

CLOSING SPEECH BY DR. FIDEL CASTRO RUZ, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA, AT THE 9TH IBERO-AMERICAN SUMMIT. HAVANA, NOVEMBER 16, 1999 [1]

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would rather speak from here (meaning his chairman seat) because it seems to me that you can hear me better, at least, I do hear myself better from here. However, I have asked everybody else to speak from the podium, therefore, I must oblige. I will speak from the podium, too. (APPLAUSE)

There is no reason to be afraid, I will be as brief as possible. (LAUGHTER)

I shall begin by addressing you as dear friends. Actually, I sense that we are here not only with Their Majesties --our beloved friend King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia-- and with distinguished Heads of States and Governments. At this closing session today, I feel that you are more than celebrated guests, I feel that we are all friends.

There is this famous English novel --I do not remember the author's name-- whose title is Wuthering Heights. Many heralded that this 9th Summit would be as stormy as the plot of that novel. However, it gives me great pleasure to say that, in my modest view, this has been as smooth a summit as I have seen few in my life (APPLAUSE). It has been both fruitful and productive and not because it was the 9th Summit held in Havana but because we are all more experienced and we have worked under the perception and the impression that these summits have grown more significant.

The discussions were very thoughtful and the work intense during the morning session which lasted over four hours. There, we tried to debate the largest number of subjects preserving the afternoon for a meeting where only the Heads of States and Governments would be present. In my view, the morning working session was so intense and productive that the basic problems were practically discussed and settled there.

First, all the Heads of States and Governments made their contributions as well as the delegates of major international entities whose work is related to the issues under discussion. All the participating foreign ministers who represented Heads of States that for one reason or another could not, and did not, attend the Summit also addressed the meeting. The arguments heard were sincere, profound and serious.

Indeed, in my own experience --and I speak for myself-- I had seldom witnessed such a meeting where everybody present offered his viewpoints so openly and straightforwardly.

As you could see, due to a technical problem or a small misunderstanding, somebody had not been able to make his presentation and it was no other than the representative of CARICOM and its member countries. That situation we have been able to correct by giving him the opportunity to speak at this closing session. Therefore, it can be said that everyone interested in presenting his views could do so in due course.

The Declaration of Havana was adopted as submitted by the Foreign Ministers. Of course, a declaration

worked out by consensus that tries to consider all criteria cannot be expected to be an extraordinary document tackling every issue. However, it is a constructive and positive document, produced by consensus and the fruit of months of hard work prior to the Summit.

As I said, the Declaration proposed by the Foreign ministers was adopted as well as a number of special resolutions on very significant issues. They all show the progress made and how we keep building up step by step.

The work of the Summits is not something that can be done in one or two years; it takes a long time and its results cannot be seen overnight. In the future, we will see the results of this great effort at unity and integration. Meanwhile, we should not be discouraged. Actually, the united and integrated Europe --or the first stage of the unity and integration we see there today-- embarked on this path over 40 years ago. Of course, they had more time available.

We are more time-pressed but we realize that major problems have been solved from the Oporto summit until this one in Havana. Thus, special declarations were adopted on significant issues: the first, on the proclamation of [Osvaldo] Guayasamín as the painter of Ibero-America. That is a historic agreement reached the very same year we had the misfortune to lose him, such an outstanding personality.

A declaration on the Panamá Canal, the very year when our continent is being historically vindicated with an action attained with everybody's support and that we all welcome.

A declaration on the reconstruction and transformation of Central America was also adopted. This is vital for tens of millions of brothers and sisters in that region of our continent so badly in need of support and so badly in need to see promises delivered. I mean the big promises because we are aware of countries like Spain and others that have delivered on their promises, which were generous albeit limited by their possibilities. That is why yesterday I referred to the big promises that are never delivered.

A declaration on the Malvinas [Faulkland islands], an extremely important issue that has led to bloody wars and that should be solved peacefully and not with the force of weapons but with moral force and by the law was approved.

A declaration on the peace process in Colombia; that issue is a major source of concern and its solution will have far-reaching implications for the realization of our dreams of unity and integration as soon as we need them.

A declaration on the peace accords between Ecuador and Peru. That is an extraordinary and historic event associated to a feud that dates back centuries. It was signed this year following the initiative of leaders from Latin America and from both countries that courageously defied the obstacles poised in the way to the solution of such a longstanding and contentious subject.

A declaration was also adopted on the follow-up of the European Union-Latin America-Caribbean Summit, an issue of major strategic significance.

Finally, a declaration on the consolidation of friendship and integration between Chile and Peru, something absolutely new and so recent that we learned of it just a few days ago.

Eight major issues have been successfully settled and it can be said that we were all supportive. Would it not be fair to say that this has been a fruitful year?

Obviously, everyone could express his viewpoints in absolute freedom during the debates. Everyone presented his own particular experiences since there are many differences in the situation of each country, their main production items, their possibilities. However, they all move in the same direction in

search for solutions to the crucial problems affecting the countries in our Ibero-American world and to crucial world problems waiting to be solved.

A spirit of unity and great awareness prevailed. Later, in the afternoon, when we should have discussed the most complicated issues, we found that we had no complex problem to discuss. Then, we used our time to approach in friendly and fraternal terms, like a family, all kinds of questions both philosophic and historic and we lamented not to have more time to continue our discussions. There, the importance of an open, friendly dialogue was proved when we could listen to each other and get to know each other better.

That would be a fair description of the afternoon session.

It seems to me that we can rightly point out that it has been an excellent Summit. We do not mean it in terms of national pride, that is, because it was held in our country, but rather for the expertise we have come to accumulate and our hopes that every summit in the future will be better.

This is what I had to say to you and as I promised not to take long, I must oblige.

I say good-bye to you all with optimism and confidence in our future although it will be a hazardous road ahead. The future struggles will be harder than the past but I am confident about the future.

Ever onward to victory! (OVATION)

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