, where they cost a lot more. And, if despite everything we have not closed a single school and our is the country with the highest number of teachers per capita in the world, it is because the Revolution is dedicated first and foremost to helping children and mothers, to helping the family.

You have recently heard the story about how at one time, through the use of lies, trickery and deceit, 14,000 children were illegally taken out of Cuba. In that case, it was done with the parents' consent. They were fooled by mercenaries working for a foreign power and made to believe that the Revolution was going to take away their paternal authority, as if a child were a plantation, or a sugar mill, or a mine. It was all lies! Because everything they do is based on lies, all of their propaganda is based on lies, which they drill into the heads of the people by repeating them thousands, millions of times. But, still, it was illegal; then, those children who are adults now have written stories, very dramatic stories, because the United States then suspended travel between the two countries, and thousands of children ended up there alone, in orphanages, and suffered a horrible trauma. Now they are speaking out and writing about it, and many are critical of parents for having done this to them, splitting the families and sending them off to endure such calamities. Some of them are in a documentary recently shown on television where they recounted their sad story.

In Elián's case, there is not just one injustice, there are at least three aggravating factors: the voyage

was illegal; the action was an alien smuggling operation organized by a criminal who never worked a day in his life and caused the death of 11 people, including children, and the tragedy suffered by this child, who was not even six years old and the child's mother death.

What right did the U.S. authorities have to take this child and hand him over to a relative who had only seen him once before in his life, and who has turned the child into a commodity, a crude and vulgar business, having his picture taken with the worst enemies of our country, those who are trying to starve us to death with one law after another, those who try to prevent trade, to prevent us from importing food, technology and equipment, those who do everything possible to jeopardize our country's economic and social development?

But, they have not even succeeded in doing this. Our country ranks first place in the world in many areas, in those that depend upon our determination. We are not first in terms of wealth but we are in our enormous desire to help the people, because that is what the Revolution exists for, and nothing else. It exists so that there are schools and medical care, so that there are recreation programs, so that there is everything needed by children, teenagers, young people, adults and the elderly. People of different ages have different needs, and the Revolution tries to meet them all.

This is what has happened. The child is handed over to a distant relative, who is not asked to show even a single piece of paper. The father, known by everyone, is asked to prove himself, and in fact, two U.S. officials came here to collect all the documents that fully and irrefutably demonstrate who the father is, and what his moral conduct has been like.

He is asked to prove himself, the real father while those who have stolen the child are asked any questions, not even a piece of paper. Now the authorities cannot figure out what to do and they are going around in circles, their opinions divided; they still have not come to a decision. Meanwhile, the boy is held there despite what the doctors have said, and the psychologists, after looking at that unfortunate boy's face. He has been the target of such vulgar maneuvers! They are trying to buy his innocence with sophisticated toys, all kinds of junk, taking him to Disneyworld.

Often, they do not even let him talk to his father, and that I am denouncing it here again. The boy's father and maternal and paternal grandparents have repeatedly complained that they are not allowed to talk to the boy with whom they shared such a close and loving relationship. The only thing that could help to remedy the child's terrible emotional suffering at this time is communication with his father, with his closest, most intimate relatives, but he is being denied even that. It is a monstrosity! You can see what kinds of thugs these people are!

All those individuals surrounding the child in that photograph you saw on television are thugs, the worst enemies of Cuba. They would do anything possible to keep the child, but they will not be able to keep him, because justice is on our side and all the laws and reason are on our side, too.

We demand that they respect the paternal authority of this boy's father, as we have respected the paternal authority of thousands, tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of parents throughout the past 40 years!

What we are asking for now is that they respect the paternal authority of a Cuban family! That is what we are asking for (Applause) and they are not even capable of doing that.

As I came here today it was not my intention to explain all this to you. I am taking advantage of the opportunity to tell you all this, and at the same time I am telling it to all the citizens of our country through the media. They need to know these things.

I have mentioned an individual, and we have all the documents related to this person, whom we had not even wanted to mention until now, but we have to show the world just how very shameful all this is. The way the voyage was planned and who organized it after living for several months in the United States.

A month has passed, and we have said that we will continue to struggle restlessly.

Now, a U.S. official has stated that this cannot be resolved immediately, that the decision has been postponed until January 21, and they keep coming up with something new every day, out of fear for the counterrevolutionary worms over there. And when I say worms, I do not mean all the Cubans living in the United States, because there are many Cubans there, members of the Cuban-American community, who support the return of the child and oppose the blockade. No, I mean specifically the mercenary worms at the service of an anti-patriotic and clearly terrorist mob and of the most shameful, arrogant and reactionary people in the United States.

