

[Speech Given by Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz at the closing ceremony of the “World Conference Dialogue among Civilizations. Latin America in the 21st Century: Universalism and Originality \[1\]](#)

Date:

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Dear Friends:

I refer to all the guests coming from other countries and from Cuba.

I must confess to you that I do not like the word “foreigners”, because it is as if I were addressing you as “Dear Strangers”.

It is not often that one has the possibility, and the challenge, to meet with a group such as this. One would have to be, in the first place, a fortune teller to know what one should speak about here. I have this reputation for talking at length, often going on far too long; such is not my intention this afternoon, even though often times intentions do not match up to results (Laughter); but, I understand, and not because I listened to all the presentation –something that I would have liked very much to do, but because I was fortunate to be provided a summary of the activities and of the various presentations.

The first thing that occurs to me is to congratulate those who had the initiative of arranging an event such as this, and to give it such a suggestive name, like that of the Dialogue among Civilizations.

Anyone who is not aware of some of the sessions or the content of your task could have thought that this was all about a group of amateurs exchanging philosophical ideas, or using their time to have interesting exchanges and reflections.

Based on what I have read, I think that the content of this dialogue is much more lofty and profound than could be deduced from just the name. It seems to me that you have really participated in a dialogue, although I'm not sure if it was a dialogue among civilizations or by civilizations.

One must think of the concepts of civilization and wonder, what are civilizations? From my boyhood and my school days, which was not so long ago (Laughter), it seems like it was just yesterday when I was listening to the first concepts about the world and about history. It was said that this world was civilized, and it was even said that the Europeans had come to this hemisphere to bring us civilization.

It was also said that it was necessary go to Africa to civilize the Africans, and go all the way to the Pacific region, to what was then called the Indian Ocean to civilize the Indians, and the Indonesians; a bit further yet and they arrived in China, to civilize China.

For a long time now we have all heard about Marco Polo. As a boy I also heard of him, of his voyages to China. It is known that there had been a Chinese civilization for a long time, just as there had been an Indian civilization, a civilization there by the Euphrates, several civilizations over there in Mesopotamia, and the strange thing is that all of these happened before the Greek and the Roman civilizations and

before European civilization.

Once I was visiting Africa, and there in South Africa I was invited to a village where a statue had been built to honor a child who had died during one of the anti-apartheid protests. While I was in that place, I reflected on the fact that there was a civilization in Africa, in some places in Africa, when the barbarian tribes were roaming throughout Europe, from one region to another.

We all know that in Julius Caesar's day and age he won his glory fighting with his legions against the Barbarian Germanic tribes, and that after vanquishing the Barbaric Frankish tribes he moved on to conquer Gaul, that is, in the Gallic Wars, and he went as far as what today is Great Britain. He even had a wall built in those islands because apparently he was unable to totally dominate some of those peoples, and so they built a wall. That same Europe –and I hold nothing against the Europeans, on the contrary, I am in favor of peace among them (Laughter), and respect for the dignity of all, and so why wouldn't I respect the dignity of the Europeans. I look at history because I'm meditating on it. At that time, when fifteen centuries after Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul, the Spaniards –partly my kingship–arrived in Mexico, they found there a civilization, a city that was larger than any European city at that time, the city of Mexico, the capital of the Aztecs, Tenochtitlán, a city built on a lake, a masterpiece of engineering, with a prosperous and highly developed agriculture. It was larger than Paris in both size and population, and possibly larger than Madrid, Lisbon and all those cities, and they went there to bring civilization, to conquer Mexico.

Well, one of the pretexts that I read by one of the writers of that time, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, is that these people had to be civilized because they made human sacrifices. And if the people who made human sacrifices had to be civilized, then I think that there are many in this world that still need civilizing.

I think, for example, that those who bomb cities, terrorize millions of men, women and children and then say that there were civilian casualties need civilizing. Apart from the civilian casualties which always occur during all bombings, and the Russians know about this better than anyone else, because the Russians lived through the bombings of Leningrad. The Russians endured preemptive attacks. The Russians remember that June 21st when the troops of Adolph Hitler, the armored divisions, bolstered by thousands and thousands of aircraft, hundreds of perfectly equipped divisions, tens of thousands of tanks and cannons, launched a preemptive attack, with no previous warning, on that dark corner of the world called the Soviet Union. The divisions penetrated the territory at full speed, some towards Leningrad, others straight to Moscow and others southwards directly towards Kiev.

Those of us who have been able to know and admire the great feats of the Russian people know the terrible challenge they had to confront, suddenly, in a matter of hours, while the soldiers from that famous Brest-Litovsk fortress, which so gallantly and heroically defended itself, despite the surprise, were home on leave. And while studying those events we observed something that speaks volumes about the historic values of the Russian people. When everywhere else the news of enemy tanks in the rearguard were the signal to surrender and hoist the white flag, the Russians did not surrender, the Russians did not hoist the white flag.

Sometimes, one reflects on what might have happened if that people had been mobilized, if the Russian Army and her allies had been in a state of combat alert. We, an extremely small country, a tiny island here near the powerful neighbor, many times we have had to foresee the dangers and declare ourselves in a state of combat alert! We are determined not to allow anyone ever to take us by surprise and to catch us off our guard. I am not going to rummage through history nor shall I speak of accountability. The truth is, however, that if the Russian people and her armed forces had been mobilized, I know very well where World War II would have ended; not in Berlin, but in Lisbon. I dare say this here with every sense of responsibility. I have thought about this many times because I have read many history books about that war, written by people on both sides. We all know that millions and millions of men and women died; the figure has been given of 15, later 20 and later 27 million people from that multinational Soviet state; then and now as well, of course, Russia is largely a multinational State, but

tens of millions died, and I think it was mostly due to the surprise.

In our country, a great many books were published, even, while great dangers threatened us. We resorted to heroic Russian literature. And so, books were printed in the hundreds of thousands to instill in our people the idea that when the people fight and when the people resist they can face up to any difficulty.

I mean that for us that heroism of the Russians is not something that we have read about like the heroism of, let's say, those who fought in Numancia and Sagunto, against the Roman troops, until the very last man, until the extermination of a population. In this case we have lived together through a part of history, a difficult part. You had lived through it earlier and we have lived through it later, constantly threatened with an invasion. And we were not threatened by the Grand Cayman island lying south of Cuba, with an area of some square kilometers and perhaps 8,000 or 10,000 inhabitants; we have been threatened by a country which 8, 9 or 10 million square kilometers and a populations of almost 300 million, by the power which, from a technical, economic and military point of view, has prevailed over the last 60 years, the United States superpower. It is a great danger.

And we were inspired by the deeds of the Soviet people --I must say this, I should not hesitate to call them so-- for we know that the soul of that resistance, the axis of that resistance, the heart of that resistance, was the Russian people, the heroism of other peoples who fought alongside the Russians notwithstanding.

Retamar was speaking about the invasion of Russia by Napoleonic troops. Napoleon was a revolutionary, a representative of that great revolution, an undisputable military genius, but a military genius in the midst of a revolution. But, really, without the French Revolution there would have been no Napoleonic military genius. He would have lived his life on his small island of Corsica at that time and nobody would have even heard of Napoleon. But there was a great Revolution, and many leaders emerged from that great revolution, from the struggles, interventions and invasions that everybody knows about. Leaders are born from the people and, above all, from great social crises.

It is not men who make history, it is history that makes men or the great figures and personalities; men interpret events, in one way or another, but they are born from history. We see here the Venezuelan ambassador, our friend Adán (Adam) who bears the name of the first human being who lived on this planet; he represents the country of Bolívar, but as I was saying, without those historical processes, the name Bolívar would be unknown today.

It was the great crisis, Napoleon's occupation of Spain, the imposition of a French king in that country, a brother of the emperor --who I believe was a bit of a fool-- that caused a rebellion, first as an act of loyalty, not by Bolívar but certainly by that society represented at the time by the wealthiest sectors, the ruling sectors.

But those historical events, that revolution, made it possible that today we know about Bolívar. This would not have been the case if Bolívar had been born 30 years earlier or 30 years later. The name of Martí would not be known, and we would not know the names of many of history's greatest figures whose reputation, more than their merits, sprang out of historical events. I say this about the great figures: Martí, the moment when he was born the son of a Spanish soldier, both mother and father were Spaniards, he was born with an enormous sensitivity, he was born on this soil at a time of crisis. Therefore, the great historical events are a product of crises.

I say this because, history --and there are many interpretations of history-- is made up of a series of events and advances from one era to another. The history of which we speak, the history of those civilizations which sprang up before the Greeks and the Romans, are teaching us many things.

I think that the history of man is a history of wars, it's a history of conquests, it's a history of some peoples dominating other peoples, of some groups being dominated by other groups. At a certain

moment empires emerged, but the Roman Empire was not the first one, for there were other empires before the Romans. There was an empire in China. They had over there that famous terracotta army, which has been dug up by the Chinese. It is remarkable what that shows us, in terms of advances in art, culture, technique, civilization.

There were empires in Asia. The Persian Empire long preceded the Roman Empire, and even the famous Alexandrian Empire. At a given moment, Alexander organized armies --well, it was his father who organized them-- and he was very young when he launched the invasion of Asia Minor and of all those countries. He was fighting against the Persian emperor, I think he destroyed Persepolis. He is said to have taken Greek civilization there. It is so strange, though, to hear that Greek civilization could have inspired the destruction of a city such as Persepolis. Some remains of it are left and it must have certainly been marvelous. The Mesopotamian civilization was also destroyed, the famous hanging gardens [of Babylon] disappeared who-knows-where, and all that remains of them are some vague idea. Invasion followed invasion. Europe suffered through wave after wave of invasions by the barbarian tribes. The Barbarians finally annihilated the Roman Empire, especially after the Roman legions ceased being Roman to be made up of soldiers coming from those barbarian tribes who eventually destroyed the Roman Empire. Even though during each of these eras great values were being created, in all eras, from the one that preceded ours; the philosophers who preceded our era, the Greek philosophers, sprang up precisely before our era. It is said that Aristotle was Alexander the Great's tutor. That has been recounted in the histories written by real pundits were familiar with the habits of those times and who explain how Aristotle was the tutor for the son of Philip of Macedonia.

In other words, each one of these stages was creating values, each one of these stages was creating cultures that were accumulating; but, when we speak of civilization, we cannot forget about the Mayan civilization which had knowledge of space, or the Aztec civilization, or the Inca civilization or the Pre-Inca civilizations.

I have spoken with eminent men such as [Thor] Heyerdahl, the famous author of the Kon-Tiki Expedition, who was an explorer. He dedicated his life to the study of ancient civilizations. He worked a lot in Peru and he told me how there were things and designs that could only be seen from an altitude of 2,000 or 3,000 meters, stretching over the plains, constructions that were feats of engineering such as had not existed in Europe when this hemisphere was conquered. And so what did these civilizations bring to us? Up to which point did they conquer us? Almost until today, and I say "almost", because many of us are still conquered and dominated by other civilizations that rule over the remnants of those that existed in this hemisphere, and this, keeping in mind the great values which the conquerors brought with them, because they all created values. All civilizations created values, but values that have clashed against each other.

When I hear this phrase, "Dialogue among Civilizations", what crosses my mind is the idea of an accumulation of values, an amalgamation of the values of all civilizations. Just as when we speak of teaching people to read and write, I think of providing the unschooled with those values they have not been able to obtain, because they had no one to teach them or no school to go to. When one speaks of teaching people to read and write, one thinks of that, of passing on values. But we must also ask ourselves what values, exactly what values we are passing on?

I was moved by the words that were spoken about saying goodbye to chauvinism, saying goodbye to narrow-minded nationalism, saying goodbye to hatred, saying goodbye to intolerance, saying goodbye to prejudice, by gathering all that is good in all cultures and all civilizations and all religions, by teaching everyone a universal ethic which is dearly needed in this neo-liberal and globalized world which began by globalizing egoism, globalizing vice, globalizing frantic consumerism, globalizing the attempts at stealing the resources of others, and making slaves of them.

It is said that slavery dates back to primitive times and that, as soon as humanity became involved in production and learned that people could produce for themselves and for others, rather than murder its prisoners, it began to preserve them. This is what is said and it may be very true, but slavery would

persist for thousands of years afterwards.

It is said that the passage from Roman slavery to feudalism which took place in Europe in what was called the Middle Ages, was a great step forward, up until the very moment they discovered us here. I say "us" because, even though I share in the blood of the discoverers, I consider myself a son of this land and this island, and, above all else, a son of humanity. This land knew a great patriot, a great philosopher who once said —and not at the time of internationalism, this man was struggling for his homeland's independence against Spanish colonialism— but he said a phrase that ought to be remembered for all time: "Homeland is humanity". That man's name was, is and will always be José Martí. See this: "Homeland is humanity". Here, where the representatives of more than 25 countries, where scientists, intellectuals and religious leaders have gathered to hold this dialogue among civilizations, have you not been moved by the feeling, have you not had a sense that your homeland is humanity?

I stress this point because I hate chauvinism; I revile chauvinism as I revile many other things that have characterized humanity in its long journey throughout its brief history...no one knows whether Homo Sapiens first appeared 50, 100 or several hundreds of thousands of years ago. Archaeologists spend their lives looking for skulls to determine at which point in the evolution of the species humanity arose. I mention this without fear of offending anyone, even if I know there are many religious people here, because the leader of the Catholic Church himself, some years ago, declared —courageously, in my opinion—that the theory of evolution is not irreconcilable with the doctrine of creation. I don't know, of course, how other religions view this issue. I respect them all, as I respect all points of view. I limit myself to offering you an example of how the Catholic Church interprets this knowledge. These are new phenomena, for churches have learned from experience and have attempted to broaden their points of view and their conceptions in their search for good.

I was educated in religious schools; I was critical, and I can still be so, of the way in which they taught me religion, a very dogmatic way. Everyone is not born the same and everyone has their own character, their own personality. I reject those things that they tried to force on me, or that they forced me to believe without persuading me about, those things they wanted me to believe. Thus, everyone has their own way of reacting.

