

[Speech given by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, at the Open Forum of the Revolution held in Buey Arriba, Granma province. It contains some information added by the author mostly about the battles against the last offensive of the tyranny forces and the final offensive of the Rebel Army. March 30, 2002 \[1\]](#)

Date:

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Dear fellow Cubans from Buey Arriba, Granma and Cuba:

Fate would have it that over the last few days four of the Revolution's important programs, the result of the great battle of idea that we are waging, should take concrete shape.

In fact, this development is extraordinarily symbolic for all of us, for all people from the eastern provinces and for the whole country.

The programs I mentioned were, in the order that their inaugurations took place in Granma province: firstly, the completion and opening of the Manzanillo School of Visual Arts, which is named after the illustrious painter and intellectual, Carlos Enrique. It was not easy to choose a name because there are so many famous painters, and every day there are more of them, secondly, the program of comprehensive education for young people: (SHOUTS) in which almost 80,000 young Cubans have already registered; thirdly, the program to install and create, we could say, video screening rooms in those rural villages that have no electricity at all; fourthly, the colossal program to install laboratories or, in the case of small schools, computers, for teaching computer science at senior and junior high schools and in all the primary schools, including preschool children.

I do not know if there is any other country in the world that has completed such an encompassing program for teaching computing, but it is that pre-school, primary and junior high school students in this mountain municipality —I don't know if they have a senior high school here— are already learning that here. And if there were a country in the world that has been able to implement such a broad, ambitious, precise, exact program what we can claim, with all certainty, is that no one has ever done so, and perhaps never will, in eight months (SHOUTS OF "LONG LIVE FIDEL") That includes training the teaching staff and creating 12,000 decent jobs which will receive great social recognition in years to come as this program bears fruit and as those thousands of young people who are teaching today acquire more knowledge. (APPLAUSE)

Fate would also have it that a few hours before we left for Manzanillo another extraordinary development was announced in Havana: the eradication of the dengue virus (SHOUTS) and the reduction to almost zero of the dangerous *aedes aegypti* mosquito.

Many things could be said about the significance of these four programs. When I spoke of the visual arts school being opened in Manzanillo, it is one of the seven that the Revolution is building over the course of the years 2001 and 2002. Two of the seven are completed; another four will be completed before

next September. They are already operating in temporary facilities but their suitable buildings will be ready by that date and maybe the seventh will be in place by the end of this year. In addition to that, other similar schools have been built and expanded. These two programs will double the number of visual arts student who are being trained today in the existing schools.

I am talking about visual arts because they are representative of another colossal movement, the cultural boom that is taking place in our country. It can be seen in other artistic and intellectual areas. We see it at all the open forums, in children, in adolescents, in young people, in the entire population, as shown in the recent International Book Fair, a celebration extended to all of Cuba through 17 of the major cities. That is another phenomenon that cannot be found in any other country either. It is an expression of new developments in the area of dancing, music, theater and other art disciplines and intelligentsia in our homeland.

Our Minister of Culture explained it at the dedication ceremony of the Manzanillo school when he said that the number of people going to theaters, museums, music shows and other functions has almost doubled. We see that here in this municipality of Granma province. We see it not only in those speakers who are children, whom we could say are an expression of culture and art, because of their eloquence, because of the speeches that no one writes for them, they write them themselves. In how many places in the world can such amazing communicators as our children be found? We have seen those who came here to say poetry, those who came here to dance, or those who came here to sing, or the duo of musicians, also the couple here who gave a magnificent performance for us. It is something that is flourishing everywhere, and we have only just begun.