It is for fear of these people that the matter has not been resolved, and it seems they are challenging us to a long struggle. If it is a long struggle, they should know the price they will have to pay for a long struggle, as the world continues to witness what our people are made of, as we continue to demonstrate our morale, our conscience, our reason and our strength. At the moment, despite the reactionary propaganda and the lies they are telling over there, the majority of the U.S. people support the return of the child. The fact is that in the United States, like everywhere else, families have great respect for the right to paternal authority, and they can clearly see that the rights of this child and his father's rights are being abused. (Applause)

So, how long will this struggle take? We must be prepared, but for now, I want to tell you something: the open stage will no longer be only there where it has been for almost three weeks. That will be its official venue.

Listen to this: the stage may be anywhere in the country. One day it may be in Cárdenas, for example, and address the country from Cárdenas. Another day it may be in Plaza Cadenas at the University of Havana, and do the same.

I already explained that if this struggle goes on much longer, as it will likely be the case, we could not wear ourselves out. We must gather energy and strength for a long struggle. You know that. If boy scouts like you are going to walk for three days, you do not drink all the water you take in the first half-hour. If you are going to be walking six hours, you should not begin drinking it until two or three hours at least have passed.

When I made long treks, I developed the habit of not drinking water until I was in a place where I could replenish my supply. You know why? Because you suffer more when you are thirsty and your canteen is empty than when it is full. You endure thirst better --and this is a little secret I am telling you-- when you know you have a full canteen with you, even if you are suffering because you want a drink of water. When it is empty, the anxiety and suffering are two or three times worse.

I drew a lesson from all this. When I walked a lot I used that method. We must keep the canteen full for this long struggle, and when we drink a little, we must try to replace it as soon as we can. And we must increase the quantity of water, and find a larger canteen. Or, if the walk is really long, we can take two canteens, in order to gather strength and energy to use in this struggle, in which reason is on our side, and morality is on our side, totally and completely. They have fallen into a trap that they themselves had laid because they should have solved this problem immediately. I tell you that with every passing day they have to pay a higher price, that is, they are more discredited and they may end this long struggle in total disgrace. That is why we need to manage our enormous strength very carefully.

For yesterday's march, 70,000 people were called. There must always be a reserve force, in case someone falls ill or cannot participate for some important reason. Fifty thousand were announced, and 100,000 actually marched. All those who had T-shirts with Elián's picture on them were there, and many who did not have them gathered in an orderly fashion in the blocks where there were T-shirts in reserve. They were given the T-shirts since they said they wanted to participate. That is why yesterday no less than 100,000 people marched, although the idea was to have only 50,000. Why was that? Because we

wanted to preserve forces and energy.

How many marches will we have to make if the struggle is long? And we have classes, we have exams, we have vacations. All this has to be estimated. That is why it is not correct at all to use all our forces. We are ready to use them, as they become really necessary. With our canteens full – perhaps this is a good image – and ready for a long march. They are the ones who are not ready for a long march. We are.

Of course, we are making every effort to keep the marches short because, most of all, we are interested in the child's return, in putting an end to his suffering.

Who is to blame for making him suffer one more day, one more week, one more month? Not us. We even suggested an honorable solution. We said we did not want to humiliate anyone. We also know that in the United States there are different views, widely different views on this issue, and that many unbiased, intelligent and calm people favor the child's return. If the boy's release is delayed and he suffers one more minute, one more day, one more week or one more month, we will never be the ones to blame. But the longer they keep him there, the greater our determination, the steadier our decision to fight for as long as necessary. We shall see who wins this battle. (Applause and shouts.) We shall see what is stronger, if force and arrogance, or reason and the feelings of a whole people who will not be alone in the world.

As we said some weeks ago, we will leave no stone unturned! (Applause.) And the total responsibility for every last bit of the child's suffering lies with the U.S. authorities. And not only the child's suffering, because the father is suffering terribly, especially since they do not let him speak to him on the phone; the grandparents are suffering terribly and so are his 900 classmates, together with millions of pioneers in our country.

Now you have an explanation I think you can understand. While listening to the children speaking on TV and those in Elián's school, I could have a better appreciation of the intelligence of our children, the knowledge of our children, the feelings of our children, and that is how I know that you understand what I say. If you were in first, second or third grades, I would not speak to you like this, but you are fourth, fifth and sixth grade pioneers, and I think I can talk to you like this.