But I can say that the churches themselves have been making an effort. The Catholic Church has criticized the crimes that were committed, the conquest of this hemisphere with great violence; they have criticized the Inquisition, they have criticized the condemnation of Galileo, they have condemned those horrible acts such as the burning of heretics at the stake. The first native to revolt in this country --he was a peaceful man, and he was not even a Cuban-- came from Santo Domingo where there was a much more combative population. His name was Hatuey and he was condemned to burn at the stake; and there a priest was sent to persuade him to be baptized so that he could go to heaven, and the story goes that he asked --whether it is true or not, I say it is a lovely story; we have been taught this right from primary school --he is said to have been asked whether the Spaniards went to Heaven and when he was told that, yes, they did, that rebellious native said: "Then, I would rather die, I don't want to go to such Heaven where Spaniards go."

Look at that lesson, how every man who lives leaves us something. That rebel died with those words on his lips, which may be true or not, but he at least inspired them. Consider that beautiful example of dignity, of heroism.

And I was speaking about all the mistakes we have made and which we must overcome and the values we have created that we must bring together. Thus I interpret what could be termed a dialogue among civilizations, whose spirit I share one hundred percent and which makes me happy. I wish I could one day participate fully in a dialogue and not just in its closing ceremony and not have to find out about it from a summary of all that was discussed.

Our distinguished visitor, whom we have received with much satisfaction, and we know that it is not his

fault that he arrived late --we could call this a contradiction in views, a contradiction of civilizations—he was speaking about the satisfaction with which they were awaiting the next dialogue to be held in Greece, where all those who wanted to, could attend, I was reminded of a recent occurrence that I, sports lover that I am, that I always have been wanting to see one of the Olympic Games, which I have never attended, even when I could have gone; but I thought that I had the right to participate in the Olympics, if I wanted to, and there in Greece many people invited me, even people from the Greek Orthodox Church, and they promised that they would take me to see a famous monastery. And truly, my mind is overflowing with ideas, memories, things they told me, the marvelous things they told me about the history of that church and what they have accomplished and what they have created. It was very interesting having the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church visit me precisely on the day we were inaugurating the Orthodox Church building. And we have also been talking about laying the first stone of a Russian Orthodox church; there will also be a cathedral here, to all of our satisfaction, in the same way that there is a mosque in our city, and in the same way all the religions are represented. We have this honor and we are pleased and honored that they are all represented here. And I think that our country has been an example of how ecumenism can exist not just in the religious terrain but also in the respect of the sentiments of all.

I could not be ecumenical with those who deny other people their right to think and their right to believe, because for us, we who are so often accused of violating human rights, I shall say nothing more other than that the first human right is the right to think, the right to believe, the right to live, the right to learn, the right to know dignity, the right to be treated like any other human being, the right to be independent, the right to sovereignty as a people, the right to dignity as a human being.

We really think that to discuss human rights, a sort of Olympics would have to be organized, getting us all together, the accused with all the frauds and hypocrites in the world today, and assemble together in a room like this one to debate what human rights are, which ones we have violated and which ones we have defended for dozens of years, without ever abandoning our principles. You, many of whom are religious persons --and I am not a religious person in the traditional sense of the word-- at the end of the road could remember religious characters and God forbid, I am not comparing ourselves with any other character in history. I am not just myself; I speak for the people of Cuba, I represent thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of human beings who live in this island. I don't assume to compare myself to anyone; but this island has been more slandered than the early Christians, it has been more slandered than those who were devoured by the lions in the Roman circuses, more slandered than those who were forced to live in the catacombs because of their faith.

There are religious beliefs and there are political beliefs. There are religious convictions and there are political convictions. And I mean it in the best sense of the word because everything political has been so discredited. There are political ideas. I conceive political ideas to be those that are truly worth the life of a man, of a man's sacrifice, of a man's life, of a man's death; or that of many men, of an entire people if necessary, who would sacrifice themselves in defense of those values, whoever defends values and knows that without values there is no life. And I say more, without values there is no civilization; even more, without values, this humanity cannot survive, because when we speak of civilizations --and we know there were many, and just as many have disappeared --we might also wonder how long these civilizations will last if we do not take the relevant steps just as you are trying to do here so that not just civilization but the species can survive. Because for the first time in the long march through a brief history, the survival of humanity is in jeopardy. I would invite anyone to answer and tell me if there was ever any other time like today when the survival of the species was in danger.

In the past, it was the Roman Empire, before that Greek or Greco-Roman civilization; in earlier times it was the Egyptian, Persian and the already-mentioned Mesopotamian civilizations. That is to say, the two hemispheres have known civilizations, because man took civilization with him wherever he went. It has been shown that human beings on this side of the Atlantic had the same level of mind development and the same intelligence as those who remained in the Old World. And geophysicists, those who have studied the Earth know that, ages ago, the two hemispheres did not yet exist, that 350 million years ago there was only one continental landmass. These hemispheres are also the product of an evolution

governed by the laws of physics, of geology. That compact mass began to split, this hemisphere split off from that mass, Antarctica split off, Australia split off, all continents began splitting off from it. We all know how the Himalayas came into being, the movements of the tectonic plates that created all manner of formations, and 350 million years ago there were no human beings around; not even 300 million years ago. Oil deposits were beginning to form around that time. That oil, apparently so marvelous and perhaps marvelous indeed, that civilized man has all but destroyed in barely 200 years.

This is now the year 2005, and I wonder just how much oil will remain in the world in 91 years. In 1896, the world spent 6 million tons of oil a year and today consumption amounts to 82 million barrels, that is, nearly 12 million tons of oil every day.

One hundred nine years ago, again, homo sapiens —and just how sapient humanity is, dear friends, is still to be established—109 years ago it spent 6 million tons of oil a year and today it is spending nearly 12 million every day, and consumption is increasing at a pace of 2 million barrels of oil per day each year. There is not enough oil to go around and it is becoming more and more expensive.

And I am limiting myself to but one problem, the energy problem. We could ask ourselves how long this easily-accessible energy is going to last our civilized neighbors, I don't mean the people, I mean that very civilized government —and do forgive me for mentioning a government in particular, I don't want to mention any because I don't want to offend anyone— but that policy, or whatever you wish to call it, that is so civilized and humanitarian, opposed to the Kyoto Protocol, a simple and modest attempt to contain atmospheric contamination, that policy deserves our repudiation.

That country is spending 25% of the world's energy. Today, there is an oil crisis, and it will not go away. The latest, most serious one was in 1975. It is said that oil is expensive today. No, oil was truly expensive in 1975.

We're not in the oil business. Even if we were, I am not defending any one doctrine here, I am merely saying that, if oil becomes more expensive, so much the better; because, if they're going to contaminate the world, the more expensive oil is, the greater the hope of having it last a few more years before we are poisoned or intoxicated to death, before they finally change the world's climate completely, the greater the hope that we will see some rainfall.

We are facing the most severe drought that Cuba's history has known. The other day, when I heard a clap of thunder, I felt as though I was in another country, not unlike what I experienced when I visited Russia and saw snow for the first time. When I suddenly came across the snow, which I had never seen before, well, just as astonished was I some weeks ago when I heard thunder. Thunder usually heralds the rain, and I discerned a light drizzle, some clouds, I felt I was in another country, for it's been months since this country has seen any rain. There was some rainfall recently but not in the country's eastern region. There, there is a terrible drought. Hundreds of thousands of homes are currently getting their water from trucks and millions of animals are getting it from water-tank trucks. Currently, we are constructing numerous emergency aqueducts, using PVC tubes that allow us to construct and set up these pipelines quickly and transport the water, now, when fuel prices are —I won't say high—on the rise. And there is more and more competition for control over that fuel.

Just calculate how many trucks are transporting water. Why do I mention this? We don't have to wait until hell freezes over —one can't help but talk about climate change, it seems— we are doing this now. A drought like this one obliges us, not to say farewell to arms, as Hemingway wrote —we can't say farewell to arms just yet— but farewell to the idea of depending on the sugar industry or sugarcane, for sugarcane plantations require water. We filled this country with water reservoirs; today, they are empty. There are some here and there that have some water. But we have not lost hope, we have confidence that it will rain.

I see, for instance, that Venezuela gets a lot of rain, Venezuela is a case in point: in one place, it rains too much, in another, too little. The world's climate has been disturbed; it's the least we can say, as a

result of environmental pollution. This is the reason I said that, if the high price of oil is going to make the lunatics a little more sane, make the lunatics stop wasting natural resources and destroying the planet's natural habitats, so that civilizations can continue to exist and engage in dialogue—for, in order to engage in dialogue, one must, of necessity, be alive—then so much the better. Let us not forget that philosopher who said "I think, therefore I am". We could just as well say: in order to think, one must first exist, to engage in dialogue, one must survive, and to survive, one must struggle with resolve.

I am not exaggerating. I am firmly convinced that I am not exaggerating when I say that we must struggle and do it with the utmost determination, again, if we want civilizations to survive, if we want the species responsible for these civilizations, whatever its shortcomings and mistakes may be, to survive. It is through this lens that I have observed the dialogue you have had and the meeting you've held, and the gathering you are to hold next year in Greece, a gathering which, unfortunately, I will not be able to attend should you invite me, because, invitations aside, I was forbidden to go to the Olympics. They didn't tell me that this was forbidden me, though many explicit prohibitions apply to me in this world: it is forbidden for me to live; I am constantly avoiding death, surviving, more or less. I am involved in a constant struggle for survival, for there are those who wish that I do not survive and are constantly doing everything in their power to see to this. Now, they're a bit more relaxed because I am getting older, they think nature is going to do their work for them. But I also know how impatient they are (Laughter). You can't be too careful, you know what I mean?

In an article, I read something along the lines of: "Castro has not been invited" to the Olympics. This is false. Someone from a paper, a slanderer, said that Castro was going to attend the Olympics, and, immediately, the government spokespeople there reacted. I don't know which government they represented, I don't even know what party is in power there, nor am I hugely interested in knowing, forgive me if I am been disrespectful. I don't know if it's a left-wing or right-wing party—you would know this better than I—I don't know if they have a new government, if there's been elections, if there's been change. It's all the same to me but, well, it would be unfortunate if they invited me to a conference there and I was unable to attend, because of the many hurdles one has to skirt when one is being hunted down everywhere. I still face a number of restrictions. I am forced to use two planes to travel, even though, as you all know, I am one of the "wealthiest" men in the world. That's what was said in a two-penny US magazine which has not yet gotten its due from me, because I have been occupied with other matters these days. But they're going to get the answer that's coming to them, they've been singing that tune for years now and they've forced me to react. What can you do? I'll respond but I am in no rush, I have much more important things to do. Tomorrow I have to see to very important matters, matters I have been seeing to for some time and I don't want to waste a minute.

But I was saying that, as they say, I am one of the world's wealthiest men, according to them. This convention centre, where you have gathered, is mine, so don't forget to pay up. I don't know if the tour operators have charged you, but you should know that according to them this convention center is mine, just like all the country's research centers, schools and hospitals we are building, the tens of thousands of doctors and hundreds of thousands of university professionals that the Revolution has trained. From their point of view, I own this country, including the few fish that remain, that's all mine, get it, the birds that come and go, that fly over this country, they're mine. They even say that this convention center is mine, that it's a business. One cannot but laugh, and, as they say, he who laughs last laughs loudest (Applause). I am going to strike back at that magazine, put them in check; they're going to regret this. But I don't want to talk about that now; I don't want to get sidetracked. It's just to warn you, since we're speaking of wealth, and they say that I am one of the wealthiest men in the world. I think they put me in the sixth place, I don't know which place you are in [pointing at somebody in the audience] but they've said that you are someone who, as a decent businessman, has had great success. Well, what about Bill Gates? They say he is one of the richest, though I believe some rivals are popping up here and there, in some fashion or other. What is by no means justifiable is that I should be rich, I say it in all honesty, it is unjustifiable, I have no right to be rich.

When I was a young man, my father had some money and they said I was rich. As rich as owning a large estate makes you, not as rich as Bill Gates is or anything close to that. But I am not a rich man, nor do I

have the right to be so. And here I am, discussing these topics with you. But I have to use two planes to travel anywhere, as I said, because, if a 'stinger' is lying in wait to take down my plane, I have to have a card up my sleeve to confuse them. Sometimes, my plane lands first, then the other. There have been times when I have taken off from somewhere and I have said: "turn off all of the lights", because I imagine someone pointing a 'stinger' at the plane. So, if you're thinking of inviting me there, you should know I am putting my life at risk, a life I appreciate today more than ever. Do you know why? Oh, because I want to devote the little time I have left and the experience I have accumulated over the years to what we are doing now. I don't ask much, two or three short years will suffice, we are going to take the fullest advantage of nearly 50 years of experience in this field (Applause).

If I say I don't want to place my life at risk, I don't mean to say I tremble at the prospect of dying tomorrow. No, not really; I am at ease, I have the utmost serenity and patience. But I am also hugely enthusiastic about what we are doing right now and, if you wish, if you are patient, and provided it's before, say, 8:00 pm, I can tell about other things that may prove of interest to you. I didn't come here to speak to you of things that interest me only, I have tried to discern what could be of interest to you, I have tried to follow some of your ideas, though I feel you have asked questions and discussed things here that are not exactly related to these matters. I began to philosophize a bit on civilizations and ended up talking about this.

I feel that the most significant thing I could say is that I am convinced that the survival of the species is at stake, that the species faces real dangers. If you have come from so far and have had the immense patience of waiting to hear me speak to you, if I owe you a statement of significance, the most significant thing I can say is this, that I have this feeling and that conviction, and that these are not based on fantasies but on facts, on calculations, mathematics, the conviction that humanity faces true risks, that we must not only achieve peace but save the species. And I believe the species can be saved. I would not speak about this if I were a pessimist, if I thought the problem could not be overcome. I believe it can and I am used to facing difficult problems. These are not the words of someone given to idle fancy: I believe the problem can be solved and that this is the most important thing. But I will move on to other issues.

What I was going to say is that he [meaning somebody in the audience] wasn't allowed to travel because he was coming to Cuba. He was stopped there and he showed them his good will. I avail myself of the time, weigh this and that other option. No, I wasn't going to go to the Olympics, because we truly have important tasks ahead of us. I didn't even go to the ones held in Moscow. I attended the Olympics in Barcelona because I was participating in an international event and they took us there for the opening ceremonies. I do, however, keep track of the number of medals won by Cuban athletes. Cuba has the greatest number of gold medals per capita in sports, of Olympic medals of every kind. I don't say this with a chauvinistic spirit, although we too can be chauvinistic when it comes to sports. I don't allow myself this, not even with respect to sports. It's true I am pleased when a Cuban team wins, as one would expect, but I am always capable of recognizing the merits and the talent of an adversary that beats us fair and square at a sporting event. This is not the case in boxing, innumerable gold medals have been stolen from us in boxing, because this sport is governed by a mafia. There are sports which are governed, not by an Olympic spirit, but by mafias.

