Speech at the Karl Marx Theater on january 3, 2004, for the 45 anniversary of the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. **[1]**

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Many of us who had the privilege of witnessing that exciting day are still alive; many others are deceased. On January 1, 1959 the overwhelming majority of those here tonight were less than 10 years old or had not been born or there were still many years to go before they would be born.

It was never our purpose to attain individual or collective glory, honors or recognition. However, those of us who today have a legitimate right to call ourselves Cuban revolutionaries found ourselves obliged to write what has turned out to be an unprecedented page in the annals of history. Unhappy with the social and political situation in our country, we simply resolved to change it. This was not something new in Cuba; it had happened many times for almost a century.

We believed in the rights of the peoples, including the right to independence and to rise up against tyranny. It was from the exercise of such rights in this hemisphere, conquered by European powers by fire and the sword, mass slaughter of indigenous peoples and the enslavement of millions of Africans, that a group of independent nations emerged, one of which was the United States of America.

When, on July 26 1953, the Cuban Revolution fought its first battle against an illegal, corrupt and bloody regime, 8 years had not yet gone by since the end of World War II unleashed by fascism in 1939, which took the lives of more than 50 million people and brought about the destruction of the economies of all the then industrialized countries, with the exception of the United States, which was out of reach of enemy bombs and guns.

The fascist ideas that were the cause of that colossal conflict were in total contradiction with the principles proclaimed by the 13 former British colonies in America on July 4, 1776 in their Declaration of Independence, which literally read: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. […]That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness".

The French Declaration of the Rights of Man, which resulted from the 1789 French Revolution, carried this point even further when it proclaimed: "When the government violates the rights of the people, insurrection is for the people and for each portion of the people the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties".

The fascist ideas also clashed head on with the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter after the gigantic battle that was World War II. Among the principles the Charter proclaimed to be essential prerequisites of a world political order are respect for the rights of the people to sovereignty and independence.

Actually, the rights of the peoples have never been respected throughout humanity’s brief known history, so full of wars of conquest, empires and an infinite variety of forms of plunder and of ways for

human beings to exploit other human beings. Nevertheless, at that historic point in time and despite the reality that the victorious powers imposed a world political order with privileges for a minuscule group of the most powerful states that became ever more irritating, many nations, institutions and people were hopeful that a new and promising stage for humanity was beginning. More than 100 nations or groups of nations, including human groups that still lacked a national identity, were formally recognized as independent States. It was a time that greatly favored illusions and deception.

The overwhelming majority of countries that formally received the status of independent states was made up of former colonies, dominions, protectorates and other forms of oppressing and controlling countries that the most powerful nations have used for centuries.

Their dependence on the former colonial powers was almost total; their struggle to attain greater sovereignty and act on it has been difficult and often heroic. The dreadful harassment to which they are submitted in Geneva to get them to support the US resolutions or, as a last resort, to abstain from voting against them is proof of this. The way these states behave in the United Nations General Assembly is admirable. An expression of this is the growing and almost unanimous support for Cuba against the blockade.

The worst of all is that a considerable number of those countries that were supposedly independent before that conflict was unaware of just how little independence they really had, and Cuba was one of them. Almost all of the Latin American countries were on that sorry list, as would become blatantly clear. As soon as our heroic people achieved real and full independence, almost all of their governing elites joined with the United States to destroy the Revolution and prevent the social and political accomplishments we were rapidly achieving.

The aggression began as early as 1959 with the use of all possible economic and political measures, including violence, terrorism and the threat of the massive use of US military might.

What happened to Cuba would help showing all of the illusion and deception contained in those elegant texts about principles and rights proclaimed by the United Nations Organization.

Might and not rights would continue to be the basic fact of human life, as it has been the case through the millennia.

All that has happened up until the present, since the first known historical facts were registered, is the result of the natural and spontaneous, torpid and disorderly evolution of human society. Nobody can be blamed for the various economic and social systems that have followed one another over the course of five thousand years.

The different civilizations which arose in the most distant regions of the world: China, India, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Central and South America obviously were, to a greater or lesser extent, ignorant of the others’ existence, were independent, although many things attest to the extraordinary range of their knowledge. Some are amazing like, for example, the Greek civilization with its art, philosophy, literature, its knowledge of history, physics, mathematics, astronomy and other subjects.

Our knowledge of Mayan and other pre-Incan civilizations is growing, and this knowledge shows that human beings, even when separated by tens of thousands of years in time and tens of thousands of kilometers in space were already creators and capable of extraordinary works. Yet, in all the civilizations that preceded us and even today, empires, wars of conquest, different kinds of slavery and feudalism, rich and poor, privileged, ruling social classes and exploited, marginalized and excluded classes have existed in one form or another. To ignore this fact would require enormous ignorance.

I must admit that Marx was right when he sketched out the idea that only when a truly rational, just and equitable social regime exists on this earth, will humankind have left prehistory behind.