Why are we here tonight, and why have I met with you? Simply because yesterday you wrote a page in history. Did you know that? (Shouts: "No!") You did not know. That is right, there was no way for you to know it. You have to be told. Someone had to explain it to you. (Applause.) And I am telling you; I am trying to explain it to you, because yesterday you did something that had never happened before anywhere in the world. Usually, you keep custody of the polling stations where not a single vote is bought and where citizens truly vote, and not for the candidate with the most money, the most posters or the most propaganda, but for the one the neighbors know has the most merits or is most capable. This is something our children know.

The polling stations that everywhere in the world are guarded by soldiers armed to the teeth are in custody of pioneers here. You make up an exceptional moral, social and human force with still greater potential. We realized that every time there was a combative march special security measures were taken, even if it was just to reassure the tenants of the buildings close to the march, and two lines of special force fighters stood on guard there, without weapons, without weapons! During the last march they carried no guns, of course, or batons; they were there in addition to the security guards that ordinarily protect the embassies.

We asked ourselves: Who guarantees the safety of any of these embassies in such circumstances? Their guarantee rests, mainly, with the high degree of culture of our people, the education of our people, the unity of our people. But an outraged individual might want to act by himself, throw a stone. Therefore, these measures have been taken from the very beginning, so that people spontaneously wanting to do such things would be prevented from doing it. However, we have absolute confidence in our people, our

students, our youth, our workers and their conscience, their equanimity, their wisdom and their political awareness.

They know that embassies must be respected. It is an international duty and we know how to fulfil it marvelously. We know how to offer that security. Of course, we know that the most important thing is the education of our people. A million citizens may march and none will throw a stone, because they know this is something you just do not do. They throw something that is far more powerful than a stone. They throw an idea, a message, in a few words: "Free Elián!" Or "Let us save Elián!" (Applause.) These are not stones, these are not insults. No battle of ideas is won with insults. These battles are won with reason, with arguments, with ideas.

Rest assured that every thing you cry out there, every slogan, every word carries a message, an idea. These are smart weapons. You have heard of smart weapons, the ones that can be aimed at a target thousands of miles away, even if they are the size of this courtyard.

We have to use smart weapons. Our smart weapons are our ideas, our smart weapons are our arguments, and our smart weapons are based on principles, on our revolutionary thought. Our smart weapon arsenal is endless. When each of you march or rally and shout "Return Elián!", "Elián must return!", "Let us save Elián!", "Free Elián!", you are using smart weapons against which there is no possible defense (Applause) and these smart weapons are the morality, the reason, the example, the image of a united people defending justice with impressive determination; a people that does not yield and that is never discouraged, neither the elderly, nor the adults, nor the pioneers. With these weapons our people are invincible, because we can make these weapons reach every corner in the world.

Although they own who knows how many international TV networks and other mass media, we have many friends and many ways of making these videos of the march and the rallies be seen, many ways of spreading written messages, filmed messages and spoken messages to every corner of the world.

That is why it would be ridiculous, stupid and even primitive to throw a stone and break a window in an embassy, in this case, the United States Interests Section. However, what we see every day and almost every hour in the world are demonstrations in front of U.S. embassies, every time they commit another brutality or crime. The protesters throw stones, break windows and burn flags or effigies of Uncle Sam. You see that quite often and terrible clashes with the police everywhere. I do not criticize them. At times, it is the only way they have to express their outrage and their discontent in this world full of abuse and injustice. They do not have the possibility of carrying out a political struggle like Cuba has, with its united and free people. At times, in other places, they are 500, 1000, 2000 or 3000 people who gather to make themselves heard and demand justice in a hostile and repressive atmosphere.

Before the Revolution, when we did not have this strength, when we did not have a united people and we were just students, we also went to a consulate or an embassy, the U.S. embassy itself to throw stones, paint slogans on walls, and do things of that sort.

I remember when some American marines climbed up on the statue of Jose Martí in Central Park. This caused a great fury. The students went to the U.S. embassy, which at that time was very close to Eusebio Leal's museum, in Old Havana, and the police hit us with rubber batons and clubs so we would not be able to do those things.

What a difference compared with today! Such different weapons we can use now! We do what I have just explained, protesting with arguments, with ideas. I know that you understand. (Applause)

Why did you write a page in history? Because for the first time in our country, or anywhere in the world, instead of specialized troops and soldiers guarding the United States Interests Section, 2000 pioneers -2000 pioneers!- were in charge of guarding it while the march was on its way.