What I mean to say is that, I value the Olympics, even though the Olympics are designed for rich countries. They always have to be held in the United States, Japan, Australia or any other highly developed country. Greece was given the right to host them almost by sheer chance; they gave Greece this right because it was the cradle of the Olympics, more than 2,000 years ago. The man who came, running, to announce the results of a battle...which, of the many wars that were waged, was that one? One of the many battles, the thousands of battles that there have been. War has been humanity's almost exclusive vocation. (Someone says: "the battle of Marathon"). That was its name.

On the other hand, at the Thermopylae, a peasant announced the arrival of 2 million soldiers. The story of the 2 million soldiers is not true. When I read the story in primary school, I thought it was true, that that many men had passed through there. One day, when I was visiting Turkey for an international

gathering, I crossed the Bosphorus, where they say the vessels were when Xerxes' army of two million came, and the Spartans were lying in wait at the Thermopylae with only 300 soldiers. Ask the US Chief of Staff how 2 million soldiers can be deployed. You need a whole merchant fleet, a whole air force to deploy 2 million men, and much more if they're accompanied by stocks of Coca Cola, ice cream and first-class food. I don't know how well-fed those Persian soldiers were.

But there was another battle, of the many waged by the Greeks, and then the marathon competitions came into being. And, since you were the founders of the Olympics, and with everyone's support, including ours —because we had defended Greece's right to host the Olympics— you will have your Olympics. Greece is the only country which is not rich that has had the privilege of hosting the Olympics, because, 2,000 years ago, it had the fortune of receiving the good news that it had won a battle against one of the empires of the time. What a pity! At the Bay of Pigs, we too could have sent a runner at full speed to take the news to Oriente that the mercenary forces had been defeated in less than 72 hours, in another small battle in which the Revolution proved victorious over some mercenary troops escorted by a US squadron. Not that it is devoid of merit, but the idea didn't cross our heads, because we had phones, the radio and all that, and there was no need for anyone to run anywhere. But here we faced an empire as powerful as that one. There was a small battle, the battle of Girón. Marathon, Girón, a poem could even be written, a rhyming verse. There are certainly enough poets in Cuba for this.

Well, that's why you got to be host of the Olympics. Now, they are already discussing the big investments. You have to be a multimillionaire. After a lot of work and becoming one of the motors of the world economy, China will finally host an Olympics. It will host the Olympic Games of 2008. I don't know who's going to beat the Chinese at organizing a spectacle like the Olympics.

Do excuse the bad habit of constantly speaking my mind, of saying things I believe to be true.

I have insisted on this issue to express my appreciation, to tell you how important I consider this gathering to be, to urge you to continue working hard and to continue to do what you did here.

Many important issues were taken up here: regional and international issues, issues related to peace. I hope the speeches delivered will be published and spread, that they become available to more than just a handful of people. The discussions struck me as very valuable and open. Everyone expressed their opinion without any kind of apprehension. Everyone expressed the truth as they saw it and I think it has been worth our time. I offer you all our support, all of the assistance that we can offer.

This is my objective assessment, and this is my mind speaking. We spoke from our hearts when Retamar spoke and said, among other things, how happy Cubans were to see so many representatives of Russia present at this conference.

I recalled the experiences we shared in the course of 30 years of history. Russia's cooperation was very valuable to us. At the time, it was Soviet cooperation, because there still existed a Soviet state. Today, it is the Russian state. The Russian state inherited practically all of the fundamental powers and responsibilities of the Soviet state, its membership at the United Nations, its prerogatives as a powerful country, and, today, Russians are duty-bound to defend it, because it faces the undeniable risk that an egotistical, imperialist policy, an irresponsible policy, a war-mongering policy could prevail. All of us face risks, not only Cubans, Koreans, Russians, Chinese, the whole world faces risks. Let no one be so deluded as to imagine that Europeans are exempt from these dangers, much less when economic and commercial competition, competition in the struggle to secure raw materials, energy and natural resources, is becoming fiercer and fiercer among those who want to own it all. And I am not referring to the people of the United States. We feel sincere admiration for them, and this is not mere diplomacy.

We have never sown hatred; we have never bred any type of chauvinism, fanaticism or fundamentalism. They are the true fundamentalists, advocates of war and of violence.

When I spoke of that first of June when a surprise and pre-emptive attack was launched against the Soviet Union, I was taken back to words I heard recently, spoken at a US military academy, when the leader of that other powerful country told officials there that they had to be ready for a pre-emptive attack on any dark corner of the world. In the blink of an eye, he spoke of 60 or more countries and we, who were listening to him, know that we are one of the darkest corners of the world, due to their idiosyncrasy and fundamentalism, their technology and ignorance —yes, we mustn't exclude ignorance. To be ignorant means to know absolutely nothing of the world, of the world's problems, of world reality. Ignorance, the ignorance I am referring to, means being completely oblivious, and the world is in trouble when the most powerful superpower that has ever existed, capable of destroying the planet twenty or thirty times over, is led by people who are completely oblivious to it. We would all have heart attacks were we not strong at heart, were we not equipped with strong consciences.

I was saying humanity must be saved. I believe consciousness is the tool with which humanity can be saved.

I practice what I preach in this connection. I was speaking of humanity, of the long and, at the same time, short history of the species that, 200 years ago, was made up of 1 billion inhabitants; which took tens of thousands of years to become that numerous and that, 130 years later, reached the figure of 2 billion and which, in only 30 years, was 3 billion inhabitants large. In 10 years, it went from 5 to 6 billion inhabitants. Let us not forget that. There are currently 6.5 billion inhabitants in the world. Whoever has any idea of the poverty that exists in the world, the backwardness, the hunger, the diseases, the shortage of homes, the lack of hygiene, the poor health conditions which prevail in this world where there are African countries in which the life expectancy is 36 and may go down to 30 in ten years, cannot but be shocked. I speak of a humanity that faces unprecedented problems.

I spoke of wars. I could say to you what I have told many comrades that this species evolved, it produced man, and man is truly a marvelous creation worthy of survival. I have great confidence in man, in his creative capacity.

Why has education been of the essence in our efforts to date? Because human beings are born as a bundle of instincts. Education is the process whereby values are instilled into this being moved by a plethora of instincts. Deprive that being of education, leave it in an incubator, at the mercy of a machine that cares for it and feeds it and you'll see what sort of education it has, if what US filmmakers dreamt of can actually result from that: Tarzan, the ape man, the man from the films of our childhood who was born who knows where in Africa, the Tarzan we were brought up with, the intelligent man surrounded by tribes whose pots were always boiling and who were ever ready to eat each other.

Yes, that was the ideology they instilled in us when we were children, that Africans were cannibals, that they ate each other. Yes, we saw many movies like that, it's a wonder we are not all racists and ultra reactionaries, given the movies we watched.

Yes, we have been given lethal doses of barbarism, lethal doses of ignorance, and lethal doses of lies. That, however, has not destroyed our country's ideas.

It has to do with what I stress: education is passing on the positive values created by human beings, the values I said we had to bring together. For us, this has been of the essence: the creation and the accumulation of values.

Will lies or values we have sown prevail? Will humanity make true values prevail over lies? Will we have to own the big television networks? Is it indispensable? No, let us become the owners of knowledge, even if we are only a minority. Let us be owners of information, let us avail ourselves of those same technical means to communicate with each other, because, while there are networks that spread lies, there can also be networks of computers through which someone can communicate with someone else who lives in Australia, in the United States or in any corner of the world and exchange ideas.

I believe that humanity has also created the technology with which truth can be made to prevail.

For instance, we have made use of television for this purpose. Until recently, there were only two television channels in our country. Today, there are four and 62% of televised programs are educational, that is, devoted to spreading educational, cultural and informational materials, aimed at cultivating a wholesome culture in people. There are recreational programs, but we try to make these an educational instrument, to make of culture a way to instill values in people; we strive to show any good film made in any part of the world, to multiply the values that underpin it and those who made it.

We no longer use television to teach people to read and write. We use television for higher levels of education, to disseminate university courses and language classes. We use the media for this. Put to good use, the media, radio and television could put an end to the scourge of illiteracy in the world.

Why are there still 800 million illiterate and billions of semi-illiterate people in the world? If there is radio, if there is television, why are there still billions of illiterate and semi-illiterate people? This is the question we should ask ourselves. We have the means to eradicate illiteracy in but a few years.

Why has UNESCO been discussing the eradication of illiteracy for half a century, what for? It has been demonstrated that illiteracy can be even eradicated over the radio.

Cuba had a radio-based literacy program in Haiti which was interrupted following the latest invasion. Now, nearly 500 Cuban doctors are working in this country which everyone knows how to invade but to which no one sends a single doctor. Cuba has never sent a soldier to Haiti, but hundreds of its doctors have been working there for years. There are, what's more, hundreds of young Haitians, who graduated in Cuba, working next to our doctors.

Before the latest invasion of Haiti by UN forces, impelled by the United States, hundreds of thousands of Haitians were already learning to read and write in their language. Now, the program has been interrupted. Our doctors remain, in spite of the risks. Over the radio, they learn the local language, Creole.

Here, more than a million Cubans have learned English over the television. French, Portuguese and other language courses have also been aired. We make exhaustive use of television and the media to offer these and other educational programs,

Today, not only literacy in general but also political literacy must be cultivated and applied.

You speak of a dialogue among civilizations. How do you expect people to understand each other? I ask myself if illiterate people will get your message, and where in the world it will be understood, with the millions of illiterate people in the Third World and the millions of illiterate and semi-illiterate people in the developed world. In the United States, for instance, there are many illiterate people and a great many functional illiterates. The reality is that developed countries have high indices of functional and even total illiteracy, in the United States more than in Europe.

How do you expect people who are illiterate, both generally and politically, to understand your message? Do you believe that people who are fed the stories the media churns out day after day will understand the message? However, we must work to drive the message home.

The message will not simply reach everyone because you elaborate it and convey it to people. I return here to the idea of crises, that the message will be spread and understood as a result of crises.

Let no one believe that the Latin American volatility of which a number of Latin Americans here have spoken, about which the ambassador of Venezuela spoke, about which Villegas spoke...I haven't seen Villegas, he should be around here.

Vladimir Villegas. - Here I am.

Commander in Chief. - It's just that you look different on television than in person.

Vladimir Villegas. - I look younger.

Commander in Chief. - That's what you think, I'm the one who's young here (Laughter). I also believe I am younger, but you are actually, objectively younger, and my best wishes to you, you have a lot of time ahead of you, use it wisely, that is all I can ask of you.

Don't you think that volatility is accidental, it stems from a crisis which shook the country with the most resources in Latin America, the country with possibly the largest oil reserves in the world, the country that saw a capital flight of 300 billion dollars, worth ten or fifteen times then what they are worth now. If you do the math from 1959 on, when that hypocritical oligarchy came to power under a democratic and progressive cloak —40 years have gone by, to date—you see that the capital flight is equivalent to a purchasing power of over 2 trillion dollars. That is the sum extracted from a single country. Use your imagination, if you wish, to do the math, for it's the only way to do it, not even computers could offer us precise figures, because, we are dealing with so many zeros that people already omit all of them, which is what one usually does when one multiplies mentally.

How much did they take from Brazil? How much did they take from Mexico? How much did they take from Argentina? How much did they take from Colombia, Peru, from all Latin American countries? We have to do the math. We have people at our Central Bank doing the math, trying to get to the bottom of it, scrutinizing the enormous figures, the trillions of dollars, to see to what extent the Sucre was devalued in Ecuador or the Mexican peso at a given point in history, or the Bolivar at another point in time. We already know Venezuelans inherited a devalued Bolivar and, as for the Brazilian currency, at one point one dollar was equivalent to 1 followed by more than 5 zeros.

This phenomenon which scourges the Third World is truly incredible, an extremely simple mechanism through which money is siphoned out of countries. No money in any Third World country is safe.

They did this also in Russia. Money, ill-gotten or not, is siphoned out, because, we're no longer talking about the gold you bury in a pot, we're talking about paper, and that paper is devalued every day. If you want to hold on to it, you trade it in for hard currency. It must be what I did to amass the personal fortune they ridiculously say I have. Yes, you have to change it into convertible hard currency and deposit it in a bank. But only I know where I keep my money. I sent it to Mars, it's in Mars, they can find it there, the CIA can find it there if it wants to. I'm going to reveal the secret, the truth is I don't remember exactly where I hid it, really, I put it away either in Mars or the Moon, to keep it safe, so that, in my fourth, fifth or tenth reincarnation, I could rent a light place and go look for it.

Since we are on the subject of currencies and we're talking about money, they take away money, ill-gotten or not, and they have to take it because there is a world economic order, whose watchdog is an institution called the International Monetary Fund, which obliges states to deposit their reserves in foreign banks. When someone comes along with the required documents to say: "I am taking these funds with me", they are obliged to say where to. If they do not comply, they are condemned; they are not given one cent. These were the methods they used when they were super powerful. Fortunately, they are becoming less and less powerful. The system's growing inability to prevent recessions and the

ever more feeble financial mechanisms behind it are becoming more and more noticeable. That order can only be maintained through the use of nuclear weapons, guided missiles, stealth bombers, weapons that can be launched from a distance of 5,000 kilometers and hit a baseball field, or the third base of a baseball field, perhaps. That is what sustains that order, what sustains that plunder, the attempts at taking possession of all the planet's wealth, wherever it may be, not only by stripping the environment of this wealth, as is being done in Alaska, where there may be no ice one day, just as we may live to see the day when Antarctica is no longer covered by ice and millions of square kilometers of water melt burying many islands. We may have to set up a small pier nearby, provisionally, for when the water melts. Those who have been there know that the ice is melting rapidly, they know this, that's a fact. Just as the icecap over Greenland is melting: this is neither fiction nor a tall tale.

Nature is being stripped of its balance and nations are being stripped of their natural resources, their energy resources in the first place. And this order can only be maintained through the use of weapons, but weapons are becoming less and less effective as people grow in awareness and thanks to that extraordinary capacity human beings have: the ability to think, to reflect, to adapt to the concrete conditions of any given moment in history.

