THE FIGHT AGAINST CHOLERA

I have taken a pause among several important analyses occupying my time these days to refer to two subjects of which our people must be made aware.

The UN, at the instigation of the US, creator of poverty and chaos in the Republic of Haiti, had decided to send its occupation troops into Haitian territory, the MINUSTAH (UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti), which in passing introduced the cholera epidemic into that brother country.

As for the OAS Secretary General, he decided, at the beginning of 2009, to appoint as his personal representative in Haiti a Brazilian intellectual, Ricardo

Seitenfus who at that time was working in his country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Seitenfus was enjoying well-deserved prestige in diplomatic and government circles in the Haitian capital because of the seriousness and openness with which he was dealing with the problems. In 1993 he had written a book called "Haiti: Sovereignty of the Dictators". He visited Haiti for the first time that year.

Two days ago, on December 25th, the information agencies spread the news that the OAS special representative had been dismissed abruptly from his job.

What was the cause of the drastic measure?

Interviewed several days ago by Le Temps in Switzerland, Seitenfus answered several questions made by that press body, sincerely laying out his point of view.

Very briefly, I shall explain what happened, using the actual words, according to the information available on the Internet and translated from French.

The first question from Le Temps was:

"Ten thousand blue helmets in Haiti, in your opinion, is this a counterproductive presence?"

Ricardo Seitenfus' answer:

"The system for the prevention of strife within the UN framework is not adapting to the Haitian context. Haiti is not an international threat. We are not in civil war conditions. […] the Security Council […] imposed the blue helmets in 2004 after the exit of President Aristide. […] For the UN it was a matter of freezing the power and transforming the Haitians into prisoners on their own island."

Question 2.

"What prevents normalization in the case of Haiti?

"Ricardo Seitenfus: For two hundred years, the presence of foreign troops has alternated with that of the dictators. It is force that defines international relations with Haiti and never dialogue. Haiti's original sin, on the world stage, is its liberation. Haitians committed the unacceptable in 1804: a crime of lèse-majesté for an impatient world. At that time the West was a colonialist world, slave-owning and racist, basing its wealth on the exploitation of conquered lands. As a result, the Haitian revolutionary

model frightened the great powers. The United States did not recognize Haitian Independence until 1865 and France demanded payment of a ransom in order to accept that liberation. Right from the beginning, independence was compromised and the country's development was road-blocked.[…] Nothing is being solved, it's getting worse. They want to turn Haiti into a capitalist country, an export platform for the American market, it is absurd. […] There are elements in this society that have managed to prevent violence from spreading like wildfire."

Question 3.

"Is it not resignation to view Haiti as a nation that cannot be assimilated, whose only future is the return to traditional values?

"Ricardo Seitenfus: Part of Haiti is modern, urbane and looking abroad. The number of Haitians living outside its borders is estimated at four million. It is a country that is open to the world […] More than 90% of the education and health systems are in private hands. The country has no public resources for the functioning of an official system even in a minimal fashion. […] The problem is socio-economic. When the unemployment rate is at 80%, deploying a stabilizing mission is intolerable. There is nothing to stabilize…"

Question 4.

"Haiti is one of the world's countries receiving the most aid, yet the situation has only been deteriorating for the last twenty-five years. Why?

"Ricardo Seitenfus: Emergency aid is effective; but when it becomes structural, when that aid substitutes the State in all its missions, a lack of collective responsibility is attained. […] The January 12th earthquake and the subsequent cholera epidemic have only accentuated this phenomenon. The international community feels that every day you have to re-do whatever was completed the day before. […] I was hoping that, before the tragedy of January 12th, the world would understand that it had made a mistake with Haiti. […] Instead of making a balance, even more soldiers were sent over. Highways need to be built, dams constructed, participation in the organization of the State, in the judicial system. The UN says that it doesn't have the mandate for that. Its mandate in Haiti is to keep the peace of the cemetery."

Question 5.

"What role do the NGOs play in this disaster?

"Ricardo Seitenfus: Starting with the earthquake, Haiti has become an inevitable cross-road. For the transnational NGOs, Haiti has become a country at a forced march. I would even say something worse than that: a country of professional formation. […] There is an evil or perverse relationship between the NGOs' strength and the Haitian State's weakness. Some of the NGOs exist only because of the Haitian misfortune."

Question 6.

"What errors have been made after the earthquake?

"Ricardo Seitenfus: In the face of massive importing of consumer goods to feed the homeless, the situation of Haitian agriculture had become worse. The country offers free rein to all humanitarian experiences. It is unacceptable from the moral point of view to see Haiti as a laboratory. The rebuilding of Haiti and the promise that we emphasize with 11 billion dollars arouse avarice. […] The Haitian doctors being trained by Cuba, […] close to one half […] that ought to be in Haiti […] are today working in the US, in Canada or in France."