The Interests Section has its usual protection. There are several sentry posts which are reinforced at

times of tensions, precisely to prevent action by any isolated individual, in good faith, or an agitator, who might throw a stone and smash a window, thus staining the honor of our country. A large propaganda campaign would immediately begin claiming the diplomatic seat of the United States in Cuba had been attacked. It is our inescapable duty to protect the immunity and integrity of all diplomatic missions and that Interests Section among them.

That is why we feel that the moment you stood there like a wall reinforcing the guard, 15 minutes before the march began, was of historic consequence. Was that guard ever stronger? (Shouts of "No!") No! And I will explain to you why. It was reinforced by the conscience of our people, by a culture that grows day by day, and it was also reinforced by the fact that no one is more respected or protected in this country than children are. Three lines of children are the greatest protection that Interests Section has ever had in this country. (Applause.) You will remember this day for the rest of your lives and your parents will always be proud of you.

As can be understood, for the reasons I have already explained, we knew you were in no danger. Other pioneers were marching. The junior high school pioneers were marching, the senior and higher education students were marching there and they are your closest brothers and sisters. The youth that protect you so much were marching there. The patriotic and revolutionary people, who love children so much, because they have children of their own, because they are parents themselves, were also marching (Applause). Who would protect you better than them?

Believe me, this troop of boy scouts who guarded the embassy during yesterday's march has written a glorious page in our history (Applause). You will be proud when you grow up, and your parents will be even prouder.

You were the first, and you were all from the municipality of Plaza. That is why we could hold this meeting today in this youth facility, and you did not have to walk too much, because 17 schools in Plaza sent their pioneers to guard that building (Applause). Did you do it to defend imperialism? (Shouts: "No!") You did it to defend the Revolution; you did it to show the world what this country is, to show the world that today this can only happen in this country. (Applause) Our pioneers do not only guard polling stations but also embassies; they can guard whatever is necessary and may be guarded by them.

That is why just yesterday, at a meeting with leaders of the Young Communist League, the students and the pioneers, we agreed to present you this afternoon with a certificate of recognition that you can keep for the rest of your lives (Applause and shouts of "Long live Fidel! Long live Fidel!") No, no, long live all of you, and I hope you live a very long life to enjoy the pride of having this certificate! Keep it always and show it to your children when you have them and to your grandchildren when you have grandchildren! We expect you to keep it in a safe place, and if for some reason you lose it, as we have the record of those who received it, we will give you a new one. But take care of this because this is the one we are giving you today. (Applause and shouts.)

We wrote the text yesterday at the meeting. Listen to what it reads:

"In recognition of:" This is where the pioneer's name goes. We did not have time to write all the names, and we wanted to do it in nice handwriting. So the 17 schools you are from will be visited and the certificates will be filled in with your names in clear handwriting, as beautiful as possible. (Applause.)

"In recognition of" (He points at a girl in the first row.) What is your name? Say it in a loud voice, come, say it, come over here. What is your name? (The girl comes closer and says her name.)

Elizabeth Gálvez Soler. Then it will read: "In recognition of Elizabeth Gálvez Soler." Then comes the text: "A pioneer who carried out the mission entrusted to him by the Revolution of guarding the diplomatic office of the United States in accordance with its – that is, the Revolution's – responsibility during the historic march of pioneers, students and young workers for the liberation of Elián." (Applause) A small correction should be made in the text, so it reads "to him" for the boys and "to her" for the girls. My

signature is at the bottom. Of course, I could not sign 2000 certificates –that would have been too many– but I made a special signature for you. I wanted it to be the best possible. This is it. (He shows it.) And of course, when you sign one with your own hand, it is printed on the rest of the certificates, no matter if there are 100,000. I am not going to fool you. I am not going to say that I spent a month signing the certificates. There are many things to do. But I signed once for this certificate of recognition.

Today we planned to hand them out symbolically, one for each school, but what we will do is send one each to all the children who participated from every school. There is a small mistake in the text (in Spanish) that must be corrected. It should actually say "its responsibility" and not "their responsibility". It is not the pioneers' duty to guard an embassy. You carried out a mission entrusted to you by the Revolution, since it is the duty of the Revolution to guard the Interests Section. What the pioneers did was to carry out a mission entrusted to them by the Revolution, by doing what you did yesterday. Is that clear? (Applause and shouts of "Yes!")