You, Russians, what did you do when the Nazis invaded and when their armored columns were penetrating deep into Russian territory? The Russians did not surrender, they fought back, they struggled to rejoin their armies, or they fought in the jungles. Their attitude was not one of: "I surrender". I stress this again. They adapted, they went to Siberia and took lathes with them. And I know of roofless factories which were set up in Siberia, which worked, chilled by snowfall, to produce weapons, at a time when the country's industrial region had been occupied and devastated.

You had to redeploy; you redeployed as much as you had to, until you struck a balance. And everyone knows what happened afterwards. I have thought much about those historical events. We have faced danger, true, but we have never been surprised by unforeseen attacks, we are always well-prepared, be it above or beneath the ground.

I can assure you that no one can occupy this country. I hope we're never put in the position of having to demonstrate this, because we are well aware of the costs. But, let me underscore this, this city cannot be occupied. This is a city of hundreds of thousands of combatants who know how to defend it, where there is not one illiterate person. Allow me to stress this: the lowest level of schooling anyone has here is ninth grade; everyone knows how to handle a mortar, a cannon or any similar weapon.

The Iraqi soldiers who fought in Fallujah, who held their ground against tanks and the most sophisticated armament deployed by the invaders for days and days, I wonder what level of schooling they had. I know only that they fought there for weeks, and, later, the US army occupied places, by the looks of it, they could neither stay in nor leave behind: they couldn't stay there because they were needed in other places and they couldn't leave because their adversaries kept returning.

Human beings, as I tell you, adapt themselves, human beings find a way to survive. The imperialists have never had to confront a nation with the conditions that Cuba has today. There is no shortage of weapons in the country and we will continue to arm ourselves. We have accumulated so many weapons that I believe the island has sunk half an inch in recent years because of the number of tanks, cannons and weapons of all kinds that have reached our country.

Any potential invader knows that it will meet with a people determined to fight and defend their homeland here. That is much more powerful than a nuclear weapon, than 1,000 chemical weapons. What need do we have of nuclear weapons? Being a small country, we have never entertained such a ridiculous idea which would spell our ruin, having a weapon that would be useful only to commit suicide. How would we transport it? We won't be playing that silly game which plays into the hands of imperialism.

Since you're interested in getting to know Cuba, I will tell you more.

We have no need of weapons of mass destruction to defend ourselves. What we have modernized are our tactics, the role of people, of individual combatants, of coordinated groups of combatants, the methods, the tactics, the weapons with which the most powerful instrument an adversary can have are neutralized.

Let me say this: our country has achieved what could be referred to as military invincibility, and at the moment, parallel its efforts to become stronger militarily, it is seeking to attain economic invincibility; two concepts. Military invincibility proved easier to secure than the latter.

Humanity can be saved, for the empire is enduring a profound crisis. Without crises, no change is possible, without crises, no awareness can be built. A day of crisis can raise the awareness of people to a greater extent than 10 uneventful years, than 10 years without a crisis.

Look at Venezuela, the country that, as I told you, they took billions of dollars from, that very rich country, the country where the gap between rich and poor is greatest. In that country, there are 17 million citizens who live in poor neighborhoods, in marginal neighborhoods. Without reference to this, we cannot explain the Bolivarian revolutionary process. Neither the ambassador nor the journalist could explain it precisely, and I am sure they can do a good job of explaining it. It has to do with accumulated injustices. Without reference to these accumulated injustices, we cannot explain the triumph of the left in Brazil, Lula's triumph. I know you discussed this also, that theses and opinions were advanced in this connection. We have had conferences here in which this matter has also been discussed, we expressed our opinion, President Chávez has expressed his opinion, and we are not pessimistic with respect to the process underway in Brazil.

Today one senior member of a European government, the government of Spain, addressed the Venezuelan National Assembly. A meeting was held in Guyana yesterday, where Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, Brazilian President Lula Da Silva, the Colombian and Spanish Presidents were in attendance.

The presence of the President of Colombia is a positive sign indeed, because there are those who want to impel the war between Colombia and Venezuela and many of us are aware that that is the last thing this hemisphere could want, the last thing these two countries could want. We know there are those who want to encourage those conflicts, but the two governments made the effort, they managed to get over the incident. And they met yesterday for a public debate, and the President of Spain was present. Then, the President of our neighbor to the North, I believe, made a statement...Even before the meeting, he was already mad, he said: "What business has Zapatero in Venezuela?" One could almost hear them say: "Zapatero, mind your own business". They said: what is he doing in Venezuela, where there's no democracy, where they're against freedom of speech and all that?

I went for a walk today and I was thinking of jogging, but I decided to do laps and using a loudspeaker I listened to Zapatero's speech to the Venezuelan Parliament. It caught my attention; I thought it was a good speech. It's my opinion.

I am going to reread it, because I missed a small part of it. His speech was one of peace, a courageous address.

Now, he is being accused of being a warmonger, because he sold a few patrol boats to Venezuela so it could monitor its coasts and fight smuggling and drug-trafficking. They don't even want Venezuela to have motorboats, patrol boats or any kind of equipment.

Venezuela has the right to defend itself. Does the North ask anyone's permission when it manufactures a nuclear super-weapon or a bomb that bores 30 meters into the ground to destroy a command post? They don't ask anyone's permission. Not to make anti-missile shields or to set them up anywhere, not even to set up weapons systems in outer space; no, they don't ask anyone's permission.

Oh, but Venezuela, threatened by the United States —I mean the U.S. government— cannot purchase even a single rifle. No, it's not purchasing nuclear weapons, battleships or plane carriers. It's purchasing something as simple as rifles.

So, they're saying that Venezuela is purchasing many rifles, 100,000. Actually, that's nothing when it comes to defending a country as large as Venezuela, with as many as 26 million inhabitants, a large, patriotic country, a country with the traditions Venezuela has. What it needs, in my opinion, are millions of rifles.

In Russia it has purchased helicopters. What you need the most during a flood, a hurricane, an earthquake, are helicopters. They're also useful for monitoring the 2,400-kilometer-long border and preventing the trafficking of drugs and goods. Thirty or forty helicopters are truly nothing when it comes to undertaking such tasks.

In Venezuela —and I am not saying this to attract tourism, you can go and see for yourselves— water is much more expensive than gasoline. A liter of water can cost a dollar and a liter of gasoline costs 9 cents. And, for a dollar, by the most recently updated rate of exchange, I believe you get 2,150 Bolivares, and for a few Bolivares you get your tank filled with gasoline. If you wish to go as tourists, be my guests, we have absolutely no rivalry with Venezuela on tourism.

So, many people buy the inexpensive fuel and take it to Colombia, where they sell it at high prices. They witness many phenomena like that there.

The enemy says: "Venezuela poses a danger for Latin America, countries must join the OAS to put an end to the Bolivarian process, led by these madmen who represent a danger to the hemisphere". These are maneuvers against that country, from which they took 300 billion dollars.

Not one of them ever took the time to find out how many people were dying in Venezuela as a result of diseases and what the life expectancy was, what the infant mortality rate was, how many people were left blind.

Do you know how many Venezuelans are going to undergo eye surgery this year, according to what our governments have discussed and what we have agreed? A hundred thousand.

We have 24 ophthalmologic centers equipped with the most modern equipment, 600 surgeons who treat all sight disorders: glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and many others which, if not diagnosed in time, can lead to blindness. I am speaking of a rich country, of Venezuela. Those who had money had no problems, they traveled to the United States or they traveled to Europe; we are talking about the humble people of the Barrio Adentro Mission, who didn't have the money to travel to a developed country to undergo such a surgery.

Now, if you're interested, I will tell you that a conservative estimate reveals that 4 million Latin Americas require this kind of medical care every year and that, left unattended, they would all go blind. Of the 550 million inhabitants of Latin America and the Caribbean, 4 million would go blind! I am not speaking of bombs dropped on Baghdad, which kill women and children and destroy millennium-old structures, irreparable, irreplaceable treasures; I am speaking of bombs that traumatize. They tell us: "No civilians were killed". But what of the millions of children, women and old people who heard the bombs fall, the explosions, early in the morning, every minute of the day, will they not be traumatized for life, or is it that the brain does not matter, that mental stability does not matter, that mental health is of no consequence, that people's nerves don't count, or the equanimity of people, the sanity of people, the mental health of people, are they not also enshrined in the Human Rights Charter? Who is going to support these people, to feed them? They are not counted among the physical casualties, but they are casualties. They are perhaps the worst off, for they are left helpless, ill people deprived of medical care for life.

Just now, I was speaking of blind people in Latin America, people who the established world order condemned to eternal blindness, I speak of 4 million people. Where shall we begin? In Cuba. In Cuba, nearly 30,000 people a year must undergo surgery for cataracts. True, the effects of the illness are not cumulative; the patient does not become totally blind, because they undergo an operation in one eye first, then, in the other, if they develop cataracts there. But 30,000 people must be operated on nonetheless, and this includes diabetic retinopathy, a terrible disease. And diabetes is one of the scourges of humanity. In our country, people do not die from diabetes, simply because they are timely diagnosed and treated. It is estimated that some 50,000 people should be diagnosed with and treated for the related risks of diabetic retinopathy.

Yesterday, as a matter of fact, we were conversing with a man who said to us: "My wife was extremely happy, very happy, she went to such and such a hospital" —she went for a check-up— "she went for a check-up because they told her she might be at risk of developing glaucoma". "And what did they tell her, did they examine her?" He said: "There's no danger, but, should one arise, it would suffice to operate using a laser beam which would give you a lifetime guarantee that you will never suffer from glaucoma". Just like that, with those words, that is the importance of an early diagnosis. You don't get diagnosed and then it's too late. You could have a sunspot, associated to age, a growing spot in your eye which be treated with laser surgery.

By the end of this year, our country will have the capacity to operate on no less than 5,000 or 6,000 patients a day, in 24 centers that are already fully fitted with the most modern equipment. We are still in the training phase. If a blockaded country like Cuba can do this, why can't other countries? This is the question that must be asked. Because millions go blind and no one cares for them. Whoever goes blind in Cuba has at least the care afforded them by social security, and that is a matter I am going to discuss tonight at 9:00 with the Council of State, the Council of Ministers, the Party leadership, the country's leadership, grassroots organizations, the National Assembly commissions, tomorrow's discussion, in which we will tackle the issue of low pensions, in which we will raise the pensions of 1,800,000 people, who received the lowest ones.

Some days ago, we revalued our currency and devalued the dollar in our country. Yes, because of the extreme privileges it enjoyed. I will give you one example, if you wish, to summarize this point.

You know that electricity is indispensable and that a kilowatt is equivalent to 1,000 watts —I am sure you know this, most of you know this, because you pay an electricity bill. Generating a kilowatt of electricity costs no less than 10 cents today. The fuel needed to generate one kilowatt costs 9 cents. Well, because of the devaluation of currencies, because of this phenomenon, with one dollar you could, till recently, purchase 27 pesos. When, three weeks ago, we revalued our peso by 7 %, this ratio dropped to 1 to 25. This took place two weeks ago, this measure involving the peso.

A week ago, it will be a week tomorrow, we revalued the convertible peso, and because the convertible peso is governed by an exchange rate, the Cuban peso was again revalued by 8%, for a total of 15%. With this stronger peso, tomorrow we are going to raise the retirement payments of all pensioners who receive less than 300 pesos, by categories: those who receive the least will get the highest raise. We are talking about generations of workers who have suffered the rigors of the blockade, who have endured many sacrifices. Yes, salaries were raised, but pensions remained the same, there were no resources to raise them. We are going to have a look at the lowest salaries as well.

I said that, those who go blind in Cuba are not left to their own fate. They who have an accident, who are incapacitated, who were born with a disability or developed it later, because, sometimes, one is born with a given proclivity and later suffers a full-blown disability, all receive aid. And they will not only continue to receive it, they will receive more and more of it.

Tomorrow, there will be a total raise in pensions of more than 80%, starting tomorrow, thanks to a revalued currency that will continue to gain in value. At least it's something.

In other places, people go blind and, what state looks after them, what organization? Only charity organizations run by churches. How many blind people wander the streets, how many blind or disabled children are out there cleaning windshields or begging on the streets?

We challenge anyone to try and find, in our country, children who are not at school, who are begging on the streets instead of at school. We have suffered poverty, and we faced harder times, yes. There were irresponsible parents who sent their children to ask tourists for money. These things will happen less and less, because we have calculated everything mathematically, goods, prices, costs, international costs, incomes, pensions, the needs of citizens.

That is the reason I was saying that our Revolution has already acquired much experience and has created the conditions needed to do what we are doing.

Our food has been rationed but that won't last forever. It was an unavoidable measure. We have been involved in a war that has lasted 46 years, defending ourselves against the empire's onslaughts. We have had to face crises, very difficult periods, and we still keep our weapons within arm's reach.

Living in extreme conditions and enduring the crises to which we were led by the blockade did not make us turn our backs on the people of the United States. The people of the United States will stand up, because there are millions of cultivated and intelligent individuals there, who access the news over the Internet, who may be deceived following the impact of a dramatic event, like the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York City, during an intense emotional state of that nature. But, as Lincoln said, you cannot deceive all of the people all of the time.

In the case of the United States, we could say: they can deceive all of the people every day, everyone could be deceived some of the time. But the people shall gain in awareness. Their mistakes are leading them straight to a crisis, from which the people of the United States will gain in awareness.

That people is concerned about the environment. It does not like that Alaska is being destroyed, that the Kyoto Protocol is abandoned, that national parks are destroyed and submitted to mining or oil field exploitation.

There are values which are held dear by the American people, and among them are health and peace, just like other peoples.

Now, up to what point have the American people had a right to objective information? Is that not a brutal violation of human rights, to prevent an entire nation from receiving objective information?

Even today, the United States government would like to destroy the small opening towards Cuba that was produced when sales of foodstuffs were authorized by a law passed in Congress, where the majority of senators and representatives asked for an end to the blockade, and that law which had wider aspirations was sabotaged, it was overloaded with amendments, a procedure they use whenever they want. They tie an amendment to a fundamental law which must be passed and all the representatives see themselves forced into a vote; but the majority is already against that law and the farmers are opposed. They are inventing things; they had invented payment in advance. I was under the impression that paying in cash, without a second of delay, was a good thing, but no, that is not a good thing; you have to pay in advance, that is what they ask of us. What for? To tie up our funds and to destroy the sales of foodstuffs.