There is no need to ask where is that little boy from, where is that little girl from, where is that group from, who sang here. No, they did not come from a foreign country or from the capital; they are from Granma province (APPLAUSE), one of the least economically developed. Or else they are from the very municipality where a forum like this lovely forum is being held. And I am not referring to the stage on which I am standing, but to this big forum on these grounds that I can see from up here and where the people (SHOUTS) are who have filled this space with more than 25,000 participants, when around 15,000 had been expected. Fortunate are they who can see on their televisions the same thing that I am looking at from up here, because you cannot see yourselves, you cannot see this image of people, flags, enthusiasm, revolutionary spirit. You can only see the flags, the trees, the hills, and the mountains we have in the background, on the right and on the left. (APPLAUSE AND SHOUTS)

There is very little to add about the four programs, which I mentioned, many things have already been said. If I add anything, it is that we were very honored by the presence of 81 painters and sculptors, some of the most prominent visual artists in the country and the eastern provinces, including Camagüey (APPLAUSE) and they are just a sample of what there is in all of Cuba. A new spirit can be seen, an air of joy in our artists, in our intellectuals. They painted murals and left their imprint in the new school. A new educational institution with all the most up to date resources could be seen there. And there is no doubt, those children of workers, of peasants and of the lower classes, those who produce the material and intellectual goods, the essential services for the country will get an amazing education there (APPLAUSE). That is a very good reason for feeling satisfied, and the two main cities in this province, sisters in the struggle, sisters in history and sisters in glory, that is, Bayamo and Manzanillo will each have a school like this one —the one in Bayamo will be completed soon— with students from every municipality. That is the good thing about them, that more and more young people from other municipalities get involved, as they have time to select the students who will attend these schools each year.

In the school just opened we also saw an open-air theater, an initiative of a young artist who takes the theater, the books and the music anywhere. So many things and initiatives can be found all over!

I have to say that the opening ceremony of the program of comprehensive education for young people was one of the most impressive things I have seen in my life (SHOUTS), because that crowd of young people who have been through the hardest things in life, who have known hardships and difficulties in

their lives were there, fully conscious that the doors to a bright future in the realms of knowledge, culture, literature and science were opening for them. (APPLAUSE) It is a school above whose entrance, one could say, is a motto which reads: "Enter and make of your life what you want it to be." (APPLAUSE) Those who for one reason or another have had very few chances in their lives or have missed them, showed the passion, the feelings, the dignity and the pride of their wise and noble decision of registering in these schools and of creating anew the possibility of gaining deep knowledge and of achieving any goal they set themselves. (APPLAUSE)

I can say about the third ceremony that there too one could perceive something completely new. Those places we refer to as video screening rooms are much more than that, as we learned yesterday. We could actually feel it, because an idea aimed at giving people the opportunity to receive information, knowledge, cultural or sports recreation has already become a kind of micro-university. It is a place where family doctors, teachers, grassroots organizations, representatives of people's power assemblies, all those representing ambitious health programs for our people and teaching people how to live depending on their ailments —and especially as one becomes more advanced in years, one has, to a greater or lesser degree, various illnesses-- teach them how to lead a healthy life, what they should and should not do. Thus this becomes a source of well being, health, and happiness for a person and for all his family, of joy for the entire population. (APPLAUSE)

And they teach them other subjects of a social nature that help them to deal with various problems, which will considerably reduce harmful habits as, for example, the smoking habit which is being reduced and will be reduced even more. Or at least anyone who smokes should do so at home or in some place where he or she is alone and not where 30, 40 or 50 people are gathered together. And it will also help to reduce the habit of parties and social gatherings with too much alcoholic beverage because consumption of alcohol is not allowed in these video rooms.

The farmers and their families dress up in their best clothes, they go to these screening rooms where there are no fights, no unpleasant incidents which to some degree are the result of centuries of limited of culture and are unworthy of a people that is revolutionizing itself in all areas and especially in the field of knowledge and culture. (APPLAUSE)

The life expectancy of our people's children will increase, in spite of our adverse climate, of the heat and of the often-unfavorable conditions, because it is humid, too, in contrast to what it is like in the temperate zones of the developed countries.

