

[Speech by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, at the opening ceremony of the First National Olympics of Cuban Sport, in the Plaza de la Revolución. November 26, 2002](#)

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Date:

26/11/2002

To the participants in the Second Hemispheric Meeting Against the FTAA our special greetings and appreciation on behalf of our people, for the great honor they do us in attending.

Also to our dear friend and an peerless author Gabriel García Marquez, whose books are familiar to all of our people that learned a long time ago now how to read, write and appreciate talent and art.

To Aldo Pérez Esquivel, whose constant battle for human rights and brave denunciations of the missing people and the horrendous crimes committed in Argentina and other Latin American countries by fascist and pro-imperialist forces have earned him the enormous respect he enjoys in our hemisphere and the world over.

I also greet Rev. Lucius Walker, a dear American friend; Marcela, Evo, Bertinotti and other outstanding and friendly personalities present here.

Distinguished guests:

Dear athletes, sport coaches and officials from Cuba:

Fellow Cubans:

After a year of tenacious efforts in preparation and training, for reasons totally beyond our control we found ourselves compelled to cancel our athletes' participation in a sports event in which our country has always participated, over several decades, right from its inception. Even in the days when the Cuban delegation was a mere handful of athletes who, with courage and patriotism, won a few medals as the glorious forerunners of the sporting power our nation has now become, the product of the justice of a great revolutionary endeavor and the incomparable heroism of our people.

One way or another, they have often tried to exclude us from international competitions. Events are repeatedly the setting for provocation and harassment, invariably defied by our brave delegations. On one occasion, we were even ready to swim from the ship to get to an event in Central America. This time, however, it is not worth trying anything like that as it is a country that, with the full support of its government, has been and continues to be a sanctuary for mercenary assassins controlled and paid by the Miami terrorist mafia. These have until very recently carried out terrorist attacks on our hotels, have hatched plots to destroy historic monuments, exposing our population to the risk of bloody massacres.

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It is a country whose authorities have been the accessories to arms trafficking and the organization of assassination attempts against Cuban delegations at major international events, where internal law and order have gone by the board. That country was in no position to offer any guarantee for the physical or moral safety of our athletes. The last straw was that they did not even accept our request for talks with that country's authorities to discuss the safety of our delegation --nearly a thousand Cubans-- in a country where there is not even a Cuban diplomatic representation.

Apparently, the terrorists and their allies thought that Cuba would not pass up the medals and records its delegation would have won at this event; that we would choose to place our athletes, trainers and officials at risk, leaving them at the mercy of cowardly and unscrupulous criminals. They thought that we could forget and ignore that it is the very same city where one of the two main perpetrators of the blasting in mid air of the plane carrying the Cuban junior fencing team with all the gold medals obtained at a similar event --all perished without trace-- operated with impunity, as do his allies and accomplices today.

The terrorist mafia and its collaborators should have known that out of honor and principle, Cuba has been ready more than once in the past to sacrifice laurels and interests. Our only regret is not being able to provide the support we planned for El Salvador sports movement and its officials, and to those brotherly people, many of whose heroic sons have always shown solidarity and friendship toward Cuba. We take comfort in our conviction that the circumstances preventing our cooperation in many fields where it could be useful will not last forever. If anyone doubts the sincerity of Cuba's regard for the Salvadoran people, suffice it to remember that, despite the above mentioned events, dozens of Cuban doctors instantly responded to the appeal to care for the noble Salvadoran people, and to deliver material and technical resources, when the country was hit by a major dengue epidemic that took the lives of over 30 children between September and December 2000, and after a devastating earthquake in January 2001 that ravaged that brotherly nation making such assistance necessary. We shall always be true to those principles of solidarity.

But what were we to do with the nearly 500 athletes who have made sacrifices and trained for so long for this event? This justified concern produced an idea that will certainly prove fruitful. Why not hold a national Olympics? Have we not in our country enough first-class athletes to make up three teams, any of which could end first in El Salvador in many sport disciplines, if not at the top of the medal count? We hold national schools sporting championships every year, so why had we never thought of organizing a national Olympics, with regional participation by our best athletes in the various sports disciplines? Such an event whose cost in hard currency would be less than 30% of the cost of sending a Cuban delegation to the Central American Games, could be held every two years as a perfect way of training for the Olympic cycle and accelerating the development of sport in our country. This would not interfere with their training for international events; on the contrary, it would make it better.

An activity of this kind would promote efforts to improve and extend our sporting facilities and the application of advanced technology in the various disciplines of this vital activity, as it has been the case with the National Baseball Series since (the baseball match in) Baltimore.

The idea of staging an alternative event that would reward the efforts made by our athletes to train for the Central American Games by holding this National Olympics will allow for the participation of over 1,500 superb athletes out of the 2,000 involved in the process of training and selection of the Cuban delegation, that is, three times as many athletes as would have gone to El Salvador.

The medals they win will be included in the athletes' personal records and will be among the most precious prizes and awards they obtain in their lifetime. Morally, they will be the true champions of the event that terrorism and crime prevented them from attending.

As it is known, Cuba has set up an International School of Physical Education and Sport --and it is perhaps the first country in the world to have done so-- where over 1,000 young people, all of them with various sporting skills, from 68 Third World countries are taking higher-level courses. The School has

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been invited to participate with outstanding individual athletes and teams in our First National Olympics. The same invitation has been extended to outstanding athletes or teams selected among the 6,073 youths from 24 countries attending the Latin American School of Medical Sciences.

As in the case of other national sporting events, athletes from countries outside the area covered by the Central American and Caribbean Games have been invited to take part.

Our sporting movement will rigorously observe all the principles and rules of the International Olympic Movement, whose new chairman, Mr. Jacques Rogge, did us the great honor of visiting our country a few days ago, leaving us with a feeling of sympathy and respect. The anti-doping war he is promoting will help curb commercial sport and professionalism in the Olympic Movement, where drug abuse is common and laboratory tests are never done.

With pride, dignity, enthusiasm and satisfaction our people will enjoy this new and unique sporting event. Broadcasting will amount to 687.5 hours by radio and over 180 hours of television, albeit carefully arranged --given the continuing limitations on TV air time-- so as not to interfere with the educational programming now being presented so successfully in our country, for the comprehensive cultural advancement for our people.

The educational channel coverage will soon be extended to every province within the next ten months and TV broadcasting hours will be increased. In sport, as in many other fields, a bright future awaits us.

This will be an historic day marking the start of a new era for Cuban sport.

Forward, valiant athletes, at this exciting moment as you open Cuba's First National Olympics!

Long live sports!

Long live the Homeland!

Long live socialism!

Long live the Revolution!

We shall overcome!

Long live Socialism!

Long live the Revolution!

Patria o Muerte!

Venceremos!

(Versiones Taquigráficas - Consejo de Estado)

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