Of course, we have all learned a bit and we realize what harm this has caused, we measured it, we calculated it, where the goods come from, the price of transportation, how much it costs, etc. Truly we have become immune to all their inventions, and so what has been happening is that everything they invent turns out badly for them. That's how it is, I am not exaggerating.

And now they want to find out what resources Cuba possesses. They have no idea about what we have been able to save. They can't imagine what we have learned about using funds wisely, the main part of those resources, savings. There were too many people making decisions about where currency would be invested, and of course, new resources, there are new resources; but basically, they are savings and by now there is nothing that can stop this. Only a war that destroys us will stop this.

We have some advantages in the new hemispheric situation, relations with other nations in the hemisphere. We know very well the cost of a pound of black beans, red beans; corn, what the market value is; how much transportation costs, whether to spend on any of these; we know what we must do, and we have been spending, but I do not wish to speak of this.

We have been taking measures. I can tell you, for example, that we are buying 50% of Uruguay's powdered milk production –and that must be arriving now. It is a government with which we have just established relations, a progressive government, a just government, a truly democratic government in a situation where it is so difficult to be democratic within the system, because they speak of democracy referring to the system. It is practically impossible to be democratic within that system, only by virtue of miracles, and when they bombard candidates with all the mass media... Vladimir knows this, your name is Vladimir, right? I am reminded of a historical name, I think it is well known to the Russians, that's where you got it from, no doubt about it; there are quite a few Russians named Vladimir; but he knows about being bombarded again and again, creating reflexes. It is one thing to transmit opinions and it is something else to create reflexes. The mechanism with which millions of people can be deceived is by the creation of reflexes.

There was an eminent Russian who studied reflexes, Pavlov, he knew how to make a bear dance and how to make monkeys almost talk, through reflexes, and it is through reflexes that the masses are dealt with, the modern techniques of commercial advertising, transmitting political ideas through the use of commercial advertising techniques by creating reflexes.

If you want to create consciousness, you must fight against reflexes, and our nation has learned to fight against reflexes, because when the Revolution triumphed, many Cubans had reflexes which had been created by advertising; so the battles are not easy battles, and just like with President Chávez, they are still saying that he is not democratic, they are saying that we are not democratic, we are delighted and we certainly haven't lost our sleep over that. We know what we are, we know it very well, and what we feel, what we have accomplished in life, and the principles which have governed our behavior. What is politicking? It is the satirical poster, it is the buying and selling of votes. Everyone knows that if you want to be President of the United States you must have at least 300 million dollars, to hold any post, you need to measure it with money, and all those who cannot collect 200 million dollars will give up in mid-campaign; that garbage they call it "democracy". At least in our country more than 95% of the people vote, and there is no advertising, no posters cluttering up the streets, something that is contrary to mental hygiene and the beauty of the landscape: "Vote for so-and-so, he is a saint, he is going straight up to heaven. He has never stolen a cent and he will never do so," "he is the most virtuous man in the world" and so on. It's a miracle he doesn't have a holy day named after him, and so all those invented lies are the advertising methods used by that so-called democracy. I don't wish to debate the point, but I do want to say that I am well aware of how many lies are hidden behind all that. But in the midst of all that, President Chávez walked off with the referendum, he walked off with it and according to the media, he is not democratic.

I have spent hours watching TV, as a friend and a brother of the Venezuelans, I have even studied the methods and procedures used by the enemies of peace and progress of the people, and I have seen how they work; it is incredible, as is all the time that they waste.

In our country we have no commercial advertising, none, and that is why everything produced by television brings in zero GNP, services of education and health and recreational activities in Cuba have almost zero GNP because they are free, they are not calculated; thus a ton of cement could cost more than a life. Someone can save a life, because perhaps a doctor has made a heart beat again, arriving

on time at the hospital, and that costs less than the ton of cement because it doesn't contribute anything to the GNP.

One has to analyze how one measures values, even literature, art, the wealth and quality of life. The quality of life doesn't appear on any GNP, a man can end up in an insane asylum, a man can live 10 years less because he was brainwashed into smoking and he smoked three packs a day, and then he dies of cancer or of a heart attack. No, they didn't teach him about the hygiene you should have if you want to live longer. Everyone knows what you need to live a little longer, what you should be eating and what exercises you should be doing.

So, since I have had to broach this little subject, and since we are great violators of human rights, the greatest existing on the face of this earth, I shall now explain this, like I spoke about the blind, and I told you about that. I know that you would like to know about hemispheric matters, I know that you have asked about what the future holds for the hemisphere, I know that you have clearly seen that this hemisphere is the future.

It is not the future, but it is being called upon to play a very important role in a peaceful world, in a world of dialogue, in a civilized world; this is where you have the potential and many know this already, the Europeans know it, otherwise what was Zapatero doing at the meeting, what was Zapatero doing speaking to the Assembly and making a constructive speech? Moreover, why was a European Commissioner visiting Cuba, such a diabolic country? They came, and we met with them and said to them: We are not afraid of any discussion; what we fear least is debate, talk, because we really know that we have a huge arsenal of arguments, facts and history, but not of tales or promises, instead we have accomplishments, things we have done, and we are not revealing that much, it is not important, but why should we care about revealing what we do?

I have attended many meetings and I haven't spoken, but here specifically I am explaining to you how things are in this hemisphere, things you want to know and things you have discussed on the subject. I tell you that you are right in doing so, because if Europe wants to exist and it knows that this hemisphere is decisive, this hemisphere which wants to throw them out, and the Chinese know this, with their millennial wisdom they know this, and with their experience they know this.

A short while ago, the President of China was here, and he visited other parts of Latin America, and he visited Brazil and Argentina and the Vice-President visited Venezuela and the Caribbean. So I say to you, are the Russians going to absent themselves from this hemisphere? You have very correctly stated that Russia is not going to be absent from this hemisphere. This decisive hemisphere for the future, one which imperialism wants to control indefinitely and can do so less and less, I assure you, they can do this less and less because in the spirit of conquest and pillage you cannot win over the hearts of the peoples of this hemisphere. You have to come to this hemisphere to give and to receive, or if you will, to receive and to give. I think that in this hemisphere, and I by no means represent this hemisphere but I have the right to think that today one can only come and participate in an exchange, you can only come to unite, you can only come to help and be helped; assist and be assisted, exchange and unite not just in the hope of material or economic benefits, but also in the hope of peace, in the search for forces that will see to the prevailing of reason and peace in the world, in search of forces that will help save the civilization of which you have been speaking. I know this very well, and as I was reading the summaries, I saw that some of you were proposing this. Yes, I can see no other path.

I know that a short while ago, the President of Russia met in Europe with the President of France, with the German Prime Minister and another President who I cannot recall right now; those men governing our neighbor to the North were not very happy.

But have a look, observe: four Presidents get together in Paris, -it's amazing that the Chinese President wasn't there, he is usually at every meeting- the Presidents of Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela and Spain met in Venezuela, in the homeland of Bolívar, observe how the spirits, the currents are communicating; ideas travel and fly everywhere and they are the only thing traveling faster than light,

faster than electricity. Ideas fly and they are ideas, everyone can observe what is happening everywhere. There, they try to create conflict and division, to promote wars, because at the moment a country like China raises its head with all that strength, the ideal situation for imperialism is the promotion of wars there, secession and conflicts that interrupt the extraordinary growth of that nation.

Everyone knows that economic competition gave way to wars, those colossal commercial deficits and those colossal budgetary deficits due, fundamentally, to an arms race without taxes; tax-free wars and pillage can also bring temptations for the promoting of conflicts that put countries which have the potential for great growth out of the race.

I wonder whether in that colossal American empire there are any leaders –I refer to those among the fundamentalists– any politicians who desire the growth of Russia. I wonder whether they want Russia to prosper, that the Russian economy prospers, that the Russian ruble has a high value, that Russian products find a market, that Russian fuel, gas and oil, have value, or that Siberian wood or Norilsk nickel, or any of the other Russian products we know of.

We know where there was quality and where there was none, just like in the West, we know what works and what doesn't, we know this very well, the value and the possibilities that each of these countries has, we cannot overlook that, we cannot afford ignoring that.

I wonder, what space remains, if everything is being conquered, if everything is being occupied, if Iraq is being invaded, if Iran is being threatened because it might have nuclear weapons? And truly, there are countries, American allies, who possess hundreds of nuclear weapons and of course they have been allowed to do so, nobody debates this, it is the truth, we all know about this, and you know what I am referring to; I don't wish to name countries, I have nothing against any country, but, yes, I have a commitment with the truth and we know how those things work, the wide end for one and the narrow end for the others. That's the way of the world, and you are aware that this world is leading us to a dead-end street, that's how it is, nobody can deny it.

But this reality is also arousing consciences. This same oil crisis is going to awaken consciences. The leader of the North recently declared: Let's go looking for all kinds of energy. Nuclear energy, since the Chernobyl accident, has imbued the world with a justified fear. And now, in the United States, it is not easy to start constructing a series of nuclear plants. Well then, let's return to coal; it isn't easy to return to coal with its polluting effect.

They are talking about hydrogen; the President of the United States spoke of hydrogen, but what he hasn't said yet is whether he is going to pull the hydrogen out of the gases, out of the fossil energy or whether he is going to pull it out of water, because if he is going to get it from water, we are surely going to send him our congratulations, even I would congratulate him warmly if he were to get energy from water, and I would be willing to propose his name for a Nobel Prize, and even start a list for people to sign for his canonization, if he were to have the wonderful idea of solving the problems by pulling hydrogen out of water and so fuel all the cars.

Yes, I know very well, because here we have three or four fanatical comrades who wanted to get hydrogen from water; they worked for something like 30 years and I remember that I visited them. I know that once it exploded, because they really got a bit of hydrogen and what they had was an explosion, but I haven't heard anything about them for a while.

I know for a fact that everyone is manufacturing the little hydrogen car in Japan, in Europe, in the United States, but what has never been said is where the hydrogen is coming from, because if it is going to come from oil, well, like all those materials, this bottle, this lid, this telephone which I think also comes from oil, it doesn't come out of steel or iron, everything comes from oil, there isn't anything that doesn't come from oil, I think even we come from oil (Laughter), and that's reality.

There is this question: What is going to happen when it's over? And everyone knows that it is running

out, nobody is ignorant of that fact; you would have to be a complete and utter illiterate or a totally irresponsible person to believe that oil is going to last 100 years more at this same rate of use.

Yes, there are more modern techniques, they discover it quicker and the faster they find it at the bottom of the ocean, the faster they use it up, and the faster they waste it. The struggle should be geared towards making cars that save fuel.

One of the things that government did was to suppress some of the measures that required cars that consume less and less. So what then? To conquer the world at the point of a cannon, threaten it with all possible weapons, all squadrons, all aircraft carriers, all cruise missiles and all nuclear weapons, so that they can be obedient and disciplined, so they can produce raw materials, produce oil, in order to keep on using 25% of the world's energy?

We are making some small efforts that may be quite interesting in the matter of energy and the saving of energy, and with these we are arriving very meticulously at the core of the problem. We are going to make a modest contribution to the world by simply saving perhaps 50% of electrical energy that is being consumed, saving some hundreds of millions of dollars in energy, and part of this is going to be converted into those programs that I was telling you about, and part will go into highly beneficial, and I might add highly profitable investments. And we shall continue working on education, a raw material which is called education and knowledge; and a raw material of great value that is called "human capital". It is human capital that we possess, basically, and so we shall see.

Jas we say to our compatriots: Perfect? No, we would be the last people to say that we are satisfied; we have learned with time; by making mistakes, we have acquired experience. That is a privilege, not a merit.

In my own personal case, if I have lived for a certain number of years I cannot say that that is a merit, it is luck, especially when there have been so many attempts to prematurely put me out of combat. If Nature has granted me a certain capacity to survive, why should it be taken away from me? So then, I have lived and I have learned a few things; not just myself, there is an entire contingent of people who have learned, there is a people who have learned through 46 years, a people conscious of their qualities and conscious of their weaknesses, conscious of their flaws. We are very conscious of our flaws and we are critical, very critical, and I have no qualms about telling you about all the errors we have committed.

We do not live hiding our errors; we live being honest; we live ceaselessly correcting ourselves, we live examining our behavior and never being sitting on our laurels, and that is why the impression we might give is that of a Phoenix reborn from its ashes. Yes, that is the impression they will receive in many parts of the world, of a small Phoenix, a swallow reborn out of its ashes. If I am going to define Cuba in a few words, I would say that Cuba is flying and flying high.

I think I have been speaking longer than I should, really, and you agree. Yes, I know that you agree, at least that is the truth, you will not say that I should be less than sincere, you will not say that I was afraid to speak clearly and frankly, respectfully, talking the truth. I have been speaking as your brother, as a person who appreciates life.

I too harbor strong feelings within me; I have not silenced sentiment, I have tried to let reason have a voice, as our poet said when speaking about literature. When he was speaking about literature and he was speaking about what he was reading there, I was remembering solitary confinement in the prison on the Isle of Pines, today's Isla de la Juventud. I read Tolstoy's books and Dostoevsky's, I have read them all and I appeared to be a masochist reading Dostoevsky in prison, about the man carrying the same stone from here to there, and back, and The Idiot, Crime and Punishment, Notes from the Underground, all of them. And books by Tolstoy, what excellent Russian literature.

Well, I should be truthful, I was already a Marxist-Leninist when I began the armed struggle; that is what I was, what I am now and what I will always be, and nobody should be amazed at that. I am not

dogmatic, I analyze peoples' merits in history, I never renounce my ideas, and I am capable of being critical; but I have nothing to criticize to either Marx or Lenin, I say this honestly –I could make other criticisms– nor can I criticize Engels, he was the first one to show me that even the stars will go out when energy runs out, and there are stars which stopped shining long ago, while there are others moving further away from the location of the great explosion.

Lenin had not yet been born when Marx published the Communist Manifesto.

The world today is very different from the world which Marx and Lenin knew; nobody could know it, nobody could imagine communications that happen in a matter of seconds. They saw globalization, they saw what a system where the productive forces were developing would become. They saw that the development of these productive forces would achieve such level that they would bring about new situations and great changes in the world. We have reached globalization, a globalization created in conditions unimagined by anyone. The contradictions and competitions were being resolved by wars. Today, there is no war that can resolve any problem. Wars are prohibited per se now because in any modern war there are neither winners nor losers. You, the Russians, know this as the superpower you once were, great and powerful, and the power you are still today.

