

We have lost our best friend

The best friend the Cuban people have had throughout their history died on the afternoon of March 5. A call via satellite communicated the bitter news. The significance of the phrase used was unmistakable.

Although we were aware of the critical state of his health, the news hit us hard. I recalled the times he joked with me, saying that when both of us had concluded our revolutionary task, he would invite me to walk by the Arauca river in Venezuelan territory, which made him remember the rest that he never had.

The honor befell us to have shared with the Bolivarian leader the same ideas of social justice and support for the exploited. The poor are the poor in any part of the world.

"Let Venezuela give me a way of serving her: she has in me a son," proclaimed National Hero José Martí, the leader of our independence, a traveler who, without cleansing himself of the dust of the journey, asked for the location of the statue of Bolívar.

Martí knew the beast because he lived in its entrails. Is it possible to ignore the profound words he voiced in an inconclusive letter to his friend Manuel Mercado the day before he died in battle? "...I am in daily danger of giving my life for my country and duty – for I understand that duty and have the intention of carrying it out – the duty of preventing the United States from extending through the Antilles as Cuba gains its independence, and from falling, with that additional strength, upon our lands of America. All that I have done thus far, and will do, is for this purpose. I have had to work silently and somewhat indirectly because, there are certain things which, in order to attain them, have to remain concealed...."

At that time, 66 years had passed since the Liberator Simón Bolívar wrote, "...the United States would seem to be destined by fate to plague the Americas with miseries in the name of freedom."

On January 23, 1959, 22 days after the revolutionary triumph in Cuba, I visited Venezuela to thank its people and the government which assumed power after the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship, for the dispatch of 150 rifles at the end of 1958. I said at that time:

"...Venezuela is the homeland of the Liberator, where the idea of the union of the peoples of America was conceived. Therefore, Venezuela must be the country to lead the union of the peoples of America; as Cubans, we support our brothers and sisters in Venezuela.

"I have spoken of these ideas not because I am moved by any kind of personal ambition, or even the ambition of glory, because, at the end of the day, ambitions of glory remain a vanity, and as Martí said, 'All the glory of the world fits into a kernel of corn.'

"And so, upon coming here to talk in this way to the people of Venezuela, I do so thinking honorably and deeply, that if we want to save America, if we want to save the freedom of each one of our societies that, at the end of the day, are part of one great society, which is the society of Latin America; if it is that we want to save the revolution of Cuba, the revolution of Venezuela and the revolution of all the countries on our continent, we have to come closer to each other and we have to solidly support each other, because alone and divided, we will fail."

That is what I said on that day and today, 54 years later, I endorse it!

I must only include on that list the other nations of the world which, for more than half a century, have

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been victims of exploitation and plunder. That was the struggle of Hugo Chávez.

Not even he himself suspected how great he was.

iHasta la victoria siempre, unforgettable friend!

Fidel Castro Ruz

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