Well, now you know. Everyone to school tomorrow to see if the Federation of Senior High School Students and the Young Communist League honor their commitment of having the 2000 certificates ready tonight, with the corrections distinguishing boys from girls and the "its" instead of the "their". It was a simple mistake that has come in handy, because it allowed us to improve the certificate.

All this was done in a few hours. The march was organized in a few hours. Who knows the things they can organize? Resources for this struggle are infinite, I tell you. Resources and ideas are infinite (Applause) and they are not based on violence, but on ideas. Do not forget something that Martí said, and that perhaps you have heard before: "Trenches of ideas are worth more than trenches of stones." We are going to prove it beyond all doubt. We will preserve our strength, we will keep up production in the economy and services and we will keep up good grades in school. We will do everything that needs to be done but avoiding damage to other activities.

From you, the elementary school, junior and senior high school, and university students and teachers, we ask for a small additional effort to do what we must do: to produce and, at the same time, to sow what must be sown in the minds and the hearts of that enormous treasure that is our childhood and our youth.

A little more effort is requested from all of you, and I know you have more than enough energy, and even more than enough time; perhaps all you would have to do is miss a radio or TV program you like for just one day. For the moment, you should not miss those extraordinary shows in the open stage, since they will provide you with general knowledge and political culture, and that is the most important of all cultures and the one most scarce in the world today.

I was telling you that on Saturday, the open stage would move to the National Theater. (He is told that it will be at the Avellaneda Hall in the National Theater) Both times? (He is told yes.) It will be a special program for children, where children will perform, supporting the struggle for Elián's liberation. (Applause.) So, the open stage, with its announcers, speakers and leaders will be there at 5:00 in the afternoon at the National Theater, and it will be broadcast to the whole country on both TV channels. We hope it will be on both of them. The open stage near the U.S. Interests Section will always be broadcast on both channels. In this other case, we shall see. But even the children in Baracoa will see it on TV. I propose that the pioneers' organization hands out some tickets as a reward to these guards who wrote a page in history yesterday. (Applause.) Saturday and Sunday it will be there, and on Monday it will be somewhere else.

Since an official said that the solution has been postponed, until who knows what month and what day and they are into tricks and ruses, I want to tell you about an idea we will implement immediately, or as soon as possible. Right in the place where the open stage was provisionally established we will set up a permanent open stage, (Applause) a better-designed and stronger open stage. They should know that this stage will be the main venue for this program and that it will stay there. (Applause) The most we will do, when they return the child, is to take away the loudspeakers aimed at the Interests Section

building, so as not to annoy them with the echo of our functions nearby. But our glorious youth need a permanent stage, a permanent school for cultural education, a permanent school, we should say, of general culture and political culture. (Applause) That stage, born in the heat of this battle you are waging, will stay there.

Perhaps in the future lectures will be delivered there on history, economics, politics and other topics about the world today. A very wide scope of subjects will be covered but the main purpose will be the cultural and political education of our children, our youth and all our people. (Applause.)

This is the piece of news I wanted to give you. Cuba's response to this tactic of forever postponing the case of the kidnapped child and the continuation of their cruel and persistent hostility against our people, which has been maintained for almost half a century, is the permanent open stage from where Elián's return is being demanded today. (Applause)

Thank you very much, my dear little comrades. You have behaved very well. We will always remember you. We will always consider you an example. I am very pleased with the attention you have paid to me, the discipline you have shown. I will use a slogan today that is not definitive, since we should not renounce the idea of Homeland or Death or the idea of Socialism or Death. However, I will say what a young deputy to the National Assembly said: Homeland and Life! Life for you is what we want! (Applause) Our pioneers will not have to die.

In the long and historic struggle of our people, whose end no one could exactly guess, perhaps as young men and women, you will be asked one day to sacrifice your lives for the homeland. But since today we are more powerful than ever, and have so many smart weapons, we will win this battle for life, and not only for your lives, but also for the lives of all children in the world.

What we do today will serve hundreds of millions of people. Millions will use tomorrow the path that we are opening today, hundreds of millions of children who in the world of today have no schools, nor doctors, nor the patriotic, revolutionary, socialist and internationalist education our people have. (Applause.)

Until our next victory! (Applause and shouts of "Fidel, Fidel, Fidel!")

There is also a letter for the pioneer's guides who were with you that day. They will also receive the recognition they deserve. I had forgotten to mention that. (Applause.)

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