A good example is the statistic that when the Revolution triumphed Cuba, --that Cuba for so long trampled on by colonialism, trampled on by neo-colonialism and by imperialism-- had an infant mortality rate in the first year of life of no less than 60 for 1000 live births. If statistics can be trusted, because I believe that the statistics were not reliable then and who knows how many died whose deaths were not registered. As it happened on the other side of the mountains along the coastline filled with the crosses of peasants and their families who died on the seashore waiting for a schooner to pass by. That has never happened again since now one hundred per cent of unborn babies and their mothers benefit from 12, 13 or 14 visits to a doctor and all the relevant tests. The maternity homes also help to cure illnesses, which can threaten a mother's life, thus they protect both the child and the mother-to-be. That is another reason why in our country we have such a low maternal mortality rate and a low death rate for children under 1 year and under 5 years, the highest risk years. (APPLAUSE)

Today this country, with 67,000 doctors, exhibits the highest per capita rate in the world since we have almost twice the number of doctors per capita as the most developed country has. And with those doctors we not only care for our own people but we also have enough human resources to help other countries and 3000 new Cuban students enter our medical schools every year.

The immense, fabulous human capital our country has in terms of doctors, teachers and technicians is the result of those efforts (APPLAUSE) and I will say it once more, which no other country in the world has in proportion to its population and its resources. And that explains why in the United States the

number of children who die before they reach the age of one is 7 for 1000 live births whereas in Cuba, the martyred country, the number of children who die is only 6 for 1000 live births, in our climate, —and I insist— we must keep up the battle to lower it. There are some provinces where it is 5, provinces which have less than 5 and entire municipalities which don't have even one in a year, which shows you the current possibilities of our country. (APPLAUSE and SHOUTS)

(Looking at his watch) The minutes are getting shorter and I still have some ideas to discuss.

It was a source of great satisfaction that these four programs could be dedicated here in Granma, a province so full of history and virtue. (SHOUTS)

We cannot forget that it was here in this province, in La Demajagua, that our first war for independence began in 1868.

We cannot forget that it was here that slaves were freed for the first time, a revolutionary gesture by that great patriot, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes who had had the opportunity to study and for that reason was able to conceive of and lead a revolution. From the first moment his conscience led him to this act of elementary justice. He marched on Bayamo, they took over the city and in Bayamo they wrote glorious pages, some of the most glorious pages in the history of our country. There they sang that anthem which makes us so proud and moves us so much when we hear it. There Maximo Gómez for the first time charged with the machete against the colonial army that, coming from Santiago de Cuba left Baire and headed for Bayamo. There, the Cubans discovered their number one weapon, the machete, the same machete they used in the fields, and then they discovered the cavalry. The machete and the horse were their basic weapons and with them they began to write our homeland's glorious history. (APPLAUSE) There, in Dos Rios, José Martí, the Apostle of Independence shed his blood. He was a genius of ideas, and of the noblest ideas that can be imagined, our homeland's national hero whose ideas inspired the Centennial Generation and today inspires and will increasingly inspire our entire people.

When the struggle, which began in Granma, spread to Santiago de Cuba and to the rest of the former Oriente province and to Camagüey, the independence movement had sprung to life in a nation that was almost completely unarmed. This heroic movement developed in a slave-based society, for that was the essential nature of that colony, where many of those called Creoles were unable to be patriots because they owned the huge plantations and the masses of slaves and instead of independence what they wanted since the beginning of the 19th century was annexation to the United States. However, the handful of men who rose up in arms here took the war to the center part of the country and almost took it to the west where most of the riches the colonialist used to smash the revolutionary movement were generated by slave labor.

The patriots fought for ten years without respite, and after a brief truce, not accepted by everybody, a truce resulting from division, they persisted in their attempts until they renewed the struggle in 1895 under the leadership of Martí who knew how to win the hearts of Cuban patriots for his ideas.