If the whole development of human society has inevitably been chaotic, disorderly, unpredictable, extremely cruel and unjust, the struggle to create a different and truly rational world, worthy of our species' intelligence is, at this moment in its history, which bears no resemblance to any of humanity's previous stages, something that was not possible or even imaginable in other circumstances: an attempt by human beings to plan their own destiny for the first time.

Dreaming of impossible things is called utopia; struggling for goals that cannot only be reached but which are essential if the species is to survive, is called realism.

It would be wrong to assume that such an aim would be motivated by ideology alone. We are talking about something that goes beyond the noble and completely justifiable whishes for justice, beyond the deep desire that all human beings can live a free and decent life: we are talking about the survival of the species.

The big difference between the age of the Greeks and our age lies not in the intellectual capacity of our species but in the exponential and seemingly infinite development of science and technology that has taken place in the last 150 years, and which completely eclipses the negligible and ridiculous political capacity we have shown for facing up to the risk of perishing as a species, a risk which really is threatening humanity.

Less than 60 years ago, when the first nuclear device equivalent to 20,000 tons of TNT exploded over Hiroshima, it became clear that technology had created a tool which, if developed, could bring about the obliteration of human life on this planet. From that day on, the development of such new weapons and weapons systems, hundreds of times more powerful, varied and accurate has not ceased, not for one day. Today, there are tens of thousands of them. Actually, very few have been destroyed under deceptive and limited covenants.

A small group of countries that have a monopoly over such weapons have taken upon themselves the exclusive right to produce and improve them. Meanwhile the contradictions and interests of its members change and humanity develops under a web of nuclear weapons that threaten its very existence. Someone could say something similar to what that Persian emperor said as he and his huge army closed in on the 300 Spartans defending the pass at Thermopiles: "Our nuclear weapons shall hide the sun".

The lives of the billions of human beings who inhabit this planet depend on what a few think, believe and decide. The worst of it all is that those who wield such great power do not have psychiatrists to look after them. We cannot just accept this. We have the right to denounce it, to exercise pressure and demand changes and an end to such an absurd, unheard of situation, which makes hostages of us all. No one should ever have such powers or else no one on this earth will be able to talk of civilization again.

There is another lethal problem as well: nearly 40 years ago some people began to voice their concerns over what has come to be called the environment, because a barbarous civilization was destroying the natural conditions for life. This extremely sensitive issue was then put on the table for the first time. Quite a few people thought it was just some alarmists exaggerating, a kind of neo-Malthusianism, like in previous centuries.

They were, in fact, well-informed and intelligent people who took to building a public awareness on this issue, at times worried sick that it was too late to take useful measures. Regrettably, those who due to their great political responsibilities should have shown greater concern, showed only ignorance and disregard.

More than ten years have passed since the UN-convened Rio de Janeiro Summit and despite the usual proliferation of speeches, pledges and promises, very little has been done. Nevertheless, there is a growing awareness of the mortal danger. And the struggle must grow and will grow. There is no option.

Recently, a conference was held in Havana on desertification and climate change, which was also convened by the UN. It was an important effort to inform, raise awareness and call people to join the struggle.

In Rio de Janeiro, I was a witness to the deep concerns and fear of representatives from small islands in the Pacific and from other countries threatened by the risk of being either partially or totally submerged by the seas because of climate change. This is sad. The first to suffer the consequences of environmental damage are the poor. They do not have cars, or air conditioners; it is possible they do not even have furniture, if they have houses, that is. The effects of huge emissions of carbon dioxide causing atmospheric warming and the destructive effect of the ultra violet rays that pass through the damaged ozone layer filter have a greater impact on them. When they fall ill, it is common knowledge that there are no hospitals, doctors or medicines for them or their relatives.

A third problem: according to the most conservative estimates possible, world population took no less than 50,000 years to reach one billion. This happened around 1800, just as the 19th century was beginning. It reached two billion 130 years later, in 1930. It reached 3 billion in 1960, thirty years later; 4 billion in 1974, fourteen years later; 5 billion in 1987, thirteen years later; 6 billion in 1999 only 12 years later. Today, it stands at 6.3 billion.

It is really amazing that in just 204 years world population increased by 6.4 times from the figure of one billion reached in 1800, after no less than 50 thousand years, calculated in a relatively arbitrary and conservative way so as to have a point of reference, but that should be further analyzed. It could have taken many more years, if we limit ourselves only to the time it took to reach its current capacity.

At what rate is it growing now?

1999: population 6,002 millions; growth 77 millions.

2000: population, 6,079 millions; growth 75 millions.

2001: population, 6,154 millions; growth 74 millions.

2002: population, 6,228 millions; growth 72 millions.

2003: population, 6,300 millions; growth 74 millions.

2004: estimated population, 6,374 millions; growth 74 millions.

What will the world population be in the year 2050?

The lowest estimates say it will be 7,409 millions; the highest say 10,633 millions. According to many experts, there will be around 9 billion inhabitants. The enormous alarm generated by this colossal demographic explosion plus the accelerated degradation of the natural conditions needed for our species' survival have caused people to react with true dismay in many countries, since almost one hundred per cent of the growth I mentioned will take place in Third World countries.