Question 7.

“Haiti is endlessly being described as being the edge of the world. Do you see the country as a concentrate of our contemporary world...?

“Ricardo Seitenfus: It is the concentrate of our dramas and of the failures of international solidarity. We are not up to the challenge. The foreign press comes to Haiti and describes the chaos. [...] For them, Haiti is one of the worst countries in the world. We have to go to Haitian culture; we have to go to the roots. [...] Nobody takes the time or wants to try to understand what I call the Haitian soul.”

Question 8.

“Besides acknowledging the failure, what solutions do you propose?

“Ricardo Seitenfus: In two months I will have completed a two-year mission in Haiti. In order to remain here, and so as not to be overwhelmed by what I see, I had to create a series of psychological defenses for myself. I wanted to continue being an independent voice in spite of the weight of the organization I represent [...] On January 12th I learned that there is an extraordinary potential for solidarity in the world. And it is necessary not to forget that, during those first days, it was the Haitians who, completely alone, with empty hands, tried to save their fellow men. [...] At the same time we must think about offering export opportunities to Haiti and to also protect that family farm system that is essential to the country. Haiti is the last Caribbean paradise, as yet unexploited by tourism, with 1,700 kilometres of virgin coastline [...] Two hundred years ago, Haiti illuminated the history of mankind and of human rights. Now it is necessary that we give the Haitians a chance to confirm their vision.”

One can agree or not with each of these words spoken by the Brazilian Ricardo Seitenfus, but it is without question that he uttered solid truths in his answers.

I think it is convenient to add, and also to clarify:

Our country not only sent hundreds of doctors to our neighbouring brother country of Haiti, but also thousands of doctors to other countries in the Third World, especially in natural disaster situations, and it contributed to the formation of tens of thousands of doctors in our Homeland and abroad.

The medical collaboration with Haiti began 12 years ago, on December 4th, 1998.

When at the end of the 1990s the tyranny of Duvalier and the Tonton Macoutes ceased to exist, -imposed for decades by the United States – and a government elected by the people assumed the leadership of Haiti, Cuba sent 100 doctors to provide services to that country, and the first contingent of young Haitian high school graduates travelled to Cuba to begin medical studies in 1999.

In turn, in 2001, we began collaboration with the University of Medicine created by President Jean Bertrand Aristide: we sent them professors who also worked as doctors at the service of the Haitian people. When the Yankees promoted a coup d’état and the medical school was turned into a garrison for the coup perpetrators, around 270 of its students travelled to Cuba with their professors to continue their studies in our Homeland.

The Cuban Medical Mission continued, however, to provide its humanitarian services in Haiti, having nothing to do with the internal political problems of the country under the occupation of coup’s soldiers, Yankee troops or the MINUSTAH forces.

In August of 2005, the first 128 Haitian sixth-year medical students returned to their country for the practical part of their courses, side-by-side with the Cuban doctors who were providing their services in Haiti.

From the second half of 2006 until the second half of 2010, 625 young Haitian doctors have graduated: we admire them immensely. Of these, 213 are at work in the Haitian governmental medical institutions; 125 are working at the Cholera Medical Control Centres or in brigades being sent out to the sub-communes along with Cuban and Latin American ELAM graduates who are fighting the cholera epidemic; 72 are working in NGO or private medical centres; 20 are at the so-called “Mixed Centres”; 41 are continuing their studies in a second specialty in Cuba; 27 new graduates are already in Haiti, awaiting their postings; 14 are unemployed because of personal problems such as pregnancy and maternity; another four are at unknown locations and one has died.

Finally, 104 are at work abroad, basically in Spain, the US, Canada and France; one is in Switzerland and four are in Latin American countries. It would not be right to judge any of these since their country is extremely poor, lacking resources and jobs, and there is no record of any of them refusing to serve their country. They are medical values in high demand, and they were born in Haiti and Cuba.

The official figure of those dying from cholera reaches 2,707, for a death rate of 2.1%.

For three consecutive days, there has not been one single death from cholera among the people being looked after by the Cuban Medical Mission. The death rate has been lowered now to 0.57 among the 47,537 patients being treated by them. The epidemic can be eradicated, avoiding that it becomes endemic.

At the Round Table TV programme tomorrow, at six o’clock in the evening, we shall be hearing fresh and interesting news about the fight against cholera in Haiti, and we shall be listening to voices bringing us important news and authority on the subject.

I shall continue on Tuesday the 28th with the second point.

Fidel Castro Ruz
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