You see what history is like; when La Demajagua spread to Santiago de Cuba, the Maceos sprung up, and with them the Bronze Titan, one of the most glorious fighters in the history of struggle, not only in Cuba but also in Latin America or in the world. He took part in battle actions and was wounded in combat 27 times. What a man!

In that war our sister province of Santiago became a stronghold of the battle for independence as Guantánamo would be later when Maximo Gómez' troops with Maceo in the vanguard liberated that region where there were indeed many slaves in the coffee plantations. These were a legacy of the numerous French settlers who came from Haiti where the slaves had rebelled, done away with slavery and even defeated one of the most outstanding generals of the best general of that time or of all times, Napoleon Bonaparte.

In the second Great War for independence, the invasion left Mangos de Baraguá to head west and this is

an essential part of our history. A relevant event is that the easterners reached the extreme west of Pinar del Rio. That invading spirit has always been with the easterners.

Then what happened? We began our revolutionary struggle in Santiago de Cuba when we attacked the Moncada Garrison on July 26, 1953 and we resumed that struggle again scarcely three years later. When we returned in the Granma and landed in Las Coloradas (APPLAUSE) the long battle continued in the lands of La Demajagua. We suffered our harshest setbacks, without losing hope, and from a handful of men we reorganized the Rebel Army that, with the experience acquired at an accelerated pace, managed to overthrow, in less than two years, the tyranny which then had 80,000 men under arms. Less than two years, that is, if we count the defeat at Alegría de Pío three days after landing, the dismembering of our troops, the murder of many comrades who accidentally bumped into the enemy, or were taken prisoner and gave their lives for this cause before we reorganized a small detachment of the Rebel Army with a handful of survivors and peasants who joined us.

I don't go to all the open forums, except as an exception, given the enormous amount of work, which obliges us to share it out, (APPLAUSE) but I usually watch them on television. It is beautiful to see that comrade Raúl almost always presides over the forums, and with him, Commanders of the Revolution Juan Almeida, Ramiro Valdés and Guillermo García Frías (APPLAUSE) I usually watch them and I see they are healthy and I think that they can go on for a while contributing their experience and their example to the new generations who are coming up with amazing vigor, knowledge and revolutionary virtue (APPLAUSE). They assert our faith and guarantee that this country of heroes will become an enormous, extensive forest, sprung from the seedlings that were sown in those years I am referring to.

I was talking with Ramiro and Guillermo when we arrived in this place that brings back so many memories to me, (APPLAUSE) or which brings back to us the memories of those not so distant mountains where the Rebel Army was reorganized and won its first victories, an army that managed to resist that relentless persecution, made worse sometimes by betrayal which almost brought our modest forces close to total extinction.

The theater of operations of Column 4 —led by Che Guevara whom we love so much and remember constantly— is very close to this place. (APPLAUSE) He marched along these roads when he went to take over the Bueycitos garrison. I remember that it was around July 31, the day after Frank País was killed and he took over that garrison. Ramirito was telling me that twenty something men defended the place. Our troops seized 20 weapons there and that provided some compensation for the great sorrow we all felt over Frank País' death.

Many battles were fought here, because some of the tyranny's most aggressive and bloodiest troops had been deployed here, troops trained to hate and stimulated by drug use, since it was common for them to try to increase their courage by smoking marijuana. And they were in fact extremely aggressive. Their leader came to the Sierra as a lieutenant and left as a colonel, yes, a colonel wounded in the head by a bullet at the end of the final enemy offensive.

Guillermo fought nearby with his troops and Ramiro was at the frontline of these positions on this side of Turquino Mount on the right flank to the east of La Plata where the Rebel Army's headquarters was located. A rough wooden and thatched-roofed hospital, which was very important, was there too. And Radio Rebelde was on the top of a mountain with only 1 kilowatt of power but it was heard all over the country and was listened to more than any other station. (APPLAUSE)

We cannot forget that something happened here, when we were already opening up new fronts, something that happened earlier and I have not mentioned, and that is Raúl's and Almeida's promotion to commanders at the end of February of 1958 (APPLAUSE) and the creation of two columns, the "Frank País" column under Raúl's command and the "Mario Muñoz" -a heroic doctor who died at the Moncada Garrison-column under Almeida's command. The mission given to both was to advance eastwards.

