Between emigration and crime

Latin Americans are not born-criminals nor did they invent drugs.

The Aztecs, Maya and other pre-Columbian human groups in Mexico and Central America, for example, were excellent farmers and didn't even know about growing coca.

The Quechua and Aymara were capable of producing nutritious foods on perfect terraces that followed the mountain level curves. On the high plateaux that often exceeded three or four thousand metres in altitude, they grew quinua, a cereal rich in protein, and potatoes.

They knew about and also grew the coca plant whose leaves they chewed from time immemorial in order to lessen the ravages of high altitudes. This is an ancient custom that the peoples practiced along with products such as coffee, tobacco, liquor and others.

Coca originated on the steep slopes of the Amazonian Andes. The settlers there knew about it from times that pre-dated the Inca Empire whose territory, at the height of its splendour, stretched over the area covered today by southern Colombia, all of Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, eastern Chile and north-eastern Argentina; it totalled about two million square kilometres.

Consumption of coca leaves became a privilege of the Inca emperors and the nobility at the religious ceremonies.
When the Empire disappeared after the Spanish invasion, their new masters encouraged the traditional habit of chewing leaves in order to prolong the natives' working hours, a right that lasted until the United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs prohibited the use of coca leaves other than for medical or scientific purposes.

Almost every country signed it. They hardly discussed any topic regarding health. Cocaine trafficking then was not as huge as it is today. In the years that ensued extremely serious problems have been created that require profound analysis.

On the thorny issue of the relationship between drugs and organized crime, the UN itself delicately states that "Latin America is inefficient in combating the crime."

Information printed by different institutions varies due to the fact that the matter is a sensitive one. Data at times are so complicated and varied that they might lead to confusion. What we can be absolutely sure of is that the problem is rapidly getting worse.

Almost one and a half months ago, on February 11, 2011, a report published in Mexico City by the Citizen Council for Public Security and Justice of that country, provided interesting data on the 50 most violent cities in the world in terms of the number of murders that occurred in the year 2010. The report states that Mexico has 25% of the cities. For the third year in a row, the number one spot belongs to Ciudad Juárez on the United States border.

It goes on to explain "…that year the Juárez murder rate was 35% higher than that of Qandahar, Afghanistan, number two on the list, and 941 % higher than in Baghdad…", in other words, almost ten times greater than the capital of Iraq, the city occupying the number 50 spot on the list.

Almost immediately it adds that the city of San Pedro Sula, in Honduras, occupies third spot with 125 murders per 100,000 inhabitants; it is exceeded only by Ciudad Juárez in México, with 229; and

Qandahar, Afghanistan,, with 169.

Tegucigalpa, Honduras, occupies the sixth spot with 109 murders per every 100,000 inhabitants.

Thus one can see that Honduras, where the Yankee air base of Palmerola is located, where a coup d'état was produced already during the presidency of Obama, has two of the cities among the six where the most murders are committed in the world. Guatemala City has 106.

According to that report, the Colombian city of Medellín, with 87.42, also rates among the most violent cities in the Americas and the world.

The speech of American President Barack Obama in El Salvador, and his subsequent press conference, led me to the duty of printing these lines on the subject.

In my Reflection of March 21st, I criticized his lack of ethics in not mentioning even the name of Salvador Allende in Chile, a symbol of dignity and courage for the world, a man who died as the result of the coup d'état promoted by a president of the United States.

Since I was aware that on the following day he would be visiting El Salvador, a Central American country that is the symbol of the struggles of the peoples of Our America that has suffered the most as a consequence of US policy in our hemisphere, I said: "There he is going to have to be quite inventive because, in that sister nation in Central America, the weapons and training received from the governments of his country spilt much blood."

I wished him a good trip and "a bit more good sense." I have to admit that in his long trek, he was a little more careful in the home stretch.

Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero was a man admired by all Latin Americans, whether they are religious or not, just as the Jesuit priests who were cowardly murdered by the henchmen trained, supported and armed to the teeth by the United States. In El Salvador, the FMLN, a militant leftist organization, fought one of the most heroic struggles on our continent.

The Salvadoran people granted victory to the Party that emerged from the heart of those glorious combatants; it is not yet time to construct their profound story.

What is urgently needed is to face up to the dramatic dilemma El Salvador is living, just as Mexico and the rest of Central and South America.

Obama himself stated that around 2 million Salvadorans are living in the United States; this is equivalent to 30% of that country's population. The brutal repression unleashed against the patriots, and the systematic pillage of El Salvador imposed by the United States, forced hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans to immigrate to that country.

What is new is that added to the desperate situation of Central Americans is the fabulous power of the terrorist gangs, the sophisticated weapons and the demand for drugs, originating in the US market.

In his brief speech that preceded that of his visitor, the president of El Salvador stated, verbatim: "I insisted to you that the subject of organized crime, narco-activity, citizen insecurity, should not be a subject that only concerns El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras or Nicaragua, and not even Mexico or Colombia; it is a subject that concerns us as a region, and that is why we are working on building a regional strategy, through the CARFI Initiative."

"…I insisted to you that this is a matter that should not only be dealt with from the viewpoint of persecuting a crime, through the strengthening of our policies and our armies, but also by emphasizing our policies of crime prevention and thus the best weapon to fight crime per se in the region is by

investing in social policies.”

In his reply, the American president said: “President Funes is committed to creating more economic opportunities here in El Salvador so that people don’t feel like they have to head north to provide for their families.”

“I know this is especially important to the some 2 million Salvadoran people who are living and working in the United States.”

“…I updated the President on the new consumer protections that I signed into law, which give people more information and make sure their remittances actually reach their loved ones back home.”

“Today, we’re also launching a new effort to confront the narco-traffickers and gangs that have caused so much violence in all of our countries, and especially here in Central America.”

“…, we’ll focus $200 million to support efforts here in the region, including addressing, […] the social and economic forces that drive young people towards criminality. We’ll help strengthen courts, civil society groups and institutions that uphold the rule of law.”

I don’t need one single word more to express the essence of a painfully sad situation.

The reality is that many young people in Central America have been led by imperialism to cross a rigid and ever-more insurmountable border, or to work for the million-dollar gangs of drug traffickers.

Wouldn’t it be fairer – I wonder – to have an Adjustment Act for all Latin Americans? Just like the one they invented to punish Cuba almost half a century ago. Will the number of persons that die crossing the US border keep on growing infinitely along with the tens of thousands already dying each year in the countries where you are offering your Partnership of Equals?

Fidel Castro Ruz
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