

## True friendship

Yesterday I received a visit from the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, who made a trip abroad related to the defense of his country's important oil interests.

During his stop in Cuba, he took the opportunity to make contact with me and greet me personally, as he had promised, on August 13 of this year, when I had the privilege of reaching 88 years of age. That day he presented me with some fruits, among them, some small pearl like ones, which I had never even seen before and taste excellent. He also presented me with a sports uniform, a gift from the Venezuelan athletes seeking to win laurels for their country.

I was extraordinarily happy that he made the visit so soon, not only for the honor which his presence and quick action imply, when he is involved in the difficult task of carrying out the epic struggle of Hugo Chavez, as well as the exceptional actions he is carrying out.

Our world is experiencing in an extraordinary and unique moment, every day the number of people who are conscious of this is greater. Among such events, one of the most dramatic is the genocide being carried out in the Gaza Strip, where 1.8 million human beings live trapped between the desert, the sea and the military power of a Middle Eastern country, where the most powerful empire which has ever existed has created - over more than half a century, and at a cost, according to some estimates, of almost 100 billion dollars - a sophisticated and at the same time irresponsible, military nuclear power. Many people wonder: Who governs who, does the United States govern Israel, or Israel the United States?

The facts are visible. Target seeking missiles, fast and accurate bombing, armored artillery and modern tanks attack buildings filled with people, as well as hospitals, schools, and service facilities, killing defenseless children, young people, the elderly, mothers and fathers.

Atrocities occurred in the past. Not of course referring to past millenniums, but to struggles which took place before the Second World War: The Ethiopian War, The Spanish Civil War; the bombing of Guernica; the Japanese war to conquer China; U.S. interventions in Latin America, events which caused outrage, but bare no resemblance to the chilling scenes witnessed today in images, seen by all citizens in their homes on television. Politicians are rattled and chaos is evident in world politics.

Thus the meeting with the Venezuelan President was very useful. It seemed to me however, that remaining silent would not benefit anyone. With the greatest sincerity I congratulated him for what he is doing for the martyred people of the Gaza Strip. Countries which continue to suffer tragedy deserve continuing support, in accordance with a country's resources, no matter how difficult their own situation may be. This is what Cuba did, even during its most difficult times, under the cruel Yankee blockade which has already lasted over half a century.

What Venezuela is doing today is an outstanding example. Imperialism's attacks on the country are well known, given their attempt to overthrow Chávez with the support of the fascist Venezuelan oligarchy, and eliminate him if possible. He never wavered, and showed our country solidarity in the most difficult times.

I congratulated Maduro for his extraordinary solidarity with the heroic people of the Gaza Strip. As soon as the news of the genocide arrived and of the high numbers of children, mothers and people injured or killed by Israel's genocidal attacks, he ordered a U.S built military cargo plane to be prepared, which only with great difficulty is able to overcome the denial of parts by its manufacturers, and send it with

equipment, medicines and essential food to Egypt destined for Gaza. In addition he sent his tireless Minister of Foreign Relations to Cairo to secure the necessary support to allow the aid to reach those who desperately need it.

Since then the brave Venezuelan pilots have been transporting their lifesaving cargo, which will allow mothers, children and adults to be saved from death. I read today however a dispatch from the news agency AP concerning Venezuela, in which were published statements from the "The Association of Clinics and Hospitals of Venezuela, a group of private Venezuelan healthcare centers," calling on the government to declare a "humanitarian emergency" to address the "shortage of supplies, medicines, medical equipment and replacement parts," which, they state "put the lives of the population at risk."

What a great coincidence! This demand was made precisely when, in the Gaza Strip, the yankee-Israeli genocide is being carried out in poorest and most overpopulated zone of this community which has lived there for millennia.

This is what makes so laudable the conduct of Maduro, the soldiers and Venezuelan specialists who behave in such an exemplary manner - in the face of the tragedy being suffered by our sister nation of Palestine.

Many things could be said given this notable event, if the human species is able to survive, and doesn't exterminate itself, which is in its hands.

While touring areas which indicate great prospects for food production, two workers appeared. I asked them if they knew my companion. They looked at him closely and said: "President Maduro," and they smiled mischievously. I asked them what level of education they had achieved. The youngest said, "Twelfth grade." The other, still young and strong, responded that she graduated as a Physical Education and Sports teacher, a career in which she had worked for many years. Finally I asked them if they would be willing to work in Venezuela, and they responded with enthusiasm, "Yes, of course!"

I will not continue if I intend to publish this letter today, as I told the Venezuelan President.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Fidel Castro', written over a horizontal line.

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**Fidel Castro Ruz**

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