Raúl's mission was to move away from the Sierra Maestra and then to cross the lowlands close to Palma

Soriano towards the mountains to form what later became the Second Eastern Front. Almeida's mission was to create a guerrilla front close to Santiago de Cuba. We had to send for Almeida's troops two months and a half later at a critical juncture because, after the failure of the April strike, the tyranny, emboldened, threw 10,000 of its best troops, with air, tank and artillery support etc. against Front number one in the Sierra Maestra, really against the General Headquarters, where radio Rebelde, the hospital and the high command were.

Sánchez Mosquera's battalion set out from this place but Ramiro, then in command of Column 4 and Guillermo with part of the troops sent from Santiago as reinforcements stopped his advancing, fighting tooth and nail for ten days using the experience they both had gained. That battalion, armed to the teeth and with the reputation of being the best of Batista's, met with resistance from, we could say, squads. I would not say a full company. There were too few of them. A few minutes ago I asked Guillermo, he must have had about 30 or 40 men in that zone and was trying to prevent the enemy battalion from reaching the foothills of the Sierra from that direction. That enemy offensive, the final offensive, began on May 25 when they concentrated all their land and air troops. Their naval frigates were also busy in the south trying to isolate and harass us.

At that juncture, on May 25 when they launched the offensive for Las Mercedes on the left flank of our front, there were considerably less than 300 of us; we did not even have 200 men to hold our ground. However, we had already asked Almeida to come back with no less than 50 experienced men from the forces around Santiago de Cuba which by that date had already reached Column 4's zone. We also asked Camilo, who was on the lowlands to come back and he arrived at a timely moment.

Approximately three weeks after the offensive had begun, and since the battle was becoming more intense, the siege around La Plata, attacked by several battalions from several points was narrowing. The defense troops were insufficient and once the battle in Buey Arriba was over, Mosquera's battalion, which could not reach the foothills of the Sierra to advance from there towards the Headquarters received orders to march west, to go through Santo Domingo near to La Plata in order to attack our position from that direction.

They reached Santo Domingo on June 19 after crushing the resistance of two rebel squadrons that ambushed them; this was a pretty surprising development that made it necessary to move the troops that were defending the foothill to the Sierra beyond Turquino Mount in order to create a tighter and more solid defense line.

On June 28 and 29, just hours before Almeida's and Camilo's reinforcements arrived, Column I troops dealt a severe blow to the two battalions under Sánchez Mosquera's command which were trying to take over La Plata, wounding and killing many and seizing many weapons. The next day, June 30, during the night, supported now by Almeida's, Ramiro's and Camilo's forces we took advantage of the enemy's demoralization and counterattacked from several directions, putting their two battalions in an extremely difficult situation, although we did not manage to disperse them nor force them to surrender. When our reinforcements arrived we numbered around 300-armed men and 10,000 of the tyranny's best soldiers went up against those men in a struggle with no respite that lasted about 70 days.

They advanced for more or less 35 days until, having been dealt increasingly heavy blows, they began to retreat under strong harassment from our forces which grew in number as we captured weapons from the enemy. We attacked for a similar period of time and the war was about to be over at that time. Luckily for them and perhaps because of the weariness of our men who were already going barefoot their last units were able to escape. Mosquera and his battalion were surrounded and he was wounded during a difficult and complicated retreat. After 70 days we had more than 900-armed men. One could say that the only troops we could not count on, nor would it have been right to transfer them, were the troops from the Second Front. This was because they were at a distance impossible to cover in a few days and because we thought that the offensive could be defeated with the troops we were gathering together.