We were around to see when there was a certain balance; first they had nuclear weapons, then there was a balance, and then both sides would manufacture more weapons. Then the difference consisted in that one could destroy the other fifteen times and the other side could do it ten times. The issue was about how many times one side could destroy the other. You, the Russians, ceased being a superpower, however, everyone knows that each side can destroy the other five times.

As a real power, from a technical-military point of view, the Russian state has four times as much power as it needs; because it only needs one shot to destroy the other side, and the other side can have as many times more as they like. And one fine day, the American people will realize that; it will understand and there will be some hope.

I can tell you that I am happy to see this meeting, to hear you all speaking as you have here; I am happy because that country, with all its merits, with all its history and heroism, has a great potential to contribute to world peace, to civilization, to preserve the species. There are not too many of us, as there are not enough of those that can accomplish much, like Russia, to preserve the species, like China, like Europe, like Latin America; all together we can do something, and all together, some more than others, I see Venezuela, I see Brazil, I see that they can achieve a lot.

I see what Argentina has just done, how she tackled the debt problem. I was amazed today, when I think it was the Minister-President of the Central Bank told me that Bush had made a statement praising Argentina.

I am going to ask again, because I really still cannot believe it; but he was praising Kirchner to attack Chávez. He was attacking yesterday's meeting which he really didn't like much. Of course, they are not going to neutralize Kirchner with flattery, or any such thing, because Kirchner has just given them a "jab"; more than a "jab", a hard punch; he hasn't knocked out the International Monetary Fund but he has left it somewhat unsteady on its feet after the way he handled the debt. It is the first time any country adopts such a resolute position like Argentina.

The International Monetary Fund will survive for some time still, I don't think it will be much longer, and when I say I don't think it will be much longer, I think that it won't survive two more decades. Moreover, let me tell you, I doubt that this Fund will live one decade longer because the accounts make no sense. I look at them, I add, subtract, multiply and divide and it doesn't come out, the crisis cannot be handled. It is no longer a crisis, but the sum total of crises: the sum total of crises, the sum total of problems won't let this state of affairs last even two decades. They have always invented something: this formula or that, or the Keynesian method, spreading money around, avoiding the crisis by printing more bills, increasing liquidity, etc.

I have one last debt owing to you. I have been speaking quickly, and I am willing to answer any question you wish to direct to me, any question whatsoever, whatever comes to mind, and not one, two, three, for as much time as the chairman would give me.

I arrived seven minutes late. It's been a long time since I have arrived anywhere even a minute late, but I was chatting with the Canadian Minister of Agriculture, we were discussing agriculture, product prices, the price of wheat, corn, beans, lentils, peas, cows, many facts, the state of production, everything.

I was telling him of all the things we are going to buy from Canada in 2005. I don't like making promises, but I promised him that this year we would be buying three times as much as last year; sure, because we have a few little plans. They are under way even though they haven't been revealed.

So, please forgive me that I arrived seven minutes late, because I was speaking with the Minister of Agriculture and with a group of Canadian farmers.

They were just leaving to go to a meeting and I wanted to come here. I found out they were leaving at 4:00, the time I had planned to meet with you. I arrived a few minutes late, and I know that my comrades will agree that I should answer a few of your questions, I am a few minutes late.

Don't you worry; I'll be getting you all dinner later. (Laughter)

Fine, I shall submit to whatever question you want to make, on any subject (Laughter)

Let's listen to the Dominican, they tell me she is a great writer.

Luisa Zheresada Vicioso.- In this dialogue among civilizations, I would like you to tell us where the Caribbean fits.

You know that we, as a region, have produced a most extraordinary theoretician, not just for us, but for the world, Frantz Fanon, to begin with, and his role in Africa, and for the oppressed of the world.

Commander.- What, do you think that I am not from the Caribbean and that I do not feel like I am from the Caribbean?

Luisa Zheresada Vicioso.- I know.

Commander.- Don't you know that when you had Trujillo over there and I was a sophomore Law student, President of the Pro-Dominican Democracy Committee, in 1947, an expedition was organized to liberate the Dominican people from Trujillo, and I enlisted in that expedition? I was the only one from the Committee to enlist and I went despite the fact that many there with the expedition were my enemies.

I don't know if you know this, but I stayed to the end, many deserted. A problem came up at a given moment and the boat I was to go in was stopped close to the Haitian coast. I wasn't the leader, I was lieutenant of a squad, because I had a bit of knowledge and I liked adventures, I'm not going to deny that. If they want to call me an adventurer, I accept with honor the title of adventurer in geography, in excursions and in anything else, but not in politics. In politics I would accept the description of "audacious"; whoever is not audacious should never embark in this profession, better leave it to someone else. (Laughter)

But I went there before finishing my second year. My 21st birthday I spent in a key where an expedition was being organized by a handful of idiots and arrogant Cubans who were assisting the Dominicans and thought they could do it all.

There I met Juan Bosch and from that time I appreciated his intellectual worth, his ideas. That was

where I met Pichirilo, who later came on the Granma; he was the captain of the boat I was on, called the Aurora. Someone was a traitor, in the faster boat; there were four boats, two were landing and there, from Nipe Bay, we received the order from the other boat to wait for it close to Moa, near the Paso de los Vientos. There was a large frigate there. I had never seen guns that long on a frigate, and they uncovered them, showing them and saying: "Go back!" There was nothing else the leaders of the expedition could do.

Pichirilo, a Dominican, was with me on that boat, as I already said. How determined and brave he was! Years later he was our pilot on the Granma. We became brothers, because on that day I revolted from that expedition, from the company where I was a squad leader, and I said: "I don't agree that we should return to port, there is a situation in Cuba and they are going to imprison everyone, and so I don't agree".

I was of a mind to salvage the weapons and take them into the mountainous region, and so I collected the weapons and I even had quite a number of collaborators, among them, the captain of the boat. It was at this time that I became his friend, he became my accomplice in that complicated situation when I revolted against the Cuban and Dominican expedition leaders. Rebellion: I did what Hugo Chávez did. I rebelled because I didn't agree in returning to a port where we were going to lose our weapons and be taken prisoner. At the beginning I even thought that the frigate which impeded our passage was Dominican. Soon I realized that it was Cuban.

I carried on in complicity with Pichirilo. I couldn't make that move because the frigate was tailing us. We awaited nightfall. With the captain's complicity, the frigate reduced speed to less than half. It was to no avail, it was summer and the sun was setting late. I continued rebelling until I left the boat on a raft, along with three others; we were the only four, out of about a thousand, who weren't taken prisoner. The captain told the frigate that he didn't know the entranceway and was afraid to run aground. I was an adventurer, I admit it. Everyone thought I had been eaten by sharks, and one day I surprised them all and I reappeared. I have reappeared many times, more than once.

So I know the cause, I love it and I am from the Caribbean. You already know of our relationship with the Dominican revolutionaries and with Caamaño here, where he traveled after his heroic resistance. After the triumph of our revolution, scores of Cuban revolutionaries landed near the mountainous massif and fought against Trujillo.

In other words, I have been a militant in the Caribbean cause. I am from the Caribbean and I am proud of our relations with the Caribbean.

I am very sympathetic towards the English-speaking Caribbean.

You should not think that I am a fan of Latin Americans; I am critical, just as I am critical of myself, and as I can be of the Cubans.

And it was them, the people from the Caribbean, who helped break the blockade of Latin America when everybody severed relations with us except Mexico. The Caribbean states that were not even independent when the Revolution triumphed promoted the movement together with Torrijos, and also with a Venezuelan at that time who later took on different roles in his lifetime; at that time he was not one of the worst; but there was a current and they supported.

It was the Caribbean peoples who were our best friends in this hemisphere, not the Latin Americans; it was the Caribbean peoples and we have very strong ties with them and they all have the right to study in our universities without any restriction, they can have all the scholarships they need, full scholarships free of charge.

There is a Latin American school for medical students here with 10,000 Latin American and Caribbean students.

Maybe I should have said that the existence of the Venezuelan revolutionary process and the economic agreements with China have been very important factors; the agreements with Venezuela on the basis of ALBA, signed on December 14, 10 years after Chávez visited us for the first time, signed by us as an agreement that is supremely beneficial for both countries. We are semi-integrated. We share the same feelings, the ideas and the will for integration.

Before being a Marxist, I was a Communist. A Utopian Communist! Where did I learn about this? I learned from life, from reflection. I arrived at that conviction by studying economics.

I was born and brought up on a large estate farm that had 10,000 hectares; my father was the owner of the estate and of everything else other than the school and the telegraph office. He was the owner of even the cock fighting pit, the butcher shop, the livestock, the tractors, the trucks, the store, the warehouse. When Karl Marx said that private property existed only on the condition that it did not exist for nine-tenths of the population, I could understand that, because I was born in a place where my father was the owner of everything.

I attended religious schools. Thus, I was not born in a proletarian cradle. Moreover, if I had not been a landowner's son, I would not have been able to go to school, and if I had not been able to go to school, then I wouldn't have even been able to have ideas, I wouldn't have had a cause to defend.

I must be grateful to that circumstance because I was able to learn something, to not become a political illiterate. I stopped being a political illiterate by myself, because I was literate in ideas. Well, partly because I was the son and not the grandson of a landowner; I never lived the bourgeois lifestyle in some aristocratic neighborhood where I would have surely become the greatest reactionary ever to live in this country, because in one way or another, I wasn't going to be mediocre.

Well, some people have the personality that doesn't allow them to stay mediocre, they are far too enthusiastic, in one way or another, and so I have had to go into a bit of autobiographical data to show that I am from the Caribbean; but I am also Latin American, I am African, I am Russian, I am Chinese, I am Japanese, I am Vietnamese. And Vietnam, when it was in the midst of its war, knew that it could count on our strength, and the South Africans knew that they could count on our blood, and they could count on our blood at a time when there were seven nuclear weapons there. So, I didn't have to put forth too many arguments to demonstrate that our heart is not a chauvinistic heart, nor is it going to exclude the Caribbean peoples, not in the least. You people will always have a very large place within me.

If you wish to look for serious governments, look to the Caribbean governments which were English colonies until just recently; they are the most serious of governments, the most faithful of people, the ones who have the least illiteracy. They are less illiterate than those of us who were liberated from Spain --or you, who were liberated from Spain, we took another century, we were a slave state. There is less illiteracy in the Caribbean than in Latin America. There have better medical services, better health care levels than in Latin America, except Haiti, because Haiti was the first country to rebel and the country where everyone has intervened. None of those powers is capable of sending them one doctor.

There are some who call themselves Medecins Sans Frontieres ("Doctors without Borders"), that's good, give them a medal, give them the Nobel Prize, but they are just a handful. The truth is that all of Europe together cannot send the doctors which Cuba has in Haiti. Excuse me for having to say this, but it's true, they don't have 500 doctors; all of Europe together and the United States don't have the doctors we have in Africa; all of Europe together and the United States don't have the doctors Cuba has in Central America, offering their services free of charge. It is not like the Venezuelan situation where we now have an agreement for the exchange of goods and services.

I know here where all the benefits go. They criticize us that we have centralized. If we didn't centralize we wouldn't be able to do what we are doing; like in war, the decisions made at the headquarters in the

middle of a war are decisions that have to be made quickly, you cannot take too much time to deliberate.

Here we debate; here this country cannot be forced into debt by anyone.

Who contracted the debts of Latin America? No ministers of the economy, not even Parliament, took time to discuss with the people these colossal debts contracted by the governments. The Minister of the Economy was deciding whether the country should contract or not a debt of 40 billion. In order to increase pensions, I call a meeting with the entire State; I have the means because our Constitution gives me more means than a Minister of the Economy in Latin America, I am the President of the Council of State and President of the Council of Ministers, elected by the National Assembly. I can call a meeting with the Council of State. This is made up of the presidents of the People's Powers of each province, leaders of the mass organizations, the President of the Bank and all the presidents of the major banks, which are state banks, not private, and there they all are, and I ask them: "Make a report. Can we do this or not? Because these are well thought-out matters, calculated, really well calculated, and it is there that we decide what we are going to do. As the First Secretary of the Party I summoned the main Party cadres.

In Latin America, which is so democratic, the ministers of the economy decided on the debts and that imperial government didn't say that they were anti-democratic countries, it said nothing of the sort; the countries that contracted the debt were super-democratic. In 1985 we waged a battle against that, for 350 billion; today they owe 750 billion. Just look at how much democracy reigned on this hemisphere.

And in Central America and elsewhere, what is happening in Costa Rica, that cradle of democracy, that paramount democracy? Today in Cuba we have 70,000 doctors and more than 50,000 specialists. We are fighting tooth and nail against the brain drain, and in Costa Rica they have more than eight hundred doctors of Cuban descent that were stolen from the country years ago.

One day, at an international meeting, one of Costa Rica's Presidents told me about how many of those unsung doctors are in that country: "We have 800 Cuban doctors." I told him: "Ah, yes, 800 doctors", but they haven't paid one single cent for those 800 doctors we educated.

The United States wanted to construct a showcase in front of Cuba to demonstrate that, with "democracy", they could do as much as Cuba was doing "anti-democratically", that they were saving children's lives, mothers' lives and all of that; a showcase and Costa Rica has 800 Cuban doctors practicing private medicine.

That is very valuable when we are going to discuss why we are paying for 300 kilowatts that could be paid for with a dollar, and 300 kilowatts are bought for a dollar, costing the country 25 dollars to produce, in convertible currency.

Just look at how the dollar being sent to Cuba is abused. If you have an old fridge, and the thermostat is gone, it costs the Cuban state seven dollars per month. One of our saving measures is that all those fridges without thermostats are going to disappear, not because we are going to take them away and send them to the scrap heap, but because we are going to install thermostats and because we are also going to equip them with new gaskets so that the cold air cannot escape, because we have discovered that they use up between 7 and 8 million kilowatts a day. We don't even know how many million we will be saving there, with 10 million invested in thermostats; things we didn't know and things we have been finding out as fuel becomes more expensive, that it is becoming more expensive to produce a kilowatt.

So, what is happening to electricity?