Aware of the growing deterioration and reduction of land and water resources, of the famines in many countries, of the indifference and wastage in consumer societies and the educational and health problems facing the world population, one could imagine that if all of these problems are not solved our human society might become one where its members devour each other.

It would be a good idea to ask the Olympic champions of human rights in the West if they have ever used a single minute to reflect on these realities, which to a very large degree are the result of the current economic and social system. It would be worth asking them how they feel about a system that,

instead of educating the masses as a fundamental element for making progress in the search for urgently needed, viable solutions, with the support of science, technology and culture, spends one trillion dollars every year on alienating consumerist advertising. With the money spent in just one of those years to spread this peculiar poison, all the illiterate and semi-illiterate people in the world could be taught to read and write and even reach ninth grade in less than ten years and no poor child would have to go without schooling. Without education and other social services, crime and drug abuse can never be reduced or eradicated. This we proclaim from Cuba, a country blockaded for 45 years, accused and condemned more than a few times in Geneva by the United States and their closest allies but which is about to provide health, education and cultural development services the like of which the developed and rich West has never even dreamed of and, what is more, these are absolutely free for all citizens, with no exceptions whatsoever.

The neoliberal globalization imposed on the world, designed to facilitate greater looting of the planet’s natural resources, has, in the wake of the fateful "Washington Consensus" led most of the countries in the Third World, and especially those in Latin America, into a desperate and unsustainable situation.

The first fruit of this disastrous policy was the "lost decade" of the 80s during which economic growth in the region only reached 1%; it rose to 2.7 % between 1990 and 1998, much lower than false hopes and pressing needs, to drop again to 1% between 1998 and 2004.

The foreign debt, which in 1985, the year of that treacherous "consensus", was $300 billion, today stands at more than $750 billion.

Privatizations wiped out hundreds of billions of dollars worth of national assets that took many years to create but which evaporated with the speed at which capitals flee from those countries to Europe and the United States.

Unemployment reached record heights. Of every 100 new jobs created, 82 are in the so-called "informal sector" which includes a long list of those who earn their living any way they can without any kind of social or legal protection.

Poverty has grown alarmingly, especially extreme poverty; it has grown by 12.8 % involving 44 % of the population. Development is stagnant and social services are deteriorating by the day. Neoliberal globalization, as was to be expected, caused a veritable disaster in these services, first and foremost health and education.

If old and new forms of looting, such as unequal terms of trade, the unceasing, forced flight of capital, the brain drain, protectionism, subsidies and the WTO’s edicts are added to this, then no one should be surprised by the crises and other developments in South America.

Latin America is the world region where neoliberal globalization was applied most rigorously and exactingly. Now it is facing the challenge of the FTAA which will sweep away national industries and turn the MERCOSUR and the Andean Pact into appendages of the US economy: it is a last assault on the economic development, the unity and the independence of the Latin American peoples.

But, even if this attempt at annexation is successful, this economic order will still be unsustainable, both for the Latin American peoples and for the people in the United States whose jobs are threatened by plentiful cheap labor recruited by the maquilas from among those who were prevented by the existing poverty, educational disaster and unemployment from getting properly trained. Cheap, unskilled labor is something that the Latin American oligarchies can offer on a grand scale.

A summary of all that I have said shows my profound conviction that our species, and with it each one of our peoples, are at a turning point in their history: the course of events must change or else our species shall not survive. There is no other planet we can move to. There is no atmosphere, no air and no water on Mars, neither is there any transportation for us to emigrate there en masse. Either we save

this what we have, or many millions of years will have to go by before another intelligent species arises that can start all over again the adventure we have gone through. Pope John Paul II has already explained that the theory of evolution is not irreconcilable with the creation doctrine.

I must draw my talk to a close. There is much work awaiting us in 2004.

I want to congratulate our people for everything it has done over all these years, for its heroism, its patriotism, its fighting spirit, its loyalty and its revolutionary fervor.

I want to offer special congratulations on this 45 anniversary to those who took part in glorious internationalist missions, today epitomized by the exemplary behavior of the five heroes imprisoned by the Empire who, with impressive dignity, have withstood the unjust, vengeful, cruel actions of the enemies of their homeland and their people; epitomized too by the 15,000 doctors who, making great sacrifices, taking risks and dangers carry out their internationalist duties anywhere in more than 64 countries, a human feat that the United States and Europe could never accomplish as they lack the human capital to demonstrate which human rights they are really defending.

Nobody can prevent with threats or aggressions that our doctors, teachers, sports instructors or any other collaborator show their solidarity; nobody can hold back the bravery of our sons and daughters because many are ready for the honor of taking the place of those who might fall victims of terrorist actions encouraged and promoted by extremist officials in the US government.

I congratulate all those who struggle, those who never give up in the face of adversity; those who believe in humanity’s capacity to create, sow and cultivate values and ideas; those who bet on humanity; all of those who share the beautiful tenet that a better world is possible!

We shall fight hand in hand with them and we shall overcome!

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