The rest of the province and half of Cuba were invaded with 900-armed men. Almeida and Guillermo went back to their positions, we sent new forces eastwards, we sent troops to the north of the province, we sent a column even, to Camagüey and we sent two leading columns, Che's and Camilo's, one with 140 men and the other with 90, as I remember, who achieved the feat of marching 500 kilometers to reach the center of the country. Those were days were worrisome and anguishing while they were marching to Las Villas. They advanced from two directions facing an increasingly demoralized enemy and occupying territory.

All the rebels' columns set out from here, from this Sierra Maestra. And in November our column set out from just a few kilometers away from here to advance on Santiago de Cuba. But, you should not think that it was a big well-armed column; we set off with a platoon and 1000 unarmed recruits. As we advanced we picked up some squads, some small units and when we arrived here less than 100 of our men were armed. When we were nearly here we had almost surrounded an enemy company, Batista's only troops near the Sierra Maestra. We advanced quickly. We thought we would surround them and get them to surrender; this was something our soldiers and officers were now experts in. One of our officers, a very new officer, with a small group of men cut off the way of retreat for that unit, while we quickened our pace to prevent them from escaping.

Unfortunately, our young officer did not have much experience. Usually we employed a psychological weapon; we had neutralized the company leader days before, that were not difficult, then if we had managed to surround the unit it would not have held out for even 24 hours. I will tell you about that now, even at the risk of running over by a few minutes more. Our officer had to deliver a written message from me in a sealed envelope to the leader of that troop. He sent it but adding an insulting note from him. This was the least appropriate for achieving our objective and what that leader and his troop did was escape at full speed. We needed that company's weapons.

We set off again and almost immediately I had a friendly encounter with two squads from Batista's army whom the now General Quevedo—who fought against us at El Jigüey, but who is a real gentleman—had persuaded, not to join us as soldiers, but to end the war and hand over their weapons. That brought us to approximately 180-armed men. I had visited that place on November 17, 1958 and three days later a battle began in Guisa. We call it a battle because of the size of the enemy forces involved. The battle began against the troops from Bayamo, the headquarters of the enemies' operational forces, with about 5,000 soldiers. From there they could transfer troops in trucks, and move their tanks and everything else along paved roads to Guisa. We fought there for ten days. Our forces grew as we captured arms and ammunitions until we defeated their troops and took over the city.

We continued the march on Santiago, liberating towns occupied by enemy forces. First Baire, then Jiguani, Palma Soriano and Maffo in cooperation with troops from Almeida's column and from other columns, taking hundreds of prisoners and capturing their weapons and ammunitions. All the columns were together now, all the fronts. The battle-hardened troops from the Second Eastern Front, Almeida's troops, practically all the troops from the eastern part of the province and we were going to attack Santiago de Cuba with 1200 men.

There were two frigates there, plus 5,000 soldiers. The Moncada Garrison was there and we were going to attack and this time there was no way they were going to escape. Twelve hundred experienced fighters was a luxury figure, because 1200 against 5000 was the best correlation of forces we had ever had. That is when the commander of the enemy troops comes in a helicopter asking for a meeting, conceding defeat and asking how the war should end.

We suggested that he get the garrison in Santiago de Cuba cleared and he agreed to do that. He wanted to go to the capital and gave several reasons why. I said to him repeatedly: "Don't go to the capital", to avoid running risks. Undoubtedly, he had leverage, as he was the head of operations for the enemy forces. He was not an assassin, to be perfectly honest I have to say that, he was not a henchman. He was, we could say, really a civilized person and he was not without prestige in the army.

We asked him for three things: firstly, "we do not want a coup d'état in the capital", we gave him a strong warning on that point; secondly "we do not want Batista to be allowed to escape"; thirdly, "we do not want you to talk to the U.S. ambassador".