Perhaps some people have more thermostats than we do, but they haven't lived through a blockade like the Cubans have. But, the blockade they are enduring is much worse, for it is a blockade that produces illiterates, a blockade that produces malnutrition, hunger, infant mortality, maternal mortality,

worsening of life expectancy, and democracy that has led them to that point. It is a blockade that is worse than the economic one, because we have not had such a blockade here for some time, and that is the reason why we can even devalue the dollar. How amazing! And they cannot protest because, who can demand that we pay 25 dollars for kilowatts of electricity that can be bought for one dollar and sent from overseas? And who is it that sends it? Are they illiterate seasonal farm workers? No. They don't receive illiterates from Cuba. The emigration from Cuba has included many university graduates, technicians and many former landowners and bourgeois who knew all about business.

The immigration which results in the highest income in the United States is the one coming from Cuba; it is much greater than the Dominican, Haitian or any other Latin American immigration.

Well then, we have our own currency. We threw the dollar out of circulation; we replaced it with the convertible peso. Now we are headed towards the re-evaluation of our peso and the re-evaluation of our convertible peso, both of our currencies. We take one step in one direction, and another in a different direction. Thus, now the dollar has been devaluated vis-à-vis our convertible peso, that's it, they haven't any argument left to stand on.

Now what does this devaluation mean? Before, you could buy 27 pesos for one dollar and now you can only buy 25. This is a measure that we can apply as many times as necessary.

What a blow we can deal to the poor old dollar. There, in the United States, they are paying 12 to 15 cents for one kilowatt of electricity. Here we are paying less than one cent of a dollar. How is it bought? Well, with one cent, if consumption is truly lower than 300, today with one cent you can buy 3 kilowatts.

What a crime we have committed against the dollar! What a terrible complaint! What vandalism we have committed, asking them to pay more with a dollar! We have barely touched it; we have barely brushed it with a rose petal. Now we can brush it with that rose petal; also with a file, and if we want to we can brush it again, caress the dollars with petals or file them down.

What a wonderful thing it is to not belong to the International Monetary Fund! What a glorious thing it is not to have to ask this institution's help in this ever-changing world!

In four years we shall be celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Triumph of the Revolution. We have just celebrated 50 years since the beginning of our armed struggle on July 26, 1953. It's more than 50 years of struggle, more than 50 years of experience.

I speak on behalf of this, and on behalf of this alone do I dare to speak to you. And I do not always speak like this; today, I speak this way because we are defining some very important things.

I conceive of all forms of Socialism with the same objective and with a different path to bring it to fruition, a different style, born from the roots, from the concrete historical circumstances of each and every country. We have constructed this, and I have already told you how we did it. It is now that we can obtain all the advantages from what we have accomplished. Now it is that we shall begin to harvest the fruit; now it is when we shall depend only on our own conscience, our human capital, our experience and our will to correct all the errors we have made on a large scale, tactical errors, and some errors that have been big but not strategic. We have really attempted to avoid making strategic errors at all costs since, by definition, these are irreversible.

I would like you to know that some of the things that happened to us were the result of theories and books that were written in other times and in other places.

The most that I can say in my lawyerly defense -once I had to defend myself like this- is that I have always been anti-dogmatic. I have always taken a stand against dogma, preconceptions, pamphlets that talk about a subject. I think something else -and Osvaldo knows this well- I think that economics, like

politics, is not a science, but an art. Artists cannot say that they master a science; they need science, they need all calculations. If you do not subtract, add, multiply, find the square root, then you cannot add anything up; but the poet combines words, ideas, images and styles. A writer does the same. The politician mixes elements and factors; the economist also mixes elements and economies. Monopolies have always existed, free trade has hardly ever existed; these are just theories which have been opposed by all industrialized nations.

Now that they rule the world, they tell everyone else that they are about to be developed: free trade, zero tariffs, zero this and zero that.

This is quite clear: to me, economics is an art and a science, and politics is an art and not a science. One needs the support of politics, science and every other element.

Now, I have the best concept of economics, I see it as an art; and politics, I see it as an art.

Who would like to speak? Hey, chair this meeting.

Let whoever wants to speak, speak.

I'll answer all the journalists, anyone of them you like.

Bishop Feofan.- Comrade Castro...

Commander.- Isn't anyone going to translate for me? I'm just hearing some Russian (Laughter)

Bishop Feofan.- Comrade Fidel Castro, allow me to first express my thanks for the possibility of having here a Russian Orthodox church.

Unfortunately, factories age, they even lose their meaning even though they have been erected upon a base of brotherhood; nevertheless, a church, no matter how ancient, has more value, and within a century, the church that you have been helping us to construct for the Russian Orthodox faithful will be a steadfast witness to our good relations.

But I am interested in another matter: I am a bishop in a region of the northern Caucasus, and I personally experienced a tragedy caused by terrorists when one of our schools was attacked. I went to that school 20 minutes after the attack and I stayed there until the end. That was a truly horrible thing.

I would like to know your opinion, since terrorists often speculate about the fact that they are carrying out missions of salvation; but what I saw there was something terrible. I would like to hear your opinion on that. Thank you.

Commander.- In my heart of hearts and in the most profound of my convictions, I repudiate the deaths of innocents.

I remember the combats during the war in the Sierra Maestra; there were combats and sometimes there were people who came to us with all the information -our comrades who had relatives living close to the objectives- we were attacking towns occupied by the army, and we took many of them, some of these were difficult combats and I cannot recall one single dead civilian. See how even in wartime and whenever you have to fight, because a garrison is in one location and you have to attack it, even though it is preferable to have them come out, because they are weaker on the move than when they are ensconced in their positions, it is possible to avoid the deaths of innocent people. I cannot recall one single civilian death in any of the combats during the 25 months of war that we were engaged in.

I had a contingent from which all the others derived, and our people learned to fight by fighting; they didn't learn it in academies since there were no academies at that time.

These are not just my words that I am saying here today; there is a long history that backs up these words.

No, I cannot kill a child to destroy the blockade, deliberately go out and kill a child...I just can't do it. We have an ethic, we have principles. You can sacrifice your own life whenever you like, but you cannot sacrifice the life of an innocent person.

That is what I believe and I have always said it, and our country has participated in internationalist missions –not just one, but quite a few–when the South African racists invaded Angola; or when the Mobuto forces invaded it from the north –surely he was backed by lots of money, without anyone knowing where it was being kept, or which bank was dealing with it– and not just there, in more than one place we have been carrying out missions. You can make inquiries in the world whether any of our prisoners of war were executed, in any of the places where our troops were stationed and where our comrades died. It was a doctrine and it was respected not just here; because our army never shot a prisoner of war. For us, this is a point of pride. We will give you all that we have and anything we can borrow if anyone can prove that in our war against apartheid and the other allies of imperialism in Africa we ever executed any prisoner. Often times, the soldiers of apartheid even preferred to become our prisoners because their lives would be respected. I say no more (Applause).

Bishop Feofan.- Thank you very much Commander Castro. That's what I wanted to hear from you.

Natalia Chopin.- My name is Natalia Chopin. I am a journalist from ECO of Moscow.

A very short, very simple, question.

Tell me, please, if you think you will be visiting the Russian Federation in the near future. Thank you.

Commander.- ...how can I plan a visit to the Russian Federation? If you ask me about my feelings, my wishes, yes, in the summer or the winter, with snow or without it, whoever directs, and today with much more reason, when relations between Cuba and Russia are improving; and even more so today when we have just had an excellent meeting of the Russia Cuba Collaboration Committee, with very good results, at a peak time for relations between our peoples, and when there is a basis of immense affection, affection expressed by the poet, the affection I would express when I remember on Lake Baikal, in the middle of the snow, some rough fishermen, strong men from Siberia, were roasting a fish, and we were still having some problems in our relations, a certain dislike for the incorrect manner, in our opinion, of having done something in the past, the way the Missile Crisis had been resolved. I was able to get to know the Russian people, and I can say that they are a very peace loving people, and more so because they were people who lived through a war.

No other people suffered as much or were more devastated than the Russians during World War II. That people truly knew war and the tragedy of war, and for that reason loved peace more than any other people; but I can also say that the Russian people are a very unselfish people. That man who had lived through war was able to give everything and return to combat. That Siberian knew I was a citizen of a little island and that I was there at the ends of the earth and he talked to me and told me his feelings; because that was a people who, having lived through a war and hating war more than anyone else, had the generosity of spirit to die for another.

We Cubans also learned about this. Not only have we given our lives for our homeland and for our soil, many Cubans have given their lives fighting or offering their services on internationalist missions.

There are risks in wartime, in peacetime, under any circumstances.

I was really amazed by my experiences at age 21. I could tell you that a short time later, when I was in Bogotá, during an OAS meeting, an important leader was assassinated and I watched the entire city

explode. I enlisted there with the people, with the students, grabbing a gun just like them, and I took up position in a police station, armed. I think I had but seven bullets, a cap with no visor looking like a beret and a pair shoes not specially fit for combat. I was in that city until the last day; they almost had to throw me out. There was even a negotiation and peace and they left everybody high and dry there. I'm not inventing this, there are written accounts of all this.

And I had an instant of doubt one night, in the early morning at around 2:00 or 3:00. We were in the police station; it was a rebel police station. Because of the way violence erupted, and the looting and all that, even the army didn't know what to do. At that time, Gaitán was a much loved leader. He was defending a lieutenant from some kind of slander and everyone listened to him. But the looting led to martial law; and I was on the side of the rebels, on the side of the students, the people.

The people destroyed and looted because their level of education left them no other option; they looked like ants carrying pianos, fridges measuring two cubic meters. I saw all that. Those men holed up in the police station, rebels, were lost. I was aware of that because of our history, because I had been thinking, I had meditated on many things like that, in spite of my tender years, and there I was with the lost garrison, where a tank would rumble by and fire some shots.

I saw there how they were abusing a policeman, and I was outraged; he was a "godo", that's what they called a reactionary, and they mistreated him there. I was in one of the dormitories standing at the window, because that was the position they assigned me, and I was upset; they mistreated him, insulted him and told him all sorts of things. I spoke two or three times with the leader and said: "Look, these troops are lost."

Anyone who has read books about the French Revolution knows what violent protests are like, knows that troops who stay put are lost; any troops in that situation must take the initiative. That's what happened during the French Revolution. We have read about it in books by many different authors...Anyone staying put in a place is lost. I told him: "Take the men out on the street, attack." I was trying to persuade him but he didn't understand. Well, there I was, and in a given moment I remembered my family, I even remembered my girlfriend. I remembered everything. So, I had an instant of doubt. Nobody knew I was there; I was going to die there, without a face or a name, and I had to explain to myself why I was still there. And I explained it to myself right away, saying to myself: this people is just like all the others, like mine, their cause is just, the injustice is the same as it is over there. And I knew I was right, my inconformity came from the fact that the men were being poorly used. I said: Should I sacrifice myself or not? And what did I decide? To stay, to sacrifice myself along with all those people. I was lucky that we were not attacked, the other side had tanks.

The next day, I said to him: "Give me a patrol"; all the high points were unoccupied and all the armed forces had to do was show up and take the high points. I said: "Give me a patrol". And they gave me a patrol and I went up to defend the heights.

It was a tremendous experience for me; that day I watched the city burn, and in the evening I returned, and I didn't make use of that as an excuse to save my life; I returned to the garrison because they told me the station was being attacked; thankfully the rebels were attacking a building somewhere else. And so, by pure chance, I survived, I stayed there and the next day they didn't even let me take away a little sword that I wanted as a souvenir; peace had been declared and everyone was applauding: "The Cuban!", everyone was talking to the Cuban, because everyone was amazed that a Cuban student had stayed there.

I was there for a congress we were organizing, and I enlisted, and I had my doubts that day. This story I'm telling you, I've never told it before, because it was a matter of conscience; I stayed and I decided to sacrifice myself for a people that was not my own, in an operation that was a lost cause, in a group of men who were defeated, and I stayed there because it was a matter of conscience.

I say that it was very recent, because it was just at the time I was going from the second to the third

year of university; I already had many ideas, I was an anti-imperialist or anti-colonialist. I was in favor of Dominican democracy, the independence of Puerto Rico, the return of the Panama Canal to the Panamanians, the Falklands to the Argentines, the end of European colonies in Latin America, those were the banners. Well, it wasn't a Socialist banner, yet.

I had not yet read Marx at that time I'm telling you about. I have just told you about two episodes. But observe how my thinking goes, so, I really say what I am thinking, and it isn't an answer. I can answer any question you ask me because I have tried to be consistent in my ideas, to maintain a steadfast position, and so, "be steadfast", that is what I would advise any young person. And like all young people, I must have had my measure of vanity; it is not what I should have, but surely I had. I have had it all, even petit bourgeois vanities, pride, those sorts of silly things; but I never abandoned my set of values, and life has taught me to be more modest, more self-effacing. I think I am more humble now than when I began as a young man. A youth is very critical of everyone else, he thinks he knows it all and that he is right, but he is not always right; and, of course, I always remember the way I was.

Life is a constant struggle right up to the very end, and I think I shall be fighting against myself until the day I die, on the exact second I die, because I am still analyzing whatever I do, I analyze myself and whenever I make a mistake, no matter how small, if it is a detail, I correct it. Who knows whether I will start thinking later about what I have just said here; but I hope not, because I have been true in telling you, as I appreciate your meeting. I am not going to make a speech here, I have not had time, because I am involved in all of this. I have had little information, just minimal. I could barely eat lunch because I was reading, looking into other things, dashing to meet with the minister, returning, and there were people waiting for me there. Tomorrow I make an important appearance at 6:00 p.m. and supposedly I am still recuperating from an accident I had on October 20 last year.

That's why I'm telling you that perhaps I will make a soul searching, and say: What did I tell the Russians? But I am sure that I won't be sorry about anything I have told you, because I have spoken with you like a brother, I have spoken with you affectionately, I have spoken to you from my heart. So, whatever we feel for you, because just like I was saying to you, I met men like those, I met forest rangers, I met true patriotic and revolutionary Russians, like the combatants I always saw, those who fought in Stalingrad, in Leningrad, in Kiev, all over, in Smolensk, the ones who never surrendered, those that continued the resistance, those that fought. Yes, those who went to fight the Japanese, when without saying anything to anyone the United States dropped that famous bomb, in an act of terror.

If I were to calculate what the Allies lost, the Russians and all the Soviet peoples who fought alongside Russia sacrificed more lives than all the allies who participated in that war; it's the truth. I have visited some cemeteries, the one in Leningrad, and I know history, the 1,000 day siege. I have also read a huge book that commemorates all the sacrifices made in Leningrad, like the ones made by the Russian people everywhere. So, my feelings are on solid ground, I know what the Russians are like and I admire them.

As I said before, our relations with the Russian state and government are going well, and I am pleased because we have to unite in a dialogue in defense of civilization. That is what I wish to say.

Alfonso Bauer.- My question is that in Guatemala it is said that you lived in the city of Jalapa and I am one of those who maintains that it is not true, even though it would be an honor for my homeland if you had been in Guatemala at that time.

Commander.- I wish I had been there, I would have liked that, really. How many were the disappeared? Well, I know there were more than 100,000 dead and more than 100,000 disappeared after the United States intervention against the Guatemalan revolution.

That is what would have happened to us if they had won at the Bay of Pigs.

How many lives were lost in the mercenary expedition in Guatemala that overthrew the Arbenz

government?

Alfonso Bauer.- Some 200,000.

Commander.- Yes, that's right, 100,000 dead and 100,000 disappeared. Why then are there protests for some imprisoned mercenaries? Oh, but here there are prisoners, here there are no disappeared, here there are no murders. Those who deserve a large medal, Olympic-sized, the blessing of the empire, are those who kill in those countries where illiterates and semi-literates make up 30%, 40% or much more, where infant mortality is sky high, all of those miseries to which I was referring. That, gentlemen, is "democracy", and what we are doing is nasty, a "systematic and permanent violation of human rights".

I think that if we had not been capable of applying severe measures, we would have been cooperating with those who wanted to destroy our Revolution and with those who wanted to destroy our people.

Do we like applying the death penalty? Not in the least, it is repugnant to us; more than the fact that we do not like it, we consider it to be repugnant. Now, when it has been a matter of defending ourselves from the most powerful empire in history, we have used it. There is no other place in the world like Texas for executing people, and there they have executed innocent people, children, people who committed crimes when they were children; here, nothing like that has ever happened.

They have executed insane people; here that has never happened.

Therefore I wonder: Why don't they take that fine little gentleman who governs the United States to Geneva to face the Commission for Human Rights? Oh no, Cuba is the one that has to go there, year after year. To tell the truth, I don't want to talk disdainfully, but what we feel towards all that hypocrisy is disdain. I have nothing to add: disdain! Because we don't need anyone to judge us, because we are the first to judge ourselves.

Russian delegate.- First of all, many thanks for your brilliant speech. Please tell us, from the beginning of your revolutionary struggle, what has been the most difficult phase for you?

Commander.- Now I have the most difficult one, this question which you have just asked me (Laughter and applause).

There is some time left. If you resist, I will still resist.

Mikhail Chernov.- Dear comrade Fidel Castro, thank you very much for your intervention. My name is Mikhail Chernov, I am a Russian journalist, a Soviet, from the magazine Expert. This is not my first visit to Cuba; I like your country very much, I like the Cuban experience which I have been able to see here and my question is the following: I think we have a lot to learn from Cuba, please tell us, how can you help us?

Commander.- The second very difficult moment (Laughter). I cannot help you with anything; on the contrary, you are the ones who can help us. Here I speak to you with total candor, exchanging impressions. I can help you and your people just as much as you can help us; by doing so, you will be helping yourselves and you will be helping us.

The only thing left to us is our obligation to you, because you have had confidence in us and you have seen fit to hold this meeting here, to have this exchange and to invite us.

I cannot imagine that I am helping you, or that there could be a way for me to help you; I do think that you are helping us and the world.

This is our job. Here there are many religious persons, they know what their obligation is, what their job is; there are doctors and professionals, and each one of them knows his job; we know that this is our

job.

The only thing I can do is make exchanges, truly, the most I can say: let us help each other, that is what we can do (Applause).

Everyone who wants to ask a question, the press, delegation members, you can ask anything.

Russian delegate.- Dear Mr. Fidel Castro, we would like to hear your opinion, if possible, how long will the occupation of Iraq last?

Five minutes ago you said that you sometimes made mistakes. Could you tell us about the mistakes you have made leading the government of Cuba?

Commander.- This meeting, and submitting myself to your interrogation (Laughter). That is one mistake, among many.

You ask how long the occupation of Iraq will last. Iraq's occupation? I think the question is not correct. Iraq has been invaded, but not occupied.

You are asking about when they will leave. That's what I think (Applause).

Could you clarify your question? Do you think that the country is occupied? Do they no longer have a government there, do they have no assembly? Why aren't they leaving? You want to know when they are leaving?

When will they really go? When they can; they will withdraw whenever they can withdraw. It's just that now they can neither leave, nor can they stay, they are part of the game about what if the Shiites this, what if the Sunnis that, what if there is a government; they'll leave when they can, because invaders do not leave when they want, they leave when they can do so. They know the moment they can invade, but they don't know when they can pull out.

In Vietnam they knew when they went in, but afterwards it cost them a lot of effort, a lot of time and 50,000 lives lost; the tally of lives permitted them by American society at that time was 50,000. I wonder whether American society today would allow a tally of 5,000 lives to the invaders. Perhaps 5,000 lives is already the maximum that will be tolerated, and as time goes by, the tally for adventures based on lies and deception will be less.

The problem is that they already need to pull out, but they can't. Now they are looking for whatever they can invent, what to do in order to be able to pull out.

So the question is: When can they withdraw? That will ultimately depend on the American people and on the economic crisis and the almost 500 billion budgetary deficits and the commercial deficit of another 500 billion, that is, a trillion. For how many consecutive years can they put up with this trillion dollar deficit and how are they going to get out of it? Do they think they will annihilate culture? They are exploiting religious contradictions, national contradictions, a complicated situation; Kurds to the north, Sunnis in the center, Shiites to the south, Orthodox Christians there; the country of Iran which they want to destroy or invade and whose resources they want for themselves. It is not an Iran which has been spurned by the Shiites in southern Iraq, who were repressed at a time.

It is a well-known history, we know a fair amount about that history, because when that war between Iraq and Iran began we were in the Chairing the Non-aligned Movement and we were given the task of finding peace between the two nations. We know everything that happened there.

Iraq was a country that had relations with many countries. It was investing oil money well, until that unfortunate war with Iran broke out.

That is all I want to say about the matter. I have a clear opinion on all of that. It was an influential country which later committed serious errors.

We were also opposed to the occupation of Kuwait and we condemned it in the United Nations, but we made great efforts trying to persuade the government to give that up. We felt they needed courage to abandon and correct that error; that this would give the United States government the opportunity to make a great Arab-Moslem-European-NATO-United States coalition. We reached the point of suggesting to them: "Correct your error."

In Russia, there is a copy of those documents in the files, also of course, in the United States, because at a given moment, the United States was informed by Russia. What I wrote and what I have been saying here is in the State Department and there, in those two places; but I am not publicizing it on my own, the positions, and the reasons that I used in my attempt to influence, because we had obligations with the international movement.

We had relations with Iraq; there were even medical services, a Cuban contingent of doctors working there.

Therefore, some of the events that came before we arrived at that tragic page occurred earlier, and the consequences were seen, and even foreseen, and can be shown on paper.

That helped, just like the destruction of the Twin Towers helped a warmongering, untimely and anachronistic imperialist policy.

I recall in Malaysia, at the Non-aligned Summit Meeting, that I talked with the Vice President of Iraq. At that moment, relations were not very good with the Iraqi government because we were never in agreement with the occupation of Kuwait, and so they were not too happy about the fact that there was an inter-parliamentary meeting, and I had meetings with the Kuwaiti delegation as well as with the Iraqi delegation. They were talking a lot about the number of children that were dying, and I said: "Why don't we do something to prevent the deaths of all those children? Tell us how many doctors you need. We can draw up a plan so that they won't die." It was true that children were dying.

Here we have had a Special Period, a blockade, an endless list of things, but children have not died; first the adults die, the parents die before the children.

Thus, my position to them was: "We cannot justify it. Why don't you finally declare peace with Kuwait?" I asked them. I was telling the Iraqi representatives who attended the meeting: "Work for peace."

There were even a lot of people, some of the Arab countries which were at war, who wanted to correct the error, who wanted to seek peace, and they kept on maintaining an unyielding position. In Malaysia I told the Vice President: "The U.S. government wants to wage war against you, it is obvious that they are going to war, they cannot hide it; don't give them the least excuse, don't help them go to war." I told them: "Look, don't start thinking now if they say that those missiles have 50 km more and if they cannot pass 500, limit them to 499. Your rights are undeniable, but don't give them any excuse. Explain, state it publicly, and invite a Non-aligned Commission to visit Iraq in order to show them that there are no chemical weapons." I told them: "I think you don't have any, and if you ever manufactured some, destroy them." I asked him to communicate this to the Iraqi leadership. It was clear that the launching of the attack was quite imminent; but I took the initiative and told the Vice President, and he even thanked me profusely.

On the other occasion, the Kuwaiti incident, the Iraqi government had stated: "The Mother of all Wars is going to take place." I had said: This and this are going to happen. It's not Vietnam any more. Vietnam had support, the jungle, not the deserts, an irregular kind of warfare, the support of China which was next door, of the Soviet Union which was sending weapons by sea, by many different ways.

You are not going to receive a single bullet, you have nowhere to turn to in the midst of this situation," I told them. I said all this while I was asking them to correct their errors and not help the empire. Time has gone by and now their country is occupied. It seemed to them to be simple enough and now they have a very serious headache, they have been shattered; they have been losing their strength. Many Americans are realizing this and, surely, it is not the same now as when they had just arrived.

Many people there are thinking. It is not a matter of pulling a trigger or pushing a button. In order to push a button, you have to have something like 200 or 300; I don't know how many people decide upon pressing a button. The soldiers themselves know, they are professionals, and they know the toll this will take in lives, in prestige. It has been a tremendous discredit. Even I have been surprised by the events.

Imagine how naive we are that even knowing exactly what they are like, that they have absolutely no scruples, I would never have thought the U.S. government would torture prisoners. I thought that they would not be doing that, that they wouldn't be so foolish as to do that; carrying out those sadistic physical and psychological tortures, just for the sake of it. It is shameful, sickening; it didn't happen in just one place.

I would never have imagined that one day the Guantanamo Naval Base, a piece of Cuban territory occupied by force, would be a torture center, of all sorts of sadistic tortures. I could never have imagined it. I really didn't think...I believed that that uncivilized civilization, that government which was capable of dropping nuclear weapons, bombing everything, would not commit the foolishness of taking human beings, whoever they might be. Have we never dealt with criminals who have murdered our comrades? Whoever they might be, we never laid a finger on them. We can give all the money in the country -there is not a lot, but there is some- to whoever can prove that here we have ever laid a finger on any of the most despicable prisoners, on the perpetrator of any of the worst crimes or on the worst acts of terror against our country.

We had prisoners, those taken at Giron, after the attack by the Bay of Pigs, mercenaries who invaded us, those who had come and landed preceded by air raids, who had killed women and children. There, after that battle, which was bitter, fought for 68 hours straight; we didn't let up day or night because the American Marines squad was waiting to land. And I don't know what those that heard about it are saying; you are hearing this from someone who was there, because, among other things, that has been my habit all my life. I have never been holed up in some shelter, that's not my way, not my way of thinking, not my habit. I was there at dawn when the U.S. Marines simulated a landing on the northern part of Pinar del Río province, close to the capital. We said, "But what do you mean a landing?" "Yes, a landing." "Positive information on a landing at Cabañas," exactly as they had told me 24 hours earlier when they woke me up: a landing on Playa Larga, and that a squad there had clashed with the enemy.

Later, after the paratrooper had been dropped, I was totally convinced that that was the main attack. We were there, they had rejected our tank attack, and we were preparing another from a different direction. We were going to surprise them in the rearguard, on Playa Larga and at Girón, at both locations. There I was awaiting a tank battalion. There was our artillery shelling them hard. Maybe we would have arrived at Girón before dawn. The Yankees maneuvered; today's highway did not even exist then. We had poor communications, organized at the level of battalions, not by army or even by corps or divisions or even brigades. When we were guerrillas we didn't have battalions, no tank, artillery or anti-aircraft battalions, or 130 mortar battalions, or howitzer 122 battalions. It was on the level of batteries, but in the mountains we had none of that.

So we were facing the American squad and nobody was executed, nobody hit over the head with a rifle butt. What did that prove? That ideas had turned into conscience, that ethics were conscience, and those soldiers who were angry were not abusing anyone. The American squad was 3 miles away, not 12. When we entered the Girón area they were there with their lights off; aircraft carriers, Marine infantry in boats, waiting to set up a government.

That's what I want to say; I know these people well, but I could not imagine that they were capable of

torturing prisoners, not at Guantanamo, not at Abu Ghraib. I thought they were a little sane, sane enough not to do that, and I said why. They cannot justify it in hatred or anger, and that is why I mentioned to you that many times we have imprisoned terrorists, mercenaries, traitors and we have never laid a finger on them, and they have done it.

Therefore, that's what I tell you, they will withdraw when they can, when the moral and political price will be as little as possible; but no-one knows. Perhaps one day the American people will decide that they have to withdraw from that country, no matter who is President of the United States.

Well, now those are things that may happen, they are incalculable.

Let someone else speak.

Don't end this session or you will become unpopular (Applause) [addressing the chairman].

Quickly, two or three more.

I will try to be brief, we have to try to explain.

Vladimir I. Yakunin.- I think that we have violated some laws or regulations about work.

I ask those attending the conference to lower their hands, There is a saying which puts it well: “You should not overstay your welcome.”

I think we should be thanking the President of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers for the time he has given us. We must thank him (Applause).

Commander.- Maybe we will meet again there, but they haven't invited me to the meeting, I don't even know if they will grant me a visa (Laughter).

When is the meeting? What month?

Vladimir I. Yakunin.- October 3 to 7.

Commander.- This year?

Vladimir I. Yakunin.- Yes, sir.

Commander.- Where?

Vladimir I. Yakunin.- In Rhodes, Greece.

Commander.- Any guests?

Vladimir I. Yakunin.- Yes sir, absolutely.

Commander.- What are the requisites to ...?

Vladimir I. Yakunin.- Just your presence, nothing more.

Commander.- No, I cannot make the commitment because I don't know what problems may come up, and I don't want my word...

Vladimir I. Yakunin.- Perhaps you will think about it.

Speech at the closing ceremony of the “World Conference Dialogue among Civilization”

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Commander.- I will think about it, yes, I will think about it, of course (Applause).

Thank you very much for all your patience.

Long live peace!

Long live the dialogue among civilizations! (Applause).

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