He reached Havana and we waited for the 30th of the month when there was supposed to be an uprising. But, we only received a short letter, some message, then we replied to him via the head of the Santiago garrison saying that when the time agreed to was up we would attack it and liberate the city. It would take too long to explain everything, and it is not possible on a day like this. I shall just say that he did exactly the opposite of the three things he had been asked to do (LAUGHTER): there was a coup d'état in the capital, they waved Batista goodbye at the airport and they made contact with the U.S. ambassador. That explains everything.

That was when the First of January occurred. We launched the slogan of not having a cease-fire, of advancing with all forces and we issued a call for a revolutionary general strike by all workers. Everyone, without exception, responded positively to this, despite the fact that the leadership of the workers' movement was in the hands of yellow union leaders.

Then, it was total collapse. That very night we entered Santiago de Cuba. It was not like in 1898 when the U.S. expeditionary forces that intervened in that war when Spain was already defeated did not allow the Mambises [Cuba's independence fighters] to enter Santiago de Cuba. This time the Mambises entered Santiago, they entered Havana, went as far as Guanahacabibes and Cape San Antonio, the entire country, all weapons in the hands of the people, (APPLAUSE) all of the people united.

That people who is even more united today, but which does not have a 30% of illiterates, or a 60% of functional illiterates or semi-literates. And it is pretty bad to have to say that there were only about 10% of people who were neither completely nor functionally illiterates because only around 400,000 Cubans had completed sixth grade. Today we have two university professionals for every citizen with a sixth grade education in the country back then. (APPLAUSE) And many more will graduate in the future! I look at you, I can see the students from the comprehensive up-grading courses, because those who want opportunities, will have them. (APPLAUSE)

Look how much history is associated with this place, with these mountains, how much history! (APPLAUSE) More than simply the achievements of our rebel fighters, there are the achievements of the people. Without the support of the people a revolution that came back to life after landing with only seven weapons could never have been conceived of. And we attained victory in less than 24 months, if we are to subtract all that time following the blow we sustained, when attacked by surprise, due to our inexperience.

We had to learn a lot, to start all over again and to learn again when the Revolution triumphed. I said there in Santiago on the night of January 1st and I said it in what is now Ciudad Libertad on the 8th of that same month that what was coming after we reached the capital was going to be much more difficult. And what came? The feats, the exploits, the indelible history that you have written. Perhaps it would be better to say, your parents and you, for 43 years, up against a powerful empire which blockades us, which attacks us, which has wanted and still wants to starve us to death and kill us with diseases. (APPLAUSE) It has not managed to do so.

A nuclear world war almost broke out because of the empire's stubbornness and it is still stubborn. They just never learn that it is impossible to destroy this Revolution defended by this people, (APPLAUSE) and not only because of the physical strength of our fighters but because of their moral forces, because of their willingness to win or die, because of their willingness to defend an historic, revolutionary process which has given us all that we have today. And this is nothing yet because we will be stronger in our knowledge, in our moral values, in our conscience, in our organization and management which makes it possible to implement the programs I was describing, even when the price of sugar is between five and six cents which is equivalent to half a cent in that Machado era which brought so much hunger to our country.

Of course, at that time the country did not own anything, everything belonged to foreign companies or to a rich minority in this country, as the little girl said here. When she spoke of the need to defend what our country has today, I remembered the murdered peasants, the hundreds of peasants known to us who lived in fear, not of the war; their first fear was of eviction from their lands. The fear of soldiers who burned their houses, sometimes with people inside, and the murder of so many.

I remembered those poor, illiterate peasants whose children had no access to doctors. We noticed that when they began coming to our camp because they knew there was a doctor there, Che and other doctors. There was not one doctor in all those mountains, but there are many now, dozens, and from here to Santiago de Cuba there must be hundreds because the country has 30,000 family doctors, not 3, not 30, not 300, not 3,000, thirty thousand! (APPLAUSE) That has to be shouted out loud, and 250,000 professors and teachers, plus the new ones who are graduating to teach computing or to reduce class size to no more than 20 —another thing we have longed for. We are multiplying the number of primary school teachers coming out of the crash courses. And we will have tens of thousands of social workers. We will have what our country deserves to have or, as Guillen would have it, what we had to have! (APPLAUSE)

Now we shall have more because we are developing ideas and opportunities that we never even dreamed of back then when we began our revolutionary struggle.

I have felt the need to talk longer because on a day like today I wanted, I have really wanted for so long to share some ideas with you, to tell you some secrets, reminding you of our history (APPLAUSE AND SHOUTS OF "LONG LIVE FIDEL") so I have talked for a few minutes more.

I know there are things you wanted to hear about, you wanted me to tell you about Monterrey and hundred of other things. I will not say anything other than there's a time and a place for everything. (APPLAUSE AND SHOUTS)

I know that you want to know many things. I could talk about the world's problems, but this is not the time. Let's talk about our problems, about our work, about our achievements, about our brilliant future.

Let's look towards the future which our people has won with its struggles, as it has won the recognition, the admiration and the support of the poorest and the hardest suffering people in this world, in those places where our doctors go, jungles and mountains, to the most inhospitable places; there, where our teachers have been, where the people look to Cuba and understand that a country, no matter how small it may be, can stand up to the empire, as Cuba has done for 40 years. And this is even more true now that the hegemonic empire exists, the only superpower, the master of the world, except it is not the master of this island, where it wanted to burn our revolutionary achievements to ashes and to bring over a mob of bandits, thieves, criminals, looters, terrorists.

I would like to ask you, young and old, women and men, children and adults, who of you could resign yourselves to such a tragedy? That era will never return because there would be no one left who wanted to be the witness of such ignominy.

The example you provide is an inspiration to the world. Proof of that is the support, the solidarity, the sympathies we saw in Geneva where, fear notwithstanding, our foreign minister's words —he is here with us— (APPLAUSE) received so much support. He is here today, as are other ministers, as are a group of families, the mothers and the wives of those five heroes who have accompanied us in this battle and whose presence and great enthusiasm fill us with pride.

There are valuable comrades here, I see Jaime, I see the head of our powerful eastern Army, General Espinosa whom I knew in the most difficult days in Angola when in Cabinda, whose energy resources meant life for that country suffering a South African invasion and war. He stopped the attack of powerful armored forces at the service of imperialism, forces based in one of the biggest and richest countries in

Open Tribunal of the Revolution, held in Buey Arriba, Granma province

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Africa at that time, the Republic of the Congo where certain plundering gentleman ruled whose name I won't even mention because it is not worth the bother on a day like today.

Thank you fellow Cubans from Buey Arriba! When I came here that November this place was called Minas de Bueycitos. I am glad to see it prosperous, beautiful, painted, full of schools and social facilities which did not exist back then but do exist today. But let me insist that we are just beginning! That is why I say with more enthusiasm and a deeper revolutionary and patriotic spirit than ever emanating from those years that we have struggled side by side, from the victories won, from our heroic resistance not only to the empire but to the fall of the socialist camp —those who with their mistakes and weaknesses left us alone to face the other superpower.

I think that the most glorious days were not only those of the early years when we defeated the invader at Girón and unhesitatingly accepted the challenge and the risks of the October Crisis, but our hours of great, great glory were also those when we held out against those terrible 10 or 11 years of special period.

So much suffering! And, so much satisfaction! Despite what I said to you about the economic crisis, the sugar prices, which are dreadful, and the nickel prices which are only just above the cost, or the blow sustained by tourism due to the terrorist attack of September 11 in New York against the American people and its political aftermath which brought the world great tension and many problems, the kind to which you and I have been familiar with for some time now.

This is why with more fervor and passion than ever I say: Long Live the Cuban socialist Revolution! (SHOUTS OF LONG LIVE!) And I say because without the revolution we would not be what we are today, nor would we be the first in freedom, independence and social justice, knowledge and culture as we are today.

Patria o Muerte!

Venceremos!

(STANDING